

# **Consultation outcome**

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

Updated 5 June 2025

### **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.

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'.

## Appendix 1

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**



A local government sector body

1%

**Figure 2**

	Local Authority Type (Council Body)	Number of Respondents
1.	Town or parish council	3,327
2.	District or borough council	858
3.	Unitary Council	366
4.	County Council	154
5.	Combined authority/combined county authority	7
6.	Fire and rescue authority	5
7.	Police and crime panel	4
8.	Other local authority type	41
	<b>Total</b>	<b>4762</b>

### 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.

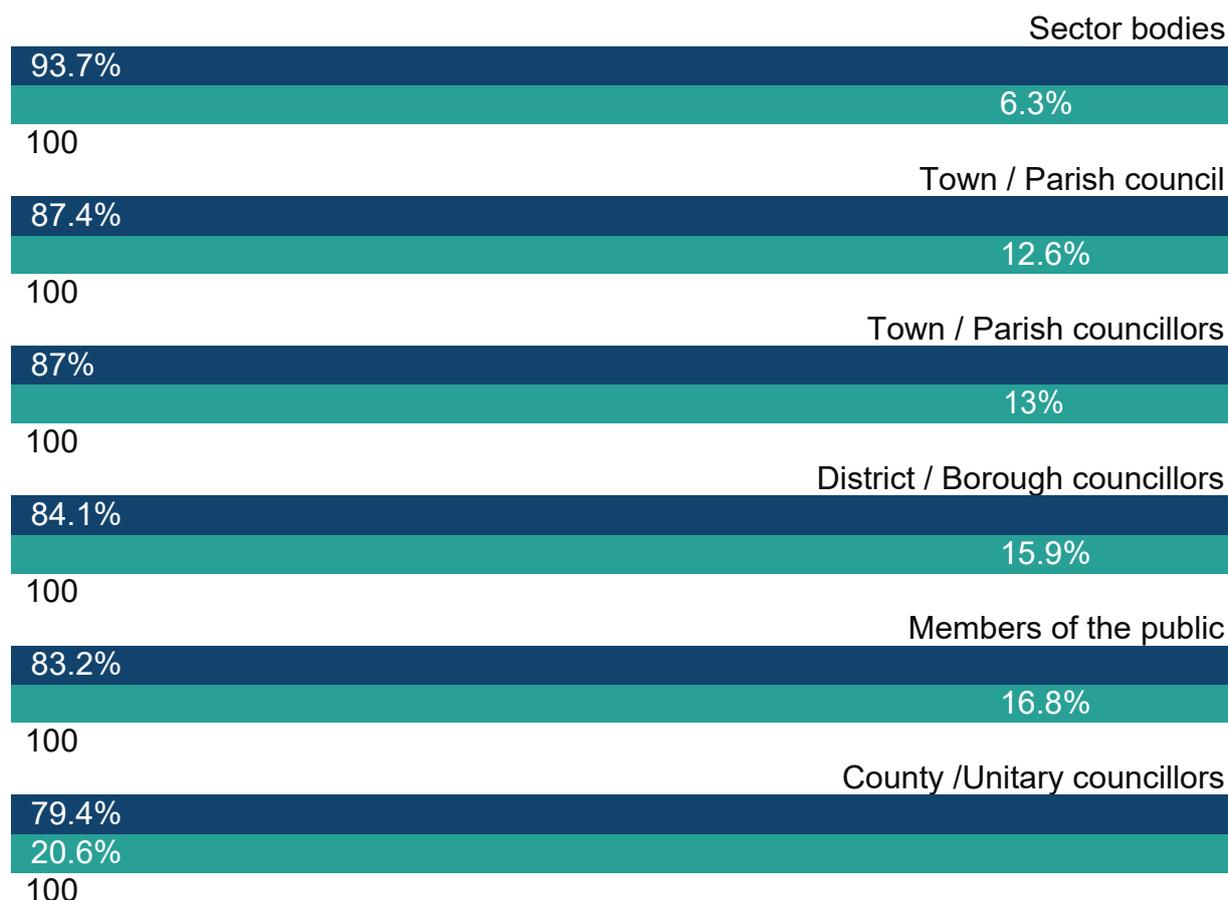
For this figure, respondents who indicated they were responding on behalf of or as an elected member of a county council or a unitary authority have been combined into a single category representing upper tier councils. Some other categories were excluded from this analysis due to small sample sizes.

**Figure 3****Figure 4**

Yes

No





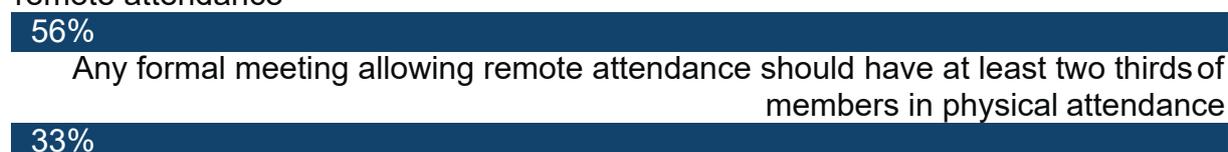
**Question 3: If you answered ‘yes’ to question 2, do you think that there should be specific limitations on remote attendance?**

