Public Document Pack

CITY OF Lincoln COUNCIL

ETHICS AND ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Monday, 30 June 2025   **6.00 pm**   **Committee Rooms 1 and 2, City Hall**

Membership: Councillors Adrianna McNulty (Chair), Liz Bushell (Vice-Chair), James Brown, Gary Hewson, Anita Pritchard, Callum Roper, Rachel Storer, Sarah Uldall and Emily Wood

Substitute members: Councillors Rebecca Longbottom, Donald Nannestad and Lucinda Preston

Officers attending: Democratic Services

AGENDA

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Ethics and Engagement Committee   **8 January 2024**

Present:	Councillor Adrianna McNulty *(in the Chair)*
Councillors:	Liz Bushell, Gary Hewson, Ric Metcalfe, Hilton Spratt and Dylan Stothard
Apologies for Absence:	Councillors Thomas Dyer, Rachel Storer and Aiden Wells and Fred Mann (Independent Person).

1.   Confirmation of Minutes - 10 November 2021

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 10 November 2021 be confirmed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

2.   Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

3.   New Member Induction Programme 2024

The Democratic Services and Elections Manager presented the draft Induction Programme for newly elected councillors in 2024 and sought any comments or feedback on any of the documents.

The Committee, particularly those recently newly elected councillors onto the council, talked highly of the induction pack in terms of his content and level of detail. It was also commented that long-standing councillors would benefit of sight of some of the documents. Furthermore the Democratic Services and Elections Manager confirmed the *Personal Safety for Councillors* guide was circulated six monthly and that other key documents would be shared with all councillors.

During discussion, the following points be noted:

- In addition to the buddying system for newly elected councillors with Democratic Services, each political group should consider introducing its own buddying system to ensure newly elected councillors had an experienced councillor to ask questions of;
- Sessions on Councillor Casework and Council Procedure Rules should be introduced, with refresher sessions six months into the Council term.

RESOLVED

That the draft Induction Programme and Pack for 2024 be approved.

4.   Work Programme - Feedback on Suggested Topics (Verbal Report)

Consideration was given to the forward work programme of the Committee. The Committee acknowledged that a large part of its remit was in relation to the standards and conduct by elected and co-opted members, with meetings of the Hearing Sub-Committee being convened as and when required. However, the Committee's remit also encompassed developing effective proposals to improve democratic engagement.

The Committee therefore suggested it explored what work was being carried out by the Council to engage with local schools. Furthermore it was highlighted that the Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee had recently done a piece of work on this topic and therefore this should be considered the starting point. It was also highlighted that the Civic Team carried out engagement with schools so the Committee may wish to speak to the Civic Manager.

RESOLVED

That the Committee reviews what work was being carried out by the Council to engage with local schools.

ETHICS AND ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE   **30 JUNE 2025**

SUBJECT:	**MEMBER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME 2025/26 AND ATTENDANCE IN 2024/25**
DIRECTORATE:	**CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND TOWN CLERK**
REPORT AUTHOR:	**CHERYL EVANS, DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND ELECTIONS MANAGER**

1.   Purpose of Report

1.1   This report presents the programme of dates for Member Development sessions and seeks the views of the Ethics and Engagement Committee on possible topics for these sessions, which the Committee would like to see included.

1.2   The Ethics and Engagement Committee is invited to establish a working group to consider Member Development in more detail, including setting the Member Development programme for 2025/26 and to receive data on councillor attendance at sessions held in 2024/25 to enable the Committee to have ownership and oversight of Member Development. The working group would consist of the Chair of Ethics and Engagement Committee and up to four other members.

2.   Background

2.1   Elected members are integral to ensuring that the strategic aims and objectives of the Council are met and that high quality, cost effective services are delivered to the residents of the City.

2.2   Following an Internal Audit on Governance Health Check undertaken in 2024, it was concluded that the Ethics and Engagement Committee should receive, on at least an annual basis, the programme of member development and training for the coming year to enable the Committee to take ownership and have oversight of development needs for Councillors. A draft programme of Member Development and Training Sessions for 2025/26 is attached at Appendix A to the report. The Committee is invited to consider topics to the draft programme.

2.3   The Council is working to support the development of all its elected members to ensure that they are able to meet the demands of their roles. The Council is committed to ensuring that:

- There is a planned and structured approach to member learning and development under the oversight of the Ethics and Engagement Committee.
- Access to learning and development is equitable.
- Members are encouraged to identify their own development needs via the Ethics and Engagement Committee and participate fully in learning and development activities.

