



Subject:	Local Government Ability to Hold Remote Meetings
Date:	19 April 2024
Reporting Officer:	Nora Largey, City Solicitor and Director of Legal and Civic Services
Contact Officer:	Jim Hanna, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.	
Insert number <input type="checkbox"/>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Information relating to any individual2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime	
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	To inform Members that the Communities Minister, Gordon Lyons is proposing to bring forward legislation to provide for councils to continue to hold remote / hybrid meetings.

2.0	Recommendation
2.1	The Committee is asked to note the contents of the report.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	The Department for Communities has written to Council Chief Executives (letter attached at Appendix A) advising that Minister Lyons is committed to giving councils the flexibility to hold meetings by remote/hybrid means and will be bringing forward regulations, as soon as possible, using the powers in the Local Government (Meetings and Performance) Act (NI) 2021. The Minister considers this to be more appropriate than continuing to use powers under the Coronavirus Act 2020, which was intended as emergency legislation, and will ensure that councils will have powers for remote/hybrid meetings but based upon more regularised legislation. A copy of the draft regulations is attached at Appendix 2.
3.2	The Council had previously responded to a Call for Evidence from the Department for Communities back in early 2022 indicating that it supported proposals to have legislation put in place which would allow remote/hybrid meetings to be held on a permanent basis.
3.3	The City Solicitor has responded to this most recent letter to indicate the Council support for the draft regulations. Members are asked to note the response at Appendix 3.
3.4	Officers understand that the Minister intends to bring the regulations in as soon as possible so as to allow councils to reinstate remote meetings as soon as possible. The legislation is intended to be permissive, in other words it empowers councils to establish their own rule in relation to how and when meetings can be held remotely or in hybrid version. It is anticipated that the legislation will be in place in the coming months.
3.5	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>None.</p>
3.6	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u></p> <p>None.</p>
4.0	Appendices - Documents Attached
	<p>Appendix 1 – Letter to Council Chief Executives</p> <p>Appendix 2 – Draft Regulations</p> <p>Appendix 3 – Response letter from the City Solicitor</p>