

The Rt. Hon. Robert Jenrick MP
Secretary of State for Housing,
Communities & Local Government
Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local
Government
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Councillor Emily Smith
Leader of the Council

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Dear Mr Jenrick,

I hope you are well and have managed to have a break over the summer.

I am writing to ask about the time frame for legislating to enable councils to hold virtual meetings.

As you are aware the LGA, and others, are keen to see the reinstatement of legislation that was in place until 7 May this year that enabled councils to meet remotely during the covid pandemic. I also feel very strongly that councils should be able to decide themselves whether their meetings are better held in person or virtually. Virtual meetings not only enabled my council to carry out our decision making and statutory functions, but we saw a significant increase in the number of people accessing our meetings and participating in online sessions. This flexibility has been very helpful for councillors and members of the public who work, have caring responsibilities at home or limited access to transport. The reduction in travel is also a very positive outcome for the planet.

With yet another challenging budget setting round now underway, we are looking ahead to what funds we need to allocate for IT equipment, room hire, travel, officer resources, etc. Having clarity on whether we are planning for virtual or in person meetings would be incredibly helpful.

My understanding was that you were supportive of legislation to enable councils to decide locally whether to hold virtual or in-person meetings. If that is the case, please can you advise when government and parliament will be able to consider new legislation?

I am sure mine is not the only council in 'limbo' and in need of clarity on this matter so anything you can do to push for legislation to be enacted as quickly as possible would be greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Emily Smith
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cc. Layla Moran, Member of Parliament for Oxford West and Abingdon
David Johnston, Member of Parliament for Wantage