



West
Northamptonshire
Council

Item 12: Remote Meetings

Background

- National regulations govern the composition, constitution and procedures of Schools Forums.
- In common with local authority meetings, the Government introduced specific legislation during spring 2020 to enable Schools Forums to meet remotely during the coronavirus pandemic.
- That legislation had a 'sunset clause' and ceased to have effect on 1 April 2021.
- However, unlike the legislation applicable to local authority meetings which would require a change to primary legislation to continue to have effect, the law permitting remote meetings for Schools Forums was enacted via secondary legislation.

Remote meetings

- The Government has enacted The School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations 2021, which have amended The Schools Forums (England) (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 to make permanent the provisions that have enable schools forums meetings to be held remotely. This includes (but is not limited to) telephone conferencing, video conferencing, live webcast, and live interactive streaming.
- Where a schools forum decides to hold a public meeting by remote means only, the forum should provide support or make alternative arrangements so that any interested parties who do not have telephone or online access can attend virtual meetings.
- The Schools Forum Operational and Good Practice Guide has been updated to reflect this change.

Experience with Remote Meetings so far

- The previous Northamptonshire Schools Forum met remotely from May 2020 to March 2021.
- Although formal feedback on the success of remote meetings has not been sought from members, informally the procedures appear to have worked well.
- Attendance throughout this period has been good and there have been no issues with quorum. Meetings have also been available to stream via YouTube, increasing transparency for Forum. The costs and environmental impact associated with Forum meetings have also reduced.

Opportunities for improved engagement

- Although the regulations require provision to be made for those who may have difficulty participating in remote meetings, remote meetings also offer new opportunities to improve engagement between Forum and stakeholders.
- The possibility of observing meetings remotely could be offered to interested parties, either through direct participation or by viewing the recording of meetings online.
- This approach may yield benefits in terms of awareness of the work of Forum and improved response rates to consultations.

Next Steps

- Forum members are invited to comment on whether remote meetings should become the default option for the WNC Schools Forum.
- Forum may wish to take a vote on the issue.