- The Member Development Programme will be reviewed and updated annually in order to support the Council's objectives, the roles and functions of its members and any key changes affecting the Council's priorities.

3. Induction

3.1 Induction for new members takes place every year that local elections are held for the City of Lincoln Council. This includes a planned two-day programme, which has previously been approved by the Ethics and Engagement Committee and is attached at Appendix B to the report. Topics covered include Meet the Chief Executive and Directors; an overview of the decision-making process; an introduction to various teams from across the Council; and a session with the City Solicitor and Monitoring Officer on code of conduct. The Committee is invited to comment on the proposed Councillor Induction Programme for 2026.

4. Mandatory Committee Training

4.1 Some of the Council's committees require attendance by the appointed committee members to attend mandatory training sessions, for example Planning Committee and the Audit Committee. Councillors are not able to participate as a Committee Member if they have not attended these training sessions. These sessions have already been incorporated into the Programme of Member Development.

5. Member Development: Equality & Diversity

5.1 Local councils play an important role in reducing inequalities and supporting inclusion and cohesion in our communities. Councils also have specific obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty. The Committee is therefore invited to identify potential topics for inclusion in the Programme of Member Development.

5.2 The proposal for equality and diversity training for members is a combination of overview awareness with local information and this would include:

1. LGA – A councillor's workbook on equality, diversity and inclusion and the 9 protected characteristics
2. An update on the Council's revised equality and diversity document suite
3. Spotlight – Diverse Communities
4. Spotlight – Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking in the United Kingdom
5. Spotlight – Disability
6. Spotlight – Young People
7. Spotlight – Older residents
8. Spotlight – Military and Armed Forces Community and Veterans
9. Spotlight – Health Inequalities
10. Spotlight – Sexual Orientation
11. Spotlight – Sex, Gender and Identity
12. Spotlight – Neurodiversity

5.3 It is recommended that these are predominantly delivered via Microsoft Teams to be inclusive and maximise attendance.

5.4   There may be some guest speakers who prefer to deliver in person, in which case hybrid attendance would be available for members.

6.   Methods of Learning and Development

6.1   A flexible approach to the delivery of training and development opportunities will be adopted to meet the potential needs of individuals and groups. A variety of methods may be used to deliver these opportunities and could include seminars, workshops, e-learning and briefing sessions delivered via a mix of in-person sessions and the use of Microsoft Teams.

6.2   The use of Microsoft Teams has seen an increase in attendance at Member Development Sessions, as it offers flexibility for anyone wishing to attend. These sessions are also recorded to enable councillors who could not attend at the original date and time, to view the session when able.

7.   Attendance at Member Development Sessions

7.1   The Internal Audit on Governance Health Check also recommended that the Ethics and Engagement Committee receive, on an annual basis, a record of attendance at each Member Development Session, to enable the Committee to assume a monitoring role. This will enable the Committee to assess the effectiveness of the member development programme and its delivery. An overview of attendance for 2024/25 is attached at Appendix C to this report. The working group will receive further details on attendance at its meeting.

8.   Strategic Priorities

8.1   <u>Let's reduce all kinds of inequality</u>

Local councils play an important role in reducing inequalities and supporting inclusion and cohesion in our communities and the proposed training will enable councillors to support this role.

9.   Organisational Impacts

9.1   Finance

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

9.2   Legal Implications, including Procurement Rules

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

9.3   Equality, Diversity and Human Rights

The Public Sector Equality Duty means that the Council must consider all individuals when carrying out their day-to-day work, in shaping policy, delivering services and in relation to their own employees.

It requires that public bodies have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination
- Advance equality of opportunity
- Foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities

Local councils play an important role in reducing inequalities and supporting inclusion and cohesion in our communities and the proposed training will enable councillors to support this role.

10.   Recommendation

10.1   The Ethics and Engagement Committee is invited to establish a working group to consider in more detail the draft Member Development Programme for 2025/26 and further data on councillor attendance at Member Development sessions held in 2024/25.

