



The Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP  
Secretary of State for Housing,  
Communities and Local Government  
House of Commons  
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## Colchester Borough Council

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Our ref	MCRC030221
Date	3 February 2021

Dear Mr Jenrick

We are writing to you on behalf of Colchester Borough Council to urge you to extend the provisions that allow Council decision making meetings to be held virtually to continue beyond 7 May 2021.

The introduction of the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panel (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Meetings) (England) Regulations 2020 has been very beneficial to the Council and has enabled effective and transparent decision making to continue, despite the restrictions imposed in response to the Covid 19 pandemic.

As well as allowing decision making to continue in such challenging circumstances, virtual meetings have brought a number of other benefits, which I would also ask you to consider:-

- Public engagement and participation have generally increased.
- Members are able to join meetings more flexibly and are able to participate in meetings for which they would otherwise have to send apologies – for instance whilst on holiday, or from work.
- There is a positive environmental impact by reducing travel to meetings and reduced power consumption in Council buildings.
- They encourage more diverse Councillor membership by making attendance at meetings easier for those with children/caring responsibilities, or who are in employment.
- They are of particular benefit for Joint Committees where members from different authorities across a wider geographical area need to meet.
- There would remain flexibility to hold in person meetings where appropriate or indeed hybrid/blended meetings if required.
- Remote meetings support councillors in balancing their meetings, especially in large counties/rural council areas.

However, the regulations are time limited and are due to expire on 7 May 2021. The principle and practice of virtual meetings are now firmly embedded both within the Council and the general population and it would seem a retrograde step not to allow virtual meetings or hybrid meetings to continue. In addition, the challenges posed by the pandemic are unlikely to be resolved by May 2021. Therefore in order for the benefits of virtual meetings to be retained and to permit their continued use, we are writing to you on behalf of all the political groups on Colchester Borough Council to urge you to introduce the necessary primary legislation to enable virtual and hybrid meetings to continue beyond May 2021.

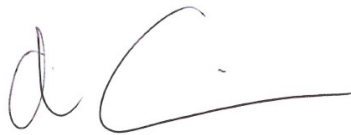
Yours sincerely



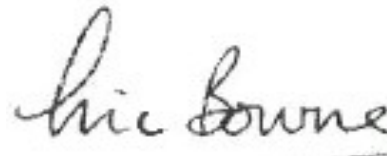
Councillor Mark Cory  
Leader, Colchester Borough Council



Councillor Paul Dundas  
Conservative Group Leader, Colchester  
Borough Council



Councillor Martin Goss  
Liberal Democrat Group Leader,  
Colchester Borough Council



Councillor Tina Bourne  
Labour Group leader, Colchester  
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Councillor Beverley Oxford,  
Highwoods Independent Group Leader,  
Colchester Borough Council