



Title of Report:	Correspondence
Committee Report Submitted To:	Corporate Policy and Resources Committee
Date of Meeting:	21st March 2024
For Decision or For Information	FOR DECISION
To be discussed In Committee	No

Linkage to Council Strategy (2021-25)	
Strategic Theme	Cohesive Leadership
Outcome	Council operates as one effective and efficient corporate unit with a common purpose and culture
Lead Officer	Director of Corporate Services

Budgetary Considerations	
Cost of Proposal	N/A
Included in Current Year Estimates	YES/NO
Capital/Revenue	N/A
Code	N/A
Staffing Costs	N/A

Legal Considerations	
Input of Legal Services Required	YES/NO
Legal Opinion Obtained	YES/NO

Screening Requirements	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	EQIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	Yes/No	Date:
	RNA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:

1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of the report is to present correspondence for Members' consideration.

2.0 The following correspondence has been received:

2.1 Anthony Carleton, Director Local Government & Housing Regulation, Department for Communities – dated 12 March 2024 (copy attached) (draft The Local Government (Remote Meetings) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024 attached)

2.2 Re: Council/Remote Hybrid Meetings

Extract

My letter of 1 March 2024 refers.

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 draft of the proposed regulations has been sent to the Department's solicitors for scrutiny. In order to keep the gap in legislative provision for remote meetings to a minimum, the Department, in parallel with obtaining legal scrutiny of the draft regulations, is seeking your input. A first draft of the regulations is attached for your information and comment.

The proposed regulations are very similar to the previous regulations, the Local Government (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of District Council Meetings) Regulations (NI) 2020.

The Department had previously carried out a public call for evidence on remote meetings (from December 2021 to February 2022) and the responses indicated general support for the arrangements made by the 2020 Regulations and for permanent provision on remote meetings being made.

Please examine the draft regulations and respond by 26 March 2024 with any comments you may have.

2.3 Limavady High School Fundraising Co-ordinator, correspondence dated 14 March 2024 (copy available upon request)

2.4 Extract

I am a teacher at Limavady High School and I am the school's fundraising co-ordinator. Our school's chosen charity for the year is Air Ambulance NI. This is a charity close to our hearts with both current and past pupils closely affected by Air Ambulance NI.

Air Ambulance costs approximately £7000 per day to run, we as a school have set ourselves a huge target of £35000 to raise this year which would be enough to fund the Air Ambulance for one full school week.

We have had many fundraising events so far including a Christmas Draw, Non-uniform days, Cookie Sales, Guess the sweets in the jar and we have many more planned such as the Belfast City Marathon, A sky dive, A hike up Slieve Donard and A 100 mile cycle. It is clear to see we are truly trying our best.

Our finale event is our "May Ball" on Saturday 25th of May at the Roe Park hotel in Limavady. We would like to invite Causeway Coast and Glens council to take a table at our event. Tickets cost £60 pp. If this is something you feel you could support us in then please respond and I will send you more details.

Any support would be greatly appreciated.

2.5 Previous decisions of Council

Notwithstanding any recommendation from Committee, in March 2022 Corporate Policy and Resources Committee considered a similar request from Riding For Disabled (RDA) to sponsor a Table or Drinks Reception. Council resolved: *that Elected Members interested in supporting the RDA event contact Democratic Services and that Members pay individually.*

3.0 Recommendation

It is recommended that Corporate Policy and Resources Committee consider the correspondence.



To: Council Chief Executives

**Causeway Exchange
1-7 Bedford Street
Belfast
BT2 7EG**

Telephone: (028) 90582 3346
e-mail: [REDACTED]@communities-ni.gov.uk
Our ref:
Date: 12 March 2024

Dear Chief Executive

Council Remote/Hybrid Meetings

My letter of 1 March 2024 refers.

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.

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general support for the arrangements made by the 2020 Regulations and for permanent provision on remote meetings being made.

Please examine the draft regulations and respond by 26 March 2024 with any comments you may have.

Yours sincerely



Anthony Carleton
Director
Local Government & Housing Regulation

Draft Regulation laid before the Assembly under section 2(5) of the Local Government (Meetings and Performance) Act (Northern Ireland) 2021, for approval.

DRAFT STATUTORY RULES OF NORTHERN
IRELAND

2024 No.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

**The Local Government (Remote Meetings) Regulations
(Northern Ireland) 2024**

Made - - - - *X Month 2024*
Coming into operation - *X Month 2024*

The Department for Communities^(a) makes these Regulations in exercise of the powers conferred by section 2(1) to (4) of the Local Government (Meetings and Performance) Act (Northern Ireland) 2021^(b).