10.2   The Ethics and Engagement Committee is invited to comment on the proposed Induction for 2026 for new councillors.

Is this a key decision?	No
Do the exempt information categories apply?	No
Does Rule 15 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules (call-in and urgency) apply?	No
How many appendices does the report contain?	Three
List of Background Papers:	None
Lead Officer:	Cheryl Evans, Democratic Services and Elections Manager Cheryl.evans@lincoln.gov.uk

Member Development Sessions 2025/2026	
Date and Time	**Topic**
2 0 2 5	
Tuesday 20 May 2025 - 5.30pm	Mandatory Licensing Training
Thursday 12 June 2025 - 5.30pm	Mandatory Planning Training
Monday 14 July 2025 - 5.00pm	Local Government Financial Statements
Wednesday 27 August 2025 - 5.30pm	
Wednesday 17 September 2025 -5.30pm	
Wednesday 22 October 2025 - 5.30pm	
Thursday 13 November 2025 - 5.00pm	Treasury Management Training
Wednesday 3 December 2025 - 5.30pm	
2 0 2 6	
Thursday 8 January 2026 - 5.30pm	
Monday 26 January 2026 - 5.30pm	Medium Term Financial Strategy
Monday 2 February 2026 - 5.30pm	
Tuesday 3 February 2026 - 5.00pm	Treasury Management Training
Thursday 12 February 2026 - 5.30pm	
Wednesday 11 March 2026 - 5.30pm	

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City of Lincoln Council

Induction for newly elected Councillors

Tuesday 12 May and Wednesday 13 May 2026

TUESDAY 12 MAY 2026

10:00   **Induction Pack and Tour** *(Cheryl Evans)*
          To include issue of induction pack and overview of the Council's decision-making/committee structure

10:30   **Break**

10:45   **Formalities** *(Cheryl Evans)*
          To include:
          - *Issuing of City Hall access cards*
          - *Taking of photographs for the Council's website and publicity materials*
          - *Completion of necessary paperwork*

11:30   **Meet the Officers Session**

          11:30 - Neighbourhood Working
          11:50 - Licensing and Anti-Social Behaviour
          12:10 – Planning

12:30   **Lunch**

13:00   **Meet the Officers Session**

          13:00 - Customer Services
          13:20 - Revenues and Benefits
          13:40 - Local Government Finance

14:00   **IT provision**
          To arrange IT access, set up email accounts and issue new members with tablets

15:00   **Induction close**

WEDNESDAY 13 MAY 2026

9:00   **Meet the Chief Executive and Directors**
To provide an opportunity to meet with the Council's Chief Executive and Directors for introductions, who will provide a brief overview of Vision 2030 and the service priorities within their respective Directorates

10:00   **Member Code of Conduct and Meeting Procedure Rules**

11:00   **Break**

11:15   **Meet the Officers Session**

11:15 – Community Services
11:35 - Food Health and Safety
11:55 – Data Protection
12:15 – Equality and Diversity

12:35   **Lunch**

13:10   **Meet the Officers Session**

13:10 – Housing Strategy
13:30 – Housing Allocations
13:50 - Housing Estates
14:10 - Housing Repairs and Maintenance
14:30 - Private Housing

14:50   **Break**

15:00   **Meet the Officers Session**

15:00 - Leisure Services and Provision
15:20 - Civic Engagements
15:40 - Communications

16:00   **Induction Close and Feedback Session** *(Cheryl Evans)*
To provide members with an opportunity to offer any feedback and raise any issues or concerns

MEMBER DEVELOPMENT SESSIONS 2024/2025		
2024		**Number In Attendance**
JUNE		
Wednesday 5 June 2024	Licensing Training	16
Monday 10 June 2024	Update on Radon	8
Thursday 13 June 2024	Mandatory Planning Training	22
JULY		
Tuesday 9 July 2024	PREVENT Training	13
Tuesday 23 July 2024	Suicide Awareness Training	13
Wednesday 24 July 2024	Car Parking Strategy	15
AUGUST		
Tuesday 13 August 2024	Assets of Community Value	14
SEPTEMBER		
Wednesday 18 September 2024	Bid Ballot	15
OCTOBER		
Wednesday 23 October 2024	Fraud Awareness Training	6
Tuesday 29 October 2024	Western Growth Corridor	22
NOVEMBER		
Wedesday 6 November 2024	Emergency Planning Training	13
Monday 25 November 2024	Vision 2030	21
DECEMBER		
Monday 16 December 2024	Member Briefing from Lincolnshire Police on Operation Ford / Councillor Safety	12
Wednesday 18 December 2024	Treasury Management Training	11
2025		**Number In Attendance**
JANUARY		
Monday 27 January 2025	Mid-Term Financial Statement	13
FEBRUARY		
Tuesday 4 February 2025	Treasury Management Training	7
Monday 17 February 2025	Local Government Reorganisation	22
MARCH		
Thursday 6 March 2025	Audit Committee Effectiveness and New Internal Audit Standards	3

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ETHICS AND ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE   **30 JUNE 2025**

SUBJECT:	**CONSULTATION OUTCOME: REMOTE ATTENDANCE AND PROXY VOTING IN LOCAL AUTHORITIES: CONSULTATION RESULTS AND GOVERNMENT RESPONSE**
DIRECTORATE:	**CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND TOWN CLERK**
REPORT AUTHOR:	**CHERYL EVANS, DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND ELECTIONS MANAGER**

1.   Purpose of Report

1.1   This report presents the consultation outcome on *Remote attendance and proxy voting in local authorities: consultation results and government response,* which was published on 5 June 2025 and attached at Appendix A to this report.

