



Subject:	Amendment to Standing Orders – The Local Government (Remote Meetings) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024
Date:	23rd August, 2024
Reporting Officer:	Nora Largey, City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services
Contact Officer:	Jim Hanna, Democratic Services and Governance Manager

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted? Yes No

Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.

Insert number

1. Information relating to any individual
2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)
4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter
5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained
6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction
7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in? Yes No

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
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1.1	To consider amendments to Standing Orders to allow all meetings of the Council and its Committees to be held in a hybrid format, that is in-person and remotely.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	The Committee is asked to agree the amendments to Standing Orders and to approve the Supplement to Standing Orders – Remote Meetings Protocol and Procedure Rules.
3.0	Main Report
	<p data-bbox="272 488 448 517"><u>Background</u></p> <p data-bbox="165 589 1489 667">3.1 Members will be aware that The Local Government (Remote Meetings) Regulations (Northern Ireland) “The Regulations” 2024 came into effect from 25th June 2024.</p> <p data-bbox="165 739 1489 869">3.2 The Regulations makes provision for remote attendance at council and committee meetings by members of a council and requires the council to make standing orders regarding the decision to hold the meeting remotely, the conduct of a meeting and access by the public.</p> <p data-bbox="165 940 1489 1220">3.3 By way of background, Members will be aware that the Council has always been supportive of the introduction of legislation to allow Councillors to attend meetings on a remote basis. The Council had previously responded to a Call for Evidence from the Department for Communities back in early 2022 indicating that it supported proposals to have legislation put in place which would allow remote/hybrid meetings to be held on a permanent basis, legislation which had previously been available temporarily under the Coronavirus Act 2020.</p> <p data-bbox="165 1292 1489 1422">3.4 As recently as 19th April, 2024, the Committee had agreed to write to the Minister for Communities requesting that the Local Government (Remote Meetings) Regulations (NI) 2024 be brought forward as quickly as possible.</p> <p data-bbox="272 1494 738 1523"><u>Amendments to Standing Orders</u></p> <p data-bbox="165 1594 746 1624">3.5 The Regulations state at paragraph:</p> <p data-bbox="371 1695 1489 1774"><i>(5) A council must make standing orders governing remote attendance at meetings of that council, which shall—</i></p> <p data-bbox="467 1798 1453 1928"><i>(a) specify the basis or process for considering whether (including who is to assess or decide whether) council meetings should or are to be held remotely;</i></p> <p data-bbox="467 1953 1425 2031"><i>(b) govern the arrangements for and conduct of such meetings whenever such meetings are to be held remotely; and</i></p>

(c) regulate—

(i) the public's access to such meetings, and

(ii) the availability to the public of documents pertaining to such meetings,

whenever such meetings are to be held remotely.

- 3.6 Regarding 5(a), given the Council's previous views on the holding of remote meetings, it is suggested that Standing Orders should be amended to provide that the default position is that all meetings of the Council and its Committees shall be held remotely, that is, in a hybrid format so that Members may attend in person or remotely.
- 3.7 For 5 (b) the arrangements and conduct of meetings shall be governed by the Supplement to Standing Orders – Remote Meetings Protocol and Procedure Rules (set out in appendix 1).
- 3.8 In relation to 5(c), the public can access all Council and Committee meetings in-person. In addition, these meeting are streamed live and can be accessed through the Council's website. All papers will be uploaded through the software as per normal procedures and this is also set out in appendix 1.
- 3.9 Therefore, it is proposed that Standing Orders be amended as follows:
- 2 (a) All meetings of the Council and its Committees shall be held remotely, that is in a hybrid format so that Councillors can attend in-person or remotely, in accordance with The Local Government (Remote Meetings) Regulations Northern Ireland (2024).
- 2 (b) The arrangement and conduct, public access and availability of documents is set out in the Supplement to Standing Orders – Remote Meetings Protocol and Procedures Rules.
- 3.10 If the Committee is minded to agree to the amendments to Standing Orders then, following ratification by the Council and the expiry of the call-in period, it is proposed that the first meeting which will be convened in a hybrid format will be the September meeting of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.
- 3.11 The Protocol will be kept under review, with the authority delegated to the City Solicitor/Director of Legal Services to make any minor changes. More substantial changes will be brought back to the Committee for approval.

3.12	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>None associated with this report. The Council already has the equipment and resources in place to host meetings in a hybrid format.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p>
3.13	None.
4.0	Appendices - Documents Attached
4.1	Appendix 1 - Supplement to Standing Orders – Remote Meetings Protocol and Procedures Rules