

**CONGLETON TOWN COUNCIL**  
**COMMITTEE REPORTS AND UPDATES**

<b>COMMITTEE:</b>	<b>Council</b>		
<b>MEETING DATE AND TIME</b>	<b>12<sup>th</sup> December 2024 7 pm</b>	<b>LOCATION</b>	<b>Congleton Town Hall</b>
<b>REPORT FROM</b>	<b>Chief Officer</b>		
<b>AGENDA ITEM REPORT TITLE</b>	<b>13 Consultation - Remote Attendance and Proxy Voting at Council Meetings</b>		
<b>BACKGROUND INFORMATION</b>	<p>The Government is now consulting on remote attendance and proxy voting for Council meetings. Its rationale is as follows:</p> <p><i>The attendance of elected members at local authority meetings is a core part of the democratic process at the local level and is integral to members carrying out their functions effectively. In addition to the value of members coming together to debate and discuss the issues which impact the lives of the people they represent; it is also important that local residents have the opportunity to engage directly with the people they have elected to take key decisions on their behalf.</i></p> <p><i>At the same time, the government recognises that there are circumstances in which it may not always be possible for members to attend council meetings in person. It is with this in mind that the government intends to amend the law to introduce provisions for remote attendance at local authority meetings.</i></p> <p><i>The intent is that this increased flexibility will strike the balance between the principle that significant in-person engagement remains vitally important, and a recognition that there will sometimes be a need to accommodate members' requirements to attend council meetings remotely. We hope it will encourage a wider diversity of people willing and able to stand and actively participate in local democracy by creating improved conditions where meetings are accessible and inclusive.</i></p> <p><i>In addition, we are seeking views on the possible introduction of proxy voting for those occasions when an elected member, due to personal circumstances, may be unable to attend even remotely, for example during maternity, paternity or adoption leave.</i></p> <p><i>In line with the government's commitment to working with local government to establish partnerships built on mutual respect, genuine collaboration, and meaningful engagement, this short consultation seeks your views on the detail and practical implications of this proposition to inform our ongoing policy development.</i></p> <p>The link to the Government website is as follows  <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/enabling-remote-attendance-and-proxy-voting-at-local-authority-meetings/enabling-remote-attendance-and-proxy-voting-at-local-authority-meetings">https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/enabling-remote-attendance-and-proxy-voting-at-local-authority-meetings/enabling-remote-attendance-and-proxy-voting-at-local-authority-meetings</a></p>		

<p><b>Considerations</b></p>	<p>The government consultation asks if there should be any conditions on remote attendance. Specifically, it asks if</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At least two-thirds of voting members should be physically present, OR</li> <li>• Remote attendance should be allowed in exceptional circumstances only such as illness or if members are ‘physically unable’ to attend, OR</li> <li>• There should be no restrictions on remote attendance.</li> </ul> <p>The consultation also asks if the use of remote meetings should have limitations placed on it or not. For example, it asks if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Councils should be able to allow full remote attendance at up to half of council meetings within a 12-month calendar period</li> <li>• Councils should only have the flexibility to change a meeting from in-person to online, or vice versa, due to unforeseen and exceptional circumstances</li> <li>• Councils should not have the flexibility to conduct fully remote meetings to ensure there is always an in-person presence.</li> </ul> <p>The consultation asks about proxy voting. For most minor illnesses such as a cold or bug, a member could join the meeting remotely, and we believe therefore that proxy voting must only be allowed in very exceptional circumstances so it cannot be abused. It is important that members hear the arguments about each item before voting, therefore meeting attendance (in-person or remote) is important. Exceptional circumstances to allow a proxy vote might be</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The member is in hospital having an operation or giving birth for example, and physically cannot join remotely. Written proof in advance is required e.g. a doctor’s note.</li> <li>• The officer in charge of the meeting receives the proxy vote at least 3 days in advance and delivers it in the meeting.</li> <li>• Proxy voting cannot be used at the last minute and must be planned in advance, with members informed of the proxy vote and why.</li> <li>• Each member can use a proxy vote no more than once per year.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Environmental Considerations</b></p>	<p>This proposal will support some Councillors, members of the press and the public attending meetings without needing to travel to the Town Hall which will lower the overall carbon footprint of meetings.</p>
<p><b>Equality Considerations</b></p>	<p>Our Equality and Inclusion Policy states that:</p> <p><i>“We will endeavour to reach out to anyone who may be at risk of exclusion and ensure they have full access to the Council and our services. Where they are less able to participate, we will take positive action to ensure they are not excluded.”</i></p>
<p><b>Financial Considerations</b></p>	<p>None – the equipment and software are already in place and licences are part of the Town Hall infrastructure (and offered to customers who book the room).</p>
<p><b>PROPOSALS</b></p>	<p>Congleton Town Council should respond to the Government's consultation outlining its position on:</p>

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|  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The principle of remote meetings and any associated conditions</li><li>2. The principle of proxy voting and any associated conditions</li></ol> <p>Councillors can also individually respond to this consultation through their online consultation platform, Citizen Space. <a href="#">Respond via Citizen Space</a>. The consultation closes on the 19<sup>th</sup> of December 2024</p> |
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