2.   Background

2.1   Following time-limited Covid remote attendance permissions that expired in 2021, local authority committee meetings have been required to be held in a single, specified, physical place.

2.2   On 24 October 2024, the Government published a consultation on remote attendance and proxy voting at local authority meetings. The consultation closed on 19 December 2024 and received 5,844 responses. The consultation sought views on the practical implications of allowing remote attendance and proxy voting at local authority meetings. A working group of the Ethics and Engagement Committee met and submitted a response to the consultation.

3.   The Government's conclusion and next steps

3.1   The Government has concluded that in-person authority meetings remain vital for local democracy, but that hybrid and remote attendance, and proxy voting, will enable local authorities in England to develop more modern, accessible and flexible working practices. The Government therefore plans to legislate to support permanent provision in relation to both policies, when parliamentary time allows.

3.2   On remote attendance, the Government plans to permit local authorities to develop their own locally appropriate policies, if they decide to allow councillors to attend committee meetings remotely.

3.3   On proxy voting, the Government plans to require principal (unitary, upper and second-tier) councils to implement proxy voting schemes, to provide consistency for members who are absent when they become a new parent, or for serious or long-term illness. This requirement will apply to meetings of full Council.

3.4 For all other meetings, proxy voting may be used but will not be required, and substitute or pairing schemes may be more appropriate. The Government also plans for other local authorities not listed above to be enabled, but not required, to implement proxy voting schemes, for any of their meetings, in the context of member absences for serious or long-term illness or becoming a new parent.

3.5 The Committee is invited to note the conclusion and proposed next steps of the consultation results and government response and await further information to be released after this has been legislated by the Government. The Committee will receive further reports once these proposals have been legislated.

4. Organisational Impacts

4.1 Finance

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

4.2 Legal Implications, including Procurement Rules

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

4.3 Equality, Diversity and Human Rights

The Public Sector Equality Duty means that the Council must consider all individuals when carrying out their day-to-day work, in shaping policy, delivering services and in relation to their own employees.

It requires that public bodies have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination
- Advance equality of opportunity
- Foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities

The proposed changes by the Government will enable councillors to participate in committee meetings or to designate someone to vote on their behalf in situations where they are unable to attend a meeting.

5. Recommendation

5.1 The Ethics and Engagement Committee is invited to note the Government's consultation and response to its consultation on *Remote attendance and proxy voting in local authorities.*

5.2 That further reports are presented to Ethics and Engagement Committee when further information is available.

Is this a key decision?	No
Do the exempt information categories apply?	No
Does Rule 15 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules (call-in and urgency) apply?	No
How many appendices does the report contain?	One
List of Background Papers:	None
Lead Officer:	Cheryl Evans, Democratic Services and Elections Manager Cheryl.evans@lincoln.gov.uk

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GOV.UK

Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Consultation outcome

Remote attendance and proxy voting in local authorities: consultation results and government response

Updated 5 June 2025

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Ministerial foreword

In-person debate, discussion, and the opportunity for residents to engage with their representatives are core aspects of local democracy. At the same time, we know that it is not always possible for elected members to attend local authority meetings in person. We want to support the local government sector to modernise their democratic practices and make elected roles more accessible for more people.

We are keen to reflect feedback from the current makeup of councils, and the demands and requirements we have heard in that process, and also lead the way in opening up elected office for a broader range of candidates, including those of working age, those with caring responsibilities and those with disabilities or other personal circumstances which would benefit from modernised democratic practices.

In the spirit of resetting our relationship with local government, we want to ensure that local authorities can develop their own remote and hybrid attendance policies, with local knowledge, and to respond to local need. Local authorities vary in size, location, responsibility, and makeup, and we want to ensure that they can develop appropriately responsive policies. When elected members cannot attend even remotely, we aim for proxy voting schemes to provide local authorities and members with additional support.

