

Councils given new powers to hold public meetings remotely

- Local Government Secretary confirms local authorities can hold public meetings remotely by video or telephone
- Government removes requirement for physical attendance at meetings
- Public will still have access to public meetings through remote means
- Change ensures effective local decision making and transparency during the national effort to fight the coronavirus pandemic

Local authorities in England have been handed new powers to hold public meetings virtually by using video or telephone conferencing technology from Saturday (4 April 2020).

The government has temporarily removed the legal requirement for local authorities to hold public meetings in person during the coronavirus pandemic. This will enable councils to make effective and transparent decisions on the delivery of services for residents and ensure that local democracy continues to thrive.

Meetings will remain accessible whilst ensuring that councillors, staff and the wider public are able to follow government advice by staying at home to stop the spread of coronavirus to protect the NHS and save lives.

Local Government Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

Local authorities are the backbone of our democracy and they are playing a vital role in the national effort to keep people safe. This change will support them to do that while maintaining the transparency we expect in local decision making.

Councillors and staff are already doing the right thing by following our advice to stay home, protect the NHS and save lives. This includes working from home wherever possible, and the new powers to hold meetings virtually will make that easier.

It's critical that they continue to provide essential services and find innovative ways to maintain important economic functions they perform like the planning system and they will now be able to do so.

We've given local authorities across England an additional £1.6

billion to help their crucial work in the national effort against coronavirus, and we are continuing to ensure they get all of the support that they need at this time.

Local Government Association Chairman Cllr James Jamieson said:

Councils are working tirelessly to support their communities as they rise to the unprecedented challenge of the coronavirus crisis.

Giving councils powers to hold meetings remotely is important to maintaining local democracy and allowing critical decisions to be made during this public health crisis. Councils need to respond quickly and make very many key decisions. They can now do so while remaining open, transparent and accessible to the public.

Remote council meetings will crucially help ensure all those taking part stay at home, helping to prevent the coronavirus from spreading and save lives.

The change applies to all local authorities in England and covers all categories of public meetings including annual meetings, cabinet and committee meetings.

The requirement for public meetings to be made accessible to the public remains, but it will be up to each local authority to decide how they conduct meetings, how voting procedures work and how to ensure that the public has access.

The government is also working to bring in new law so that by-elections, local polls and referendums cannot be held before 6 May 2021. The Coronavirus Act 2020 has already postponed local and Police and Crime Commissioner elections scheduled in the UK for Thursday 7 May 2020 until 6 May 2021.

- The change applies to all local authorities in England, which includes county councils, district councils, combined authorities, parish councils, joint committees constituted to be a local planning authority, fire and rescue authorities and national park authorities. They apply to meetings of a local authority, an executive of a local authority, a joint committee of two or more local authorities, and a committee or sub-committee of any of those bodies.
- The regulations also enable Police and Crime Panels in England and Wales to take place remotely, so they can also continue their important work in local areas.
- Existing rules about the number of councillors or members of a group required to attend to make a meeting valid will remain, but virtual

attendance will count.

- We are working with the Local Government Association and other representative bodies who are considering developing guidance for local authorities about holding remote meetings.
- This announcement applies to England (and to Wales for Police and Crime Panels). Whilst local government is a devolved matter, the Department has been engaging closely with colleagues in the devolved administrations.
- Saturday 4 April 2020 is the day that the local authorities gain the power to hold remote meetings. However, for most local authorities the practical effect will be from the start of the working week when they hold most meetings.
- The Regulations were made in Parliament on 2 April 2020 and apply to meetings taking place before 7 May 2021. The government is able to legislate to bring forward this date if medical and scientific advice leads to the relaxation of social distancing rules.
- We've provided [local authorities with £1.6 billion](#) to help them respond to coronavirus pressures across all the services they deliver. This includes increasing support for the adult social care workforce and for services helping the most vulnerable, including homeless people.

Cash support for food redistribution during coronavirus outbreak

Food redistribution organisations across England will benefit from £3.25 million of government funding to help them cut food waste and redistribute up to 14,000 tonnes of surplus stock during the coronavirus outbreak.

From overcoming operational barriers in obtaining, storing and transporting food safely from restaurants as they close in response to coronavirus, to supporting drops in volunteer numbers, grants will be available to redistributors working hard to ensure valuable food supplies do not go to waste.

All food redistribution businesses and charities will be encouraged to bid for grants over the coming month, including those whose volunteer programmes have been affected by social distancing measures or those that cannot access their usual commercial support network.

This funding comes as the government continues to engage with the food industry to ensure the nation is fed, and people across the UK are supported in getting the food and groceries they need.

Environment Minister Rebecca Pow said:

I am proud of the many organisations across the UK working to ensure food and supplies are provided to those who need it most need during this challenging time.

This funding will support people in need while ensuring that we minimise the amount of food which goes to waste – benefiting both society and the environment.

Food Waste Champion Ben Elliot said:

Now more than ever, it is of paramount importance that we ensure good food does not go to waste.

