

Source: SLCC website 11/02/22

Local Authority Remote/Hybrid Meetings – Model Motion for Council Meetings

Published 11 February 2022

On 5 January 2022, the Association of Democratic Services Officers (ADSO) and Lawyers in Local Government (LLG) launched a petition, supported by the SLCC, calling on the government to change the law to give councils (ranging from county, district and unitary authorities, through to town and parish councils) the freedom to hold remote meetings when local circumstances suit. This includes hybrid meetings.

This follows the unsuccessful High Court action in 2021 and the subsequent judgement that it was for Parliament to change the law not the courts – as indeed the devolved administrations have done in Wales and Scotland to allow for online meetings.

ADSO and LLG do not wish to impose remote meetings on councils. Councils should have the choice to decide how to run meetings depending on local circumstances. They also accept that some meetings (for example, full council meetings) are more suited to physical attendance.

You will be aware that the government issued a call for evidence on 21 March 2021 in relation to remote meetings. ADSO and LLG are still awaiting a response to the large number of submissions from local authorities, relevant organisations and the public.

The period of lockdown showed that remote meetings bring so many benefits to local democracy and residents, apart from the obvious public health safeguards. It is no longer just a response to Covid, although we are

aware that some councillors are still not able to attend meetings for health reasons either relating to them or their families.

The wider benefits are:

- Increased attendances at remote meetings by both councillors and the public
- Significant cost savings for some authorities arising from much less travel to meetings
- The environmental benefits of less travel, particularly in the large county authorities
- A better work/life balance for councillors
- Improved equality of access to meetings for all and opening up opportunities for more people to stand for election as councillors
- More transparency and openness for the public to see council meetings
- An option to move meetings online when there are constraints, for example bad weather such as snow or flooding.

SLCC therefore support ADSO and LLG in asking councils to consider passing the following motion and writing to the Secretary of State:

'This Council supports the petition launched by ADSO and LLG on 5 January with regard to remote and hybrid meetings. We agree to write to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities calling on the Government to change the law to allow councils the flexibility to hold such meetings when they deem appropriate within agreed rules and procedures.'