We plan to collaboratively develop guidance with the sector on both policies, to ensure that local authority schemes are supportive of members and officers.

I want to thank all 5,844 respondents to this consultation. Your views on this topic and the richness of your responses have been truly valuable in assisting the government to progress these policies. I hope that these reforms will improve the experience of elected members serving their communities and encourage more people to consider locally elected office.

Jim McMahon OBE MP
Minister for Local Government and English Devolution

1. Introduction

Following time-limited Covid remote attendance permissions that expired in 2021, local authority meetings have been required to be held in a single, specified, physical 'place'.

On 24 October 2024, the government published a consultation on remote attendance and proxy voting at local authority meetings. The consultation closed on 19 December 2024 and received 5,844 responses. The consultation sought views on the practical implications of allowing remote attendance and proxy voting at local authority meetings.

2. Analysis methodology

Quantitative analysis

The multiple-choice responses to each question were analysed and broken down by respondent class. The figures provided do not include respondents who did not answer the relevant question, and more detail on respondent groupings has been provided below where relevant.

Qualitative analysis

NVivo, a qualitative data analysis tool, was used to support our thematic analysis of free text responses. We reviewed free text responses, then used NVivo to systematically code the data to identify and group common language and themes. We reviewed and refined the themes to ensure that they accurately represented the data and provided us with a comprehensive understanding of the free text responses.

3. Enabling remote attendance and proxy voting at local authority meetings

5,844 respondents completed our consultation between 24 October and 19 December 2024. Figures 1 and 2 show the breakdown of respondent type.

Question 1: In what capacity are you responding to this consultation?

As outlined in Figure 1 below, the majority (63%) of responses to this consultation came from elected members. Most other responses were on behalf of councils themselves (22%) or from members of the public (15%). We received 32 responses from sector representative bodies.

Respondents who responded in their capacity as an elected member or on behalf of a council body were asked to indicate what type of local authority they represent. As outlined in Figure 2 below, most responses came from town or parish councils (3,327) and district or borough councils (858).

Figure 1

	%
An elected member of a council body	63%
A council body	22%
A member of the public	15%

	%
A local government sector body	1%

Figure 2

Local authority type (council body)	Number of respondents
Town or parish council	3,327
District or borough council	858
Unitary authority	366
County council	154
Combined authority / combined county authority	7
Fire and rescue authority	5
Police and crime panel	4
Other local authority type	41
Total	**4,762**

Question 2: Do you agree with the broad principle of granting local authorities powers to allow remote attendance at formal meetings?

As outlined in Figure 3 below, a significant majority (86%) of respondents were in favour of the broad principle of allowing remote attendance at council meetings. Support for remote attendance was consistently high across the different respondent categories, as outlined in Figure 4.

For this figure, respondents who indicated they were responding on behalf of or as an elected member of a county council or a unitary authority have been combined into a single category representing upper tier councils. Some other categories were excluded from this analysis due to small sample sizes.

Figure 3

	%
Yes	86%
No	14%

Figure 4

Organisation	Yes	No	Total
County /Unitary council	98.5%	1.5%	100
District / Borough council	95%	5%	100
Sector bodies	93.7%	6.3%	100
Town / Parish council	87.4%	12.6%	100
Town / Parish councillors	87%	13%	100
District / Borough councillors	84.1%	15.9%	100
Members of the public	83.2%	16.8%	100

Organisation	Yes	No	Total
County /Unitary councillors	79.4%	20.6%	100

Question 3: If you answered 'yes' to question 2, do you think that there should be specific limitations on remote attendance?

As outlined in Figure 5 below, over half of respondents (56%) who were in favour of the broad principle of remote attendance at council meetings did not think that there should be limitations placed on remote attendance. A third of respondents thought that elected members should only be able to attend meetings remotely in exceptional circumstances, and a third thought that two thirds of elected members at a meeting should be present in person.

Figure 5 only includes respondents who answered "yes" to question 2. Respondents could indicate multiple answers in response to this question, and respondents were invited to submit additional limitations through free text fields. Respondents who only provided a free text response have not been included in this figure.

Figure 5

	%
There should be no limitations placed upon councils with regard to setting arrangements for remote attendance of council meetings, up to and including full remote attendance	56%
Any formal meeting allowing remote attendance should have at least two thirds of members in physical attendance	33%
Members should only be able to attend council meetings remotely in exceptional circumstances, such as those who are medically or physically unable to attend, or for reasons of local or national emergencies	33%

Our analysis of free text responses identified three key themes in response to this question: digital limitations, the risk of bias and inclusion in local democracy.