This money will support food redistribution organisations to continue their pivotal work in delivering food to those who need it.

The Defra-funded grant scheme will be managed by sustainability not-for-profit [WRAP](#), which works closely with governments, businesses, and redistribution organisations to minimise food waste.

Chief Executive of WRAP Marcus Gover said:

It is critical in these unprecedented times that we maximise the amount of surplus food redistributed.

These grants offer crucial financial support to redistribution organisations, where it will have the most impact. We know from managing redistribution funds that this money will make a huge difference to many people.

Today's funding is the latest in a series of government grants to help tackle food waste, with last year's Food Waste Reduction Fund ensuring nearly 2,000 tonnes of surplus food did not go to waste.

Rene Meijer, CEO of Sheffield-based food redistribution organisation The Food Works, said:

Over the past two weeks we have doubled the amount of food we redistribute, as many tonnes of food goes spare from businesses closing and people change their shopping habits.

Surplus food redistribution is all about providing resilience to the community, and at a time like this we need resilience more than ever to ensure good food does not go to waste and reaches those who need it.

It comes as the government introduces a series of measures to support people in getting the food they need during the coronavirus outbreak. On Sunday 29 March, the government [delivered the first food parcels to vulnerable people](#) who are being shielded from coronavirus – containing food and household items such as potatoes, fruit and tinned goods.

The government has also temporarily relaxed competition law to allow supermarkets to share data with each other on stock levels, co-operate to keep shops open and share distribution depots and delivery vans.

Application windows for the fund will be split in to three phases. For more information [click here](#).

[An inspection of Home Office \(Borders, Immigration and Citizenship System\) intelligence collection capabilities, focusing on its field intelligence work:Call for evidence](#)

- Only go outside for food, health reasons or work (but only if you cannot work from home)
- If you go out, stay 2 metres (6ft) away from other people at all times
- Wash your hands as soon as you get home

Do not meet others, even friends or family.

You can spread the virus even if you don't have symptoms.

[Coronavirus – Temporary changes to how we process fishing vessel licence applications](#)

In response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak we are following the Government's advice on social distancing, with most Marine Management Organisation (MMO) colleagues now working remotely.

The health and wellbeing of our stakeholders, customers, partners and of course our MMO colleagues is our priority in these exceptional times. As a result of this we are changing the way we deliver our services including how we handle fishing vessel licensing applications.

The following guidance sets out the temporary changes to existing processes to ensure we continue to deliver a timely service in a safe way.

[How to apply for your fishing vessel licence](#)

Step one

Simply email your local admin office and let them know you want to apply for a Fishing Vessel Licence.

Step two

Your query will be picked up by our local FVL Admin Officers. The Admin Officer will then make contact with you by email, or by telephone if required.

Step three

You will be directed to or sent a form to complete via email (if there is more than one applicant, we will ask the initial contact for their details and we will then contact them to confirm they wish to proceed).

Step four

During this process we will ask for Photo ID, either a driving licence or passport. We will request further checks, if necessary. We will also require an electronic signature – the Admin Officer will advise how to do this.

Step five

Once the form is signed, checked and processed, it will be sent to the countersigning officer. Once everything is agreed a temporary electronic licence will be emailed out to the applicant.

Step six

Once operations are fully back to normal, the team will issue a full paper licence to replace the temporary electronic licence.

[UKEF expands protection against non-](#)

payment for UK exporters

- UK Export Finance (UKEF) can insure UK businesses against the risk of non-payment when selling internationally
- the department's export insurance scheme has been extended to major markets, including the US and EU
- government-backed insurance for UK exports to these markets will be available immediately

UK Export Finance has today announced it is expanding the scope of its [Export Insurance Policy \(EXIP\)](#) to cover transactions with the EU, Australia, Canada, Iceland, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland and the USA with immediate effect. Exports from the UK to these markets totalled £499 billion last year, accounting for 74% of all international sales from the UK.

UKEF will help companies concerned about the impact of Coronavirus to export with confidence, by offering insurance that can cover up to 95% of the value of an export contract. The insurance will protect against the risk of non-payment should UK exporters' customers become insolvent or their government actions make fulfilling the contract impossible.

Minister for Exports, Graham Stuart MP said:

Exports play a crucial role in our economy and it's right that UK businesses trading internationally are protected during this challenging time.

That's why we are offering a guarantee to these businesses that they will get paid, so they can continue to export with confidence and support the UK economy.

More than 230,000 businesses exported goods and services from the UK last year and over 95% of these were SMEs.

The Coronavirus pandemic is expected to put pressure on the ability of exporters to agree payment terms, while commercial credit insurance may become harder to obtain. By insuring against non-payment with UKEF, UK suppliers will have the confidence to continue trading and can offer more flexible payment terms to overseas buyers.

UKEF extends its cover to include countries that were previously excluded from the scheme after the European Commission relaxed rules this week regarding the provision of short-term export credit insurance.

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