



# LGA statement on virtual council meeting powers not being extended

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25 Mar 2021



Responding to the announcement that emergency legislation allowing virtual council meetings will not be extended, Cllr James Jamieson, Chairman of the Local Government Association, said:

“This decision is extremely disappointing. The Government’s own roadmap out of lockdown states that indoor gatherings or events - organised by a business, charity, public body or similar organisation - cannot be organised until May 17 at the earliest. Yet councils will be unable to hold remote meetings from May 7. MPs will retain the right to participate remotely until at least June 21 but the powers-that-be in the House of Commons will not make time available to legislate for councillors to do the same.

“The case is clear for the ability for councils to continue to be able to hold meetings flexibly. We urge the Government to reverse this decision and not force councils to have to hold COVID-19 secure face-to-face council meetings until all restrictions are lifted.

“Holding face to face council meetings, with supporting staff, could easily involve up to 200 people in one room even before adding in members of the public and reporters. This is likely to be a significant challenge with councils, for example, having to source larger venues in order to be able to host meetings with social distancing measures in place, such as full council meetings which will need to be held following the May local elections.

“This also risks damaging the gains seen in public participation in remote council meetings during the pandemic and our vital local democratic process.

“Left with no choice, Lawyers in Local Government, the Association of Democratic Services and Hertfordshire County Council have made an application to the Courts to declare that councils already have the powers needed to hold online meetings. The LGA will be providing support in these proceedings as the representative body for councils.”

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