1. On digital limitations, some authorities (particularly parish councils) noted that they may not have equipment to facilitate hybrid meetings. Some respondents noted concerns about whether members joining online would fully participate in meetings; others were concerned about whether hybrid or fully remote meetings would reduce public access to meetings, or impact the quality of meetings.

2. On risk of bias, some respondents noted concerns about who would develop and implement limitations on remote attendance: many respondents felt that these decisions should be made by councils, because they best understand their local challenges, while some noted that this would place a burden on councils and result in possible challenges of bias if limitations excluded specific groups or were perceived to be unfair.

3. In relation to inclusion, respondents noted that allowing online attendance would encourage more people to become councillors. Respondents believed that remote attendance may remove barriers to becoming a councillor for people with disabilities or caring responsibilities.

Question 4: If you are an elected member, can you anticipate that you personally may seek to attend some of your council meetings remotely?

As set out in Figure 6 below, most responses from elected members indicated that they may seek to attend some meetings remotely (74%). Respondents who indicated that they were not an elected member have been excluded from this analysis.

Figure 6

	%
Yes	74%
No	26%

Question 4a: If you answered 'no' to question 4, please explain your answer below:

Respondents were asked to respond through a free text field. Some respondents noted that they felt that in-person attendance makes elected members more accountable for their actions, and the decisions made. Other respondents noted that online and hybrid meetings could be more complex to run and reduce productive engagement.

Question 4b: If you answered 'yes' to question 4, please indicate below which of the following options best describes your likely pattern of attending meetings remotely:

As outlined in Figure 7 below, most respondents indicated that they would attend meetings remotely very occasionally (49%) or from time to time (38%). Very few respondents anticipated attending remotely all the time (2%). Figure 7 only includes respondents who answered "yes" to question 4, and so only includes respondents who were elected members who personally anticipated attending some meetings remotely.

Figure 7

	%
Very occasionally	49%
From time to time	38%
Regularly but not always	11%

	%
All the time	2%

Question 5: If you are responding to this consultation on behalf of a council as a whole, what proportion of the council's current elected members are likely to seek to attend council meetings remotely over the course of a year?

As set out in Figure 8 below, three quarters of responses on behalf of councils believed that less than half of their members would seek to attend meetings remotely over the course of a year. Only 11% indicated that almost all of their members (90% to 100%) would seek to attend meetings remotely. Figure 8 only includes respondents who indicated they were responding on behalf of a council body in question 1.

Figure 8

	%
Most of them 90% to 100%	11%
More than 50% but less than 90%	14%
More than 10% but less than 50%	41%
Less than 10%	34%

Question 6: The government recognises that there may be cases in which it is necessary for councils to hold meetings fully remotely. Do you think there should be limitations placed on the number of fully remote meetings councils should be able to hold?

As set out in Figure 9 below, only 16% of respondents thought that councils should not have the flexibility to meet fully remotely under any circumstances. Other responses were split between preferring that councils could meet fully remotely at up to half of their meetings (38%) and preferring that councils could only meet remotely in exceptional circumstances (46%).

Respondents could only select one answer in response to this question. Respondents were invited to submit additional comments alongside this answer.

This question sought views on potential limitations which could be placed on the frequency of fully remote meetings, and so did not offer an option for respondents to indicate that they would prefer no limitations. Question 3 above provided an opportunity for respondents to express this view.

Figure 9

	%
Councils should only have the flexibility to change a meeting from in-person to online, or vice versa, due to unforeseen and exceptional circumstances	46%
Councils should be able to allow full remote attendance at up to half of council meetings within a 12-month calendar period	38%
Councils should not have the flexibility to conduct fully remote meetings to ensure there is always an in-person presence	16%

Responses to this question were mostly short and repeated previously discussed themes. Some respondents felt that remote meetings should only be allowed in national emergencies, while others felt that councils should develop their own limitations based on their location or function.

Question 7: Do you think there are there any necessary procedural measures that would help to ensure a remote or hybrid attendance policy is workable and efficient?

As outlined in Figure 10 below, respondents who supported one of the three procedural measures proposed by this question typically supported all three measures.

"Councils should be required to ensure that standard constitutional arrangements are followed for hybrid and fully remote meetings" (87%) and "Councils should be required to make arrangements to ensure restricted items (where a council decision is taken in private to protect confidentiality) are managed appropriately and to require remotely attending members to join from a private location" (83%) received the strongest support from respondents.

Respondents could indicate multiple answers in response to this question. Respondents who only provided a free text response have not been included in this figure.

