

ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY REPORT



COMMITTEE	FIRE AUTHORITY
DATE OF MEETING	13 NOVEMBER 2024
SUBJECT	ENABLING REMOTE ATTENDANCE AND PROXY VOTING AT LOCAL AUTHORITY MEETINGS CONSULTATION
LEAD OFFICER	PAUL BREMBLE, HEAD OF CORPORATE SERVICES
LEAD MEMBER	COUNCILLOR JEFF BROOKS, RBFA CHAIR
EXEMPT INFORMATION	NONE
ACTION	AGREE

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 To establish a cross-party working group to respond to the Government's Consultation on Enabling Remote Attendance and Proxy Voting at Local Authority meetings.

2. RECOMMENDATION

That the Fire Authority:

- 2.1 **AGREE** the establishment of a cross-party task and finish group of no more than 7 Members to respond to the Government's Consultation on Enabling Remote Attendance and Proxy Voting at Local Authority meetings by 19 December 2024.
- 2.2 **AGREE** delegated Authority be given to the Chair on the final consultation response on behalf of the Fire Authority.
- 2.3 **NOTE** that Royal Berkshire Fire Authority's response to the consultation will be presented at the next Fire Authority meeting in February 2025.

3. REPORT

- 3.1 Members may be aware the Deputy Prime Minister announced at the LGA Conference in October 2024 that the Government intends to amend the law to introduce provisions for remote attendance at local authority meetings. It is also considering the option of proxy voting for members. The closing date for this consultation will be on 19 December 2024.
- 3.2 The Local Government Act 1972 require local authority committees to be held in-person. During national lockdown and COVID-19, the Government introduced remote

meetings in April 2020 under emergency legislation to enable councils to make critical decisions, however ceased this legislation in May 2021.

- 3.3 The introduction of legislation proved successful, with councils highlighting an increase in participation from both elected members and residents due to better equity of access and an increase in the transparency of decision-making processes.
- 3.4 Currently all Fire Authority and Committee meetings are held in-person. Some Members do attend meetings virtually, however, are unable to vote on decisions. This report is seeking the establishment of a cross-party task and finish group to respond to this important consultation by the closing date.
- 3.5 The consultation document is attached at Appendix A.

4. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC COMMITMENTS

- 4.1 Resilience: We will ensure we are resilient and work with our partners to promote and build resilience in the communities we serve.
- 4.2 Sustainability: We are committed to ensuring that we provide a financially sustainable Service and take meaningful action to help address the climate emergency.
- 4.3 People: We will support our staff by providing a safe and inclusive environment for them to thrive in, building a diverse organisation that is engaged with, and accessible to, our communities.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 None identified.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 None identified.

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 None identified.

8. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 None identified.

9. CONSISTENCY WITH DUTY TO COLLABORATE

- 9.1 None identified.

10. PRINCIPAL CONSULTATION

- 10.1 The Chief Fire Officer was consulted during the preparation of this report.
- 10.2 The Head of Finance and Procurement was consulted during the preparation of this report.

- 10.3 The Monitoring Officer was consulted during the preparation of this report.
- 10.4 The Chair, Councillor Jeff Brooks was consulted during the preparation of this report.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 Local Government Act 1972
- 11.2 [LGA: Give councils flexibility to offer virtual meeting options and open-up local democracy to all](#)
- 11.3 [Impact of in-person council meetings survey 2021](#)
- 11.4 [LGA response to the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government remote meetings call for evidence, 10 June 2021](#)

12. APPENDICES

- 12.1 Appendix A - Enabling remote attendance and proxy voting at local authority meetings.

13. CONTACT DETAILS

- 13.1 Fayth Rowe, Democratic Support Lead rowef@rbfrs.co.uk