

North Yorkshire Council

Executive Member for Corporate Services

18 December 2024

Consultation on enabling Remote Attendance and Proxy Voting at Local Authority Meetings

Report of the Assistant Chief Executive Legal and Democratic Services

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report sets out the proposed response to the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government consultation on “Enabling Remote Attendance and Proxy Voting at Local Authority Meetings”.

2.0 SUMMARY

- 2.1 The Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government has launched a short consultation seeking views on the detail and practical implications of allowing remote and hybrid attendance and proxy voting at local authority meetings in England. This matter has been discussed at the informal Group Leaders meeting and at the Member Working Group on the Constitution on 4 December 2024. Attached at Appendix 1 is the proposed response by the Executive Member for Corporate Services on behalf of the Council.

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Currently in order to fulfil the requirements of attendance (and therefore contribute to a quorum, and vote at a meeting), a member of a committee must be physically present in the room to satisfy the requirements of the Local Government Act 1972.
- 3.2 The Government is consulting on potentially changing these rules to allow remote and hybrid meetings where members could have full voting rights even when they are not physically present in the room. In addition Government are consulting on the potential to give members the ability to vote by proxy.
- 3.3 It is recognised that in person attendance of committee meetings is important to local democracy. However it is also important to ensure that councils have the option and flexibility to use remote and hybrid meetings as and when appropriate. Therefore it is proposed to respond to the consultation to ask Government to give councils the flexibility (but not mandate) to have remote and hybrid meetings and allow local authorities to make their own local choice about whether to use the new flexibilities.
- 3.4 Conversely with regard to proxy voting, it is considered that this flexibility is not needed and it is difficult to demonstrate that a councillor has an open mind to a debate at a council meeting when their vote has already been cast.

4.0 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN AND RESPONSES

- 4.1 A discussion has taken place with Group Leaders and the matter was considered at the Member Working Group on the Constitution.

5.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 5.1 The Council could choose not to respond or could choose not to support remote meetings and support proxy voting. Following the cross party discussions at the Member Working Group on the Constitution, these alternative options have not been followed and the response in Appendix 1 has been agreed.

6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 It is for the Government to determine whether to amend the current legislation and then the local authority to determine whether it wishes to use the new powers. There may be a potential saving in travel costs by allowing remote attendance at meetings.

7.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 To allow full voting at remote meetings would require a statutory change as identified in the consultation document. The decision rests with Central Government and the Council is simply responding to the consultation.

8.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Allowing remote meetings can have a potential positive impact for those with a protected characteristic. The decision to make the necessary changes rests with Central Government and they will need to appropriately evaluate the equality impact of those changes.

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Allowing remote meetings can reduce travel. The decision to make the necessary changes rests with Central Government and they will need to appropriately evaluate the environmental impact of those changes.

10.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 For the reasons stated in the report, it is recommended to respond to the consultation to ask for the ability to have remote meetings and not supporting the introduction of proxy voting.

11.0 RECOMMENDATION

For the Executive Member to reply to the Government's consultation as detailed in Appendix 1.

APPENDICES:

Appendix 1 – Proposed response to Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government Consultation – enabling remote attendance and proxy voting at local authority meetings

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

Government consultation: [Enabling remote attendance and proxy voting at local authority meetings - GOV.UK](#)

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Note: Members are invited to contact the author in advance of the meeting with any detailed queries or questions.