

Response ID ANON-N2UZ-453H-K

Submitted to **Local Authority Remote Meetings - Call for Evidence**

Submitted on **2021-06-10 11:51:00**

Your personal data

1 Are you happy to continue?

Please tick this box if you are happy to continue:

Yes

Introduction

2 What is your name?

Name:

Honor Howell

3 What is your email address?

Email:

honor.howell@west-norfolk.gov.uk

4 What is your organisation?

Organisation:

Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk

5 Where in the UK is your organisation based?

England

6 What type of organisation are you responding on behalf of?

Please select an option from the drop-down list below:

District Council

If you selected other, please specify:

Scope of this Call for Evidence

Purpose of this Call for Evidence

Terminology

Background

The Current Arrangements

7 Generally speaking, how well do you feel the current remote meetings arrangements work?

Very Well

Please explain your answer in more detail, though note you will be asked about specific advantages and disadvantages of remote meetings in further questions:

Allowed public meetings to continue in difficult times. Officers can attend late meetings from home, reducing travel time.

Public engagement has increased with more viewing meetings on YouTube than ever attending in person.

Less apologies from Members

Permanent Arrangements

8 Generally speaking, do you think local authorities in England should have the express ability to hold at least some meetings remotely on a permanent basis?

Yes

Please explain your answer in more detail.:

Yes. There are many reasons for this:

Reduced costs - travel allowances

Less emissions people not travelling

The technology is there. It has proven to work. Why not continue?

Benefits of Remote Meetings

9 What do you think are some of the benefits of remote meetings?

More accessible for local authority members, Reduction in travel time for members, Meetings more easily accessed by local residents, Greater transparency for meetings, Easier to chair meetings in an orderly fashion, Other (please specify below)

For each benefit you have selected, please explain each of your answers in more detail:

a) Many of our members are retired and elderly. Remote meetings mean they do not have to leave their homes and travel to meetings. We have experienced far less apologies for meetings, especially during winter when poor weather may have affected attendance.

b) The Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk covers 550 square miles. It is a large rural borough and some Members live towards the boundaries of the district. Travel time can be quite lengthy for some, up to an hour in some cases.

c) We have seen a large rise in citizens attending (virtually) the meetings which are streamed via YouTube. This enables residents to understand the political process and how councils and scrutiny works. We have seen more engagement from our customers now they can view the meetings whenever they want.

d) The meetings are recorded so there are less challenges to the minutes or actions during the meetings.

e) the Chair or Vice Chair can monitor the chat function to see who wants to speak. this ensures questions are responded to in the order correctly.

f) More efficient for officers in reduced travel and only need to attend for their reports only

Please upload a file using this link:

YT Analytics.docx was uploaded

Cost of remote meetings

10 [For local authorities only] Have you seen a reduction in costs since implementing remote meetings in your authority?

Yes

Please explain your answer in more detail.:

Attached is a spreadsheet with Members expenses paid for the last 3 years. Costs have clearly reduced considerably.

Please upload a file using this link:

Copy of Members expenses paid.xlsx was uploaded

Disadvantages of Remote Meetings

11 What do you think are some of the disadvantages of the remote meetings arrangements?

I do not think there are any disadvantages to remote meetings

For each disadvantage you have selected, please explain each of your answers in more detail:

For each disadvantage you have selected, please explain any suggestions you have to mitigate/overcome them.:

Advantages of Physical Meetings

12 What do you think are some of the main advantages of holding face-to-face meetings, as opposed to remote meetings?

Please provide your answer in the box below:

Members can speak informally (although they should be able to talk informally outside of formal meetings).

Potential to encounter local residents face to face, listen to their concerns in persons (but they should be accessible to their local residents in their ward to discuss their concerns or via other comms channels such as facebook etc).

Constraints on Remote Meetings

13 If permanent arrangements were to be made for local authorities in England, for which meetings do you think they should have the option to hold remote meetings?

For most meetings with a few exceptions (please specify)

Please explain your answer in more detail.:

There is justification for Full Council to be held face to face, as long as officers can attend remotely to keep numbers down.

14 If permanent arrangements were to be made for local authorities in England, in which circumstances do you think local authorities should have the option to hold remote meetings?

I think local authorities should be able to decide for themselves which circumstances they should have the option to meet remotely

Please explain your answer in more detail.:

this should be within the remit of the LA in consultation with it's Members. What works for one council may not work for another for a variety of reasons.

15 Would you have any concerns if local authorities in England were given the power to decide for themselves which meetings, and in what circumstances, they have the option to hold remote meetings?

No

Please explain your answer in more detail.:

No. We are not aware of any misuse of power in such arrangements. It will be discussed between the Administration and the Senior Management with all arrangement mutually agreed,

16 If yes, do you have any suggestions for how your concerns could be mitigated/overcome?

Please provide your answer in the box below:

N/A

Public Sector Equality Duty

17 In your view, would making express provision for English local authorities to meet remotely particularly benefit or disadvantage any individuals with protected characteristics e.g. those with disabilities or caring responsibilities?

Yes

Please explain your answer in more detail.:

Many local authorities have spoken of the potential benefits that remote meetings could have for members or potential members with disabilities or young families. However, there are also those for whom remote meetings may post additional difficulties, for example, those with hearing visual impairments or those more likely to struggle with the technology.

It would provide access to those who are unable to attend in person.