Citation, commencement and interpretation

1.—(1) These Regulations may be cited as the Local Government (Remote Meetings) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024 and shall come into operation on X Month 2024.

(2) In these Regulations—

“the 2014 Act” means the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014^(c);

“council” means a district council;

“council meeting” means a meeting of—

- (a) a council;
- (b) an executive of a council (within the meaning of Part 6 of the 2014 Act);
- (c) a joint committee of two or more councils; and
- (d) a committee or sub-committee of anything within subparagraphs (a), (b) or (c).

“remote access” means the ability to attend or participate in a meeting by electronic means, including by telephone conference, video conference, live webcasts, and live interactive streaming; and

“remote attendance” is to be construed in accordance with regulation 2(2) and (3).

^(a) Formerly known as the Department for Social Development; *see* the Departments Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 c. 5 (N.I.), Article 8 of and Schedule 5 to the Departments (Transfer of Functions) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (S.R. 2016 No. 76) transferred functions to the Department for Communities which were previously exercisable by the Department of the Environment.

^(b) 2021 c. 8 (N.I.).

^(c) 2014 c. 8 (N.I.).

Remote attendance

2.—(1) A reference in any enactment to a council meeting is not limited to a meeting of persons all of whom, or any of whom, are present in the same place and any reference to a “place” where a meeting is held, or to be held, includes reference to more than one place including electronic, digital or virtual locations such as internet locations, web addresses or conference call telephone numbers.

(2) For the purposes of any such enactment, a member of a council (“a member in remote attendance”) attends the meeting at any time if all of the conditions in paragraph (3) are satisfied.

(3) Those conditions are that the member in remote attendance is able at that time—

- (a) to hear, and where practicable see, and be so heard and, where practicable, be seen by, the other members in attendance;
- (b) to hear, and where practicable see, and be so heard and, where practicable, be seen by, any members of the public in attendance in order to exercise a right to speak at the meeting; and
- (c) to be so heard and, where practicable, be seen by any other members of the public in attendance.

(4) In this regulation, any reference to a member, or a member of the public, attending a meeting or being in attendance includes that person attending by remote access.

(5) The provision made in this regulation applies notwithstanding any prohibition or other restriction contained in the standing orders or any other rules of the council governing the meeting and any such prohibition or restriction has no effect.

(6) A council must make other standing orders governing remote attendance at meetings of that council, which shall—

- (a) specify the basis or process for considering whether (including who is to assess or decide whether) district council meetings should or are to be held remotely;
- (b) govern the arrangements for and conduct of such meetings whenever such meetings are to be held remotely; and
- (c) regulate—
 - (i) the public’s access to such meetings,
 - (ii) the availability to the public of documents pertaining to such meetings,

whenever such meetings are to be held remotely.

3. In section 28(7) (overview and scrutiny committees: supplementary provision) and paragraph 9 of Schedule 5 to the 2014 Act, a reference to a person attending before a meeting includes that person attending by remote access.

4. Schedule 5 to the 2014 Act (meetings and proceedings) applies as follows—

- (a) any reference to being “present” at a meeting includes being present through remote attendance;
- (b) any reference to a “place” where a meeting is held, or is to be held, includes reference to more than one place including electronic, digital or virtual locations such as internet locations, web addresses or conference call telephone numbers; and
- (c) in paragraph 5(1)(a) after “the offices of the council” insert “and on the council’s website”.

Decision-making

5. In sections 39 (simple majority) and 40 (qualified majority) of the 2014 Act references to “members present and voting on the decision” includes a member being present through remote attendance.

Sealed with the Official Seal of the Department for Communities on X Month 202x.

(L.S.)

Anthony Carleton
A senior officer of the Department for Communities

EXPLANATORY NOTE

(This note is not part of the Regulations)

These Regulations are made under section 2(1) to (4) of the Local Government (Meetings and Performance) Act (Northern Ireland) 2021. These Regulations make provision regarding the running of district council meetings by making amendments to the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Regulation 1 sets out preliminary matters and defines terms used in these Regulations.

Regulations 2, 3 and 4 make provision for remote attendance at council meetings by members of the council. They also require a council to make standing orders regarding the decision to hold a meeting remotely, the conducting of the meeting and access by the public.

Regulation 5 amends the governance provisions of councils to ensure that “members present and voting on the decision” includes members in remote attendance.