



RTPI

Royal Town Planning Institute

Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill

LORDS New Clause: Remote Planning Committees

RTPI Proposal

Reinstate remote planning committees

Support new clauses to enable planning committees to meet virtually.

During the pandemic, the RTPI noted that remote meetings increased opportunities for planning committees to hear from a more diverse group of participants and views because they were more accessible for the public. If reinstated (with sufficient digital inclusion safeguards) we expect they would enable a more diverse range of people to perform the responsibilities of local councillors and influence planning decisions that affect them.

The Bill supports the digital transformation of planning services with regard to data collection and software use but stops short of reinstating permission for planning committees to meet virtually or remotely.

The RTPI believe this opportunity to encourage public participation in planning shouldn't be missed.

RTPI Rationale

- It is incomprehensible that a Bill to improve planning using digital tools would neglect to broaden public access to decision-making in our planning system.
- [RTPI research](#) shows that digital transformation can help a younger, more diverse audience to engage with planning as significant numbers - just under half (49%) - of the general public told us that having the ability to respond digitally would make them more likely to get involved.
- During the pandemic, we noted that remote council meetings increased opportunities for planning committees to hear from a more diverse group of participants and views because they were more accessible to a wider audience. We expect its continuation would also enable a more diverse range of people to perform the responsibilities of local councillors.
- [The majority of the UK's Chartered town planners](#) believe that local authorities should be allowed to continue to hold at least some of their meetings virtually or in a hybrid form:
 - 88% believed remote meeting arrangements worked "well" or "very well" during the pandemic.
 - 90% would support continuing to hold at least some meetings remotely
- The [High Court ruled on 28 April 2021](#) that virtual council meetings could not lawfully take place after 6 May 2021. This means that primary legislation is required to restore the powers to hold virtual meetings in the future as explained in this House of Commons Library Briefing from 2021.
- The change has been under consideration by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities but a call for evidence on 'Local authority remote meetings' concluded on 17th June 2021 and is yet to publish its outcome nearly a year after seeking views from the public.
- In the RTPI's response, we recommended that "government introduce primary legislation as a matter of urgency to reinstate the ability for virtual planning committee meetings to be held, while also exploring how a hybrid model could operate. We support the need for provisions to allow remote meetings to continue alongside in-person meetings combining the best outcomes to expand engagement in planning and democracy and maintaining the high level of development approvals."
- In its response to that consultation, the [Local Government Association](#) said: "Councils have noted a range of benefits of virtual meetings, which they hope to retain going forward through the option to continue virtual and hybrid meetings as and when it is deemed locally appropriate.
- The RTPI propose to re-use wording that proved sufficient in the Coronavirus Act 2020 in s78(2).

The RTPI encourage peers to support the improvements outlined. To arrange a briefing please contact, Senior Public Affairs Officer, Joel Cohen: joel.cohen@rtpi.org.uk



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Draft wording

After Clause 123, insert the following new Clause —

“Local planning authorities to be allowed to meet virtually

- (1) This section applies to any meeting of a planning committee of a local authority in England.
- (2) A reference in any enactment to a meeting local authority 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.
- (3) For the purposes of any such enactment, a member of a local authority (a “member in remote attendance”) attends the meeting at any time if all of the conditions in subsection (4) are satisfied.
- (4) 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 entitled to attend the meeting 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 attending the meeting.
- (5) In this section any reference to a member, or a member of the public, attending a meeting includes that person attending by remote access.
- (6) The provision made in this section applies notwithstanding any prohibition or other restriction contained in the standing orders or any other rules of the authority governing the meeting and any such prohibition or restriction has no effect.
- (7) A local authority may make other standing orders and any other rules of the authority governing the meeting about remote attendance at meetings of that authority, which may include provision for—
 - (a) voting;
 - (b) member and public access to documents; and
 - (c) remote access of public and press to a local authority meeting to enable them to attend or participate in that meeting by electronic means, including by telephone conference, video conference, live webcasts, and live interactive streaming.
- (8) In this section, “planning committee” means any committee or sub-committee to which a local authority has arranged for the discharge of planning functions under section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972.”

Member’s explanatory statement

This new clause would enable planning committees to meet virtually. It is based on the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020, made under s78 of the Coronavirus Act 2020.