Figure 10

	%
Councils should be required to ensure that standard constitutional arrangements are followed for hybrid and fully remote meetings	87%
Councils should be required to make arrangements to ensure restricted items (where a council decision is taken in private to protect confidentiality) are managed appropriately and to require remotely attending members to join from a private location	83%

	%
Councils should be required to publish a list of attendees joining the meeting remotely and give notice if a meeting is being held with full remote attendance	71%

Responses to this question repeated previous themes. Some respondents highlighted the need to ensure that meetings are secure, and private meetings are not accessible; others felt that meetings should either be in-person or online because hybrid meetings are complex to arrange.

Question 8: Do you think legislative change to allow councillors to attend local authority meetings remotely should or should not be considered for the following reasons?

As outlined in Figure 11 below, respondents who agreed with one of the three supporting reasons for allowing members to attend council meetings remotely proposed by this question typically supported all three. "Councils would be more resilient in the event of local or national emergencies which prevent in-person attendance" (91%) received notably more support than the other two options provided.

Figure 11

	%
Councils would be more resilient in the event of local or national emergencies which prevent in-person attendance	91%
It would likely increase the diversity of people willing and able to stand for election in their local area, making councils more representative of the communities they serve	79%

	%
It is a positive modernising measure	78%

Responses to this question repeated previous themes. Themes of inclusion and transparency were raised, and some respondents mentioned that remote meetings would be beneficial in the context of climate change and reducing emissions. Other respondents noted the benefits of remote meetings for rural councils with poor public transport provision.

As set out in Figure 12 below, respondents who agreed with one of the three dissenting reasons did not necessarily agree with all three options. Respondents who indicated agreement with "It would be more difficult for councillors to build personal working relationships with colleagues, and engage with members of the public in attendance at meetings" (88%) typically also agreed with "It could lead to a significant number of councillors habitually attending remotely and ultimately reduce the effectiveness of councils" (78%).

Despite this, only 38% of respondents agreed that "councillors should be physically present at all formal meetings" was a reason why members should not be allowed to attend meetings remotely.

Figure 12

	%
It would be more difficult for councillors to build personal working relationships with colleagues, and engage with members of the public in attendance at meetings	88%
It could lead to a significant number of councillors habitually attending remotely and ultimately reduce the effectiveness of councils	78%
Councillors should be physically present at all formal meetings	39%

Respondents could indicate multiple answers in response to each half of this question, and respondents were invited to submit additional reasons through free text fields. Respondents who only provided a free text response

for either sub-question have not been included in Figures 11 and 12.

Respondents emphasised that some small local authorities have inadequate IT provisions, and noted concerns about hybrid meetings affecting engagement and debate.

Question 9: In your view, would allowing councillors to attend formal local authority meetings remotely according to their needs particularly benefit or disadvantage individuals with protected characteristics? For example, those with disabilities or caring responsibilities.

As outlined in Figure 13 below, three quarters of respondents thought that allowing members to attend remotely would benefit individuals with protected characteristics, and only 5% thought it would disadvantage such individuals.

Respondents could only select one answer in response to this question. Respondents were invited to submit additional comments alongside this answer.

Figure 13

	%
Yes/benefit	75%
Neither	20%
No/disadvantage	5%

Respondents noted that online meetings would improve inclusion in local democracy and many respondents with protected characteristics mentioned the potential personal impact of being able to attend meetings

remotely.

Question 10: In addition to provisions allowing for remote attendance, do you consider that it would be helpful to introduce proxy voting?

As outlined in Figure 14 below, respondents were narrowly opposed to the principle of introducing proxy voting measures, with 47% answering "no" and 36% answering "yes".

Broadly speaking, responses from members of councils and members of the public were more evenly split, while responses on behalf of councils and sector representative bodies were overwhelmingly opposed. A breakdown of responses by respondent class has been set out in Figure 15 below.

For this figure, respondents who indicated they were responding on behalf of or as an elected member of a county council or a unitary authority have been combined into a single category representing upper tier councils. Some other categories were excluded from this analysis due to small sample sizes.

Figure 14

	%
No/disadvantage	47%
Yes/benefit	36%
Neither	17%

Figure 15

Organisation	Yes	No	Unsure	Total
District / Borough councillors	45.1%	41.3%	13.6%	100
Town / Parish councillors	41.9%	40.4%	17.7%	100
County /Unitary councillors	39.6%	44.4%	16%	100
Members of the public	31.9%	53%	15.1%	100
Town / Parish council	23.8%	56.8%	19.4%	100
County /Unitary council	19.1%	61.8%	19.1%	100
District / Borough council	10.1%	79.8%	10.1%	100
Sector bodies	6.9%	89.6%	3.5%	100

Question 11: If yes, for which of the following reasons which may prohibit a member's participation in council meetings do you consider it would be appropriate?

