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**Report To:** Full Council

**Date:** 18 November 2024

**Contact Officer:** Paula Harrison

**Subject: Government Consultation** - on enabling remote attendance and proxy voting for local authority meetings

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## 1. Consultation

1.1 The Government's consultation on enabling remote attendance and proxy voting for local authority meetings is open until 11:59 p.m. on 19 December 2024. This seeks to assess opinions on proposed changes aimed at enhancing flexibility and inclusivity in council meetings.

1.2 Key Points for Consideration:

- Remote Attendance Flexibility

The proposal aims to allow councils the flexibility to enable remote attendance at formal meetings. This is intended to increase accessibility, ensuring that those unable to attend in person due to health issues or logistical constraints can still participate. The potential benefits include greater resilience in emergencies and a broader representation in local government.

- Proxy Voting for Councillors

Introduction of proxy voting is suggested for specific circumstances, such as maternity, paternity, or adoption leave. This would allow councillors to delegate their vote when attending remotely is impossible, helping maintain representation in key decision-making.

- Diversity and Inclusion

By allowing remote attendance, the proposal aims to attract a more diverse group of councillors, including those with caregiving responsibilities or limited mobility. The government believes this change could make council composition more representative of the communities they serve.

- Limitations on Remote Attendance

The consultation seeks feedback on potential limitations, such as requiring a minimum in-person presence or restricting remote attendance to specific circumstances (e.g., health or emergencies). Responses are requested to help refine these limitations.

- Full Remote Meetings

Councils may be allowed to hold fully remote meetings, but the government is considering restrictions on frequency. For example, up to 50% of meetings could be remote in a calendar year, or full remote meetings could be limited to emergencies. This aspect seeks to balance accessibility with the value of in-person interaction.

- **Efficiency and Procedural Safeguards**

Suggestions include procedural requirements, like publishing the names of remotely attending councillors and confirming secure handling of confidential matters. These measures would ensure transparency and safeguard the integrity of remote participation.

- **Public and Sector Feedback**

The consultation encourages feedback from councillors, public bodies, and citizens, especially regarding the impact of remote and hybrid formats on transparency and democratic engagement.

- **Councillor Feedback on Remote Attendance Feasibility**

Elected members are asked whether they would likely attend remotely and, if so, at what frequency. This insight will help gauge demand and guide the development of a workable hybrid model.

- **Technological and Practical Considerations**

Councils are encouraged to assess technical needs and potential costs associated with implementing remote attendance capabilities. Feedback on these logistical concerns will shape the proposal's final structure.

- **Consultation Submission**

Councils and individuals can submit responses online by following the consultation link on the official government website. All submissions must be completed before the deadline on 19 December 2024.

1.3 The Parish Council currently offers a hybrid meeting however in line with the existing legislation does not allow Councillors who attend virtually to vote. Virtual attendance is not considered to be a formal attendance. There is no provision for a proxy vote currently.

## **2. Recommendation:**

That Council considers these points and determines how it wishes to respond and highlight the practical implications for adopting remote or hybrid meeting policies.