As outlined in Figure 16 below, respondents who agreed with one of the three reasons for justifying allowing a member to vote by proxy proposed by this question typically agreed with all three. Almost all such respondents agreed with "Physical or medical conditions" (98%) as a reason.

Only respondents who answered "yes" to question 10 were included in this figure. Respondents could indicate multiple answers in response to this question, and respondents were invited to submit additional reasons

through free text fields. Respondents who only provided a free text response have not been included in this figure.

Figure 16

	%
Physical or medical conditions	98%
Caring responsibilities	89%
Parental leave or other responsibilities	81%

Some respondents felt that proxy voting should be allowed in all instances where an elected member cannot attend a meeting; others felt that it should be reviewed case by case.

Question 12: Are there circumstances in which you feel proxy voting would not be appropriate?

Respondents were invited to respond through a free text field. Respondents generally identified key issues in relation to proxy voting in response to this question, rather than identifying specific circumstances in which proxy voting would not be appropriate. Themes included the potential lack of accountability, pre-determined voting, and misuse. Some respondents felt that proxy voting would not be necessary if meetings could be held remotely or in a hybrid form.

Question 13: If you think proxy voting is appropriate, are there any limitations you think should be placed upon it?

Respondents were invited to respond through a free text field. Respondents suggested limiting the number of proxy votes a year, limiting the circumstances in which they can be used (personal limitations or meeting limitations), and ensuring clear records.

4. Conclusion and next steps

The government is of the view that in-person authority meetings remain vital for local democracy, but that hybrid and remote attendance, and proxy voting, will enable local authorities in England to develop more modern, accessible, and flexible working practices.

We have carefully considered arguments for and against remote attendance and proxy voting, and we plan to legislate to support permanent provision in relation to both policies, when parliamentary time allows.

On remote attendance, we plan to permit local authorities to develop their own locally appropriate policies, if they decide to hold remote meetings.

On proxy voting, we plan to require principal (unitary, upper and second-tier) councils to implement proxy voting schemes, to provide consistency for members who are absent when they become a new parent, or for serious or long-term illness. We plan for this requirement to apply to meetings of full council. For all other meetings, proxy voting may be used but will not be required, and substitute or pairing schemes may be more appropriate. We plan for other local authorities not listed above to be enabled but not required to implement proxy voting schemes, for any of their meetings, in the context of member absences for serious or long-term illness or becoming a new parent.

We plan to work collaboratively with the sector to develop clear and supportive guidance in relation to both remote attendance and proxy voting policies.

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ETHICS AND ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE   **30 JUNE 2025**

SUBJECT:	**ETHICS AND ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**
REPORT BY:	**CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND TOWN CLERK**
LEAD OFFICER:	**CATHERINE WILMAN, DEMOCRATIC SERVICES OFFICER**

1.   Purpose of Report

1.1   To present the Ethics and Engagement Committee Work Programme for 2025-26 and receive comments and considerations from members of potential further items for discussion in the municipal year 2025-26.

2.   Background

2.1   The work programme is attached at **Appendix A**.

3.   Recommendation

3.1   That Members give consideration to the Ethics and Engagement Committee Work Programme for 2025-26 and update where appropriate to include items which they wish to consider.

Is this a key decision?	No
Do the exempt information categories apply?	No
Does Rule 15 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules (call-in and urgency) apply?	No
How many appendices does the report contain?	One
List of Background Papers:	None
Lead Officer:	Catherine Wilman, Democratic Services Officer Email: catherine.wilman@lincoln.gov.uk

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Ethics and Engagement Committee Work Programme 2025/2026

30 June 2025

Topic	Responsible Person(s)	Comments
Member Development Programme 2025/26 and Attendance 2024/25	Democratic Services and Elections Manager	To provide an update on member development activity and attendance.
Government Response to Remote Attendance and Proxy Voting Consultation	Democratic Services and Elections Manager	

9 February 2026

Topic	Responsible Person(s)	Comments
Ward Councillor Toolkit	Assistant Director Strategic Development	
Induction Pack for Newly Elected Councillors 2026	Democratic Services and Election Manager	
Democratic Engagement with Schools	Mayor's Officer	

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