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



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**



**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.

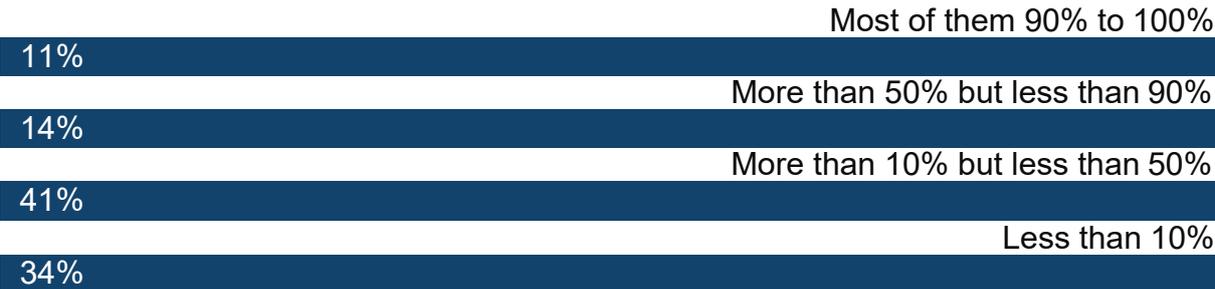
**Figure 7**



**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**



**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?**

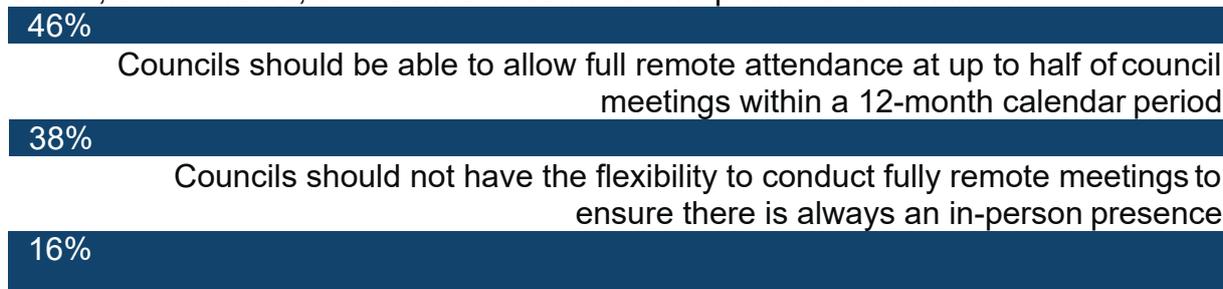
As set out in Figure 9 below, only 16% of respondents thought that councils should not have the flexibility to meet fully remotely under any circumstances. Other responses were split between preferring that councils could meet fully remotely at up to half of their meetings (38%) and preferring that councils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



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?**

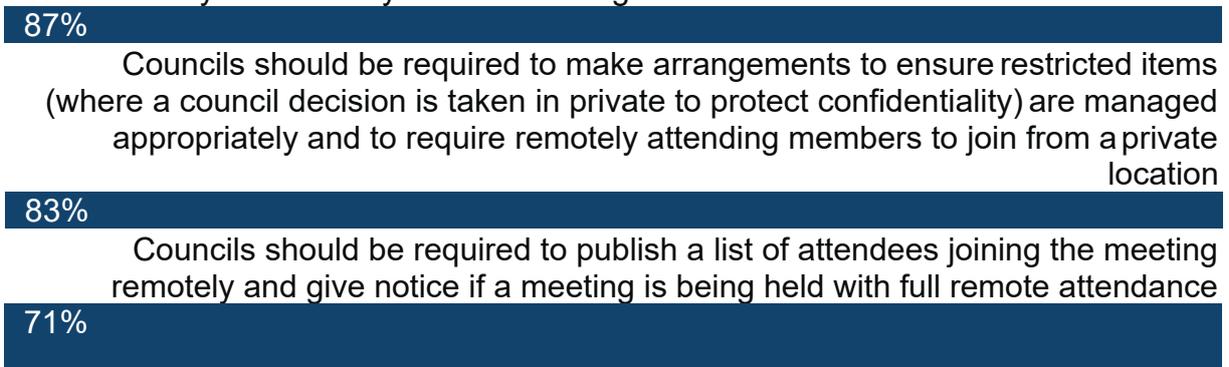
As outlined in Figure 10 below, respondents who supported one of the three procedural measures proposed by this question typically supported all three measures.

“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



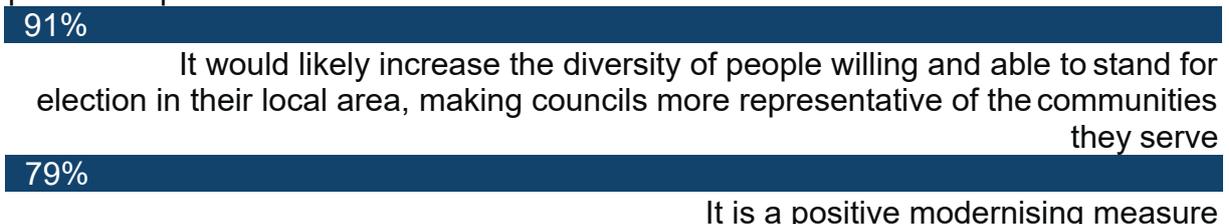
Responses to this question repeated previous themes. Some respondents highlighted the need to ensure that meetings are secure, and private meetings are not accessible; others felt that meetings should either be in-person or online because hybrid meetings are complex to arrange.

**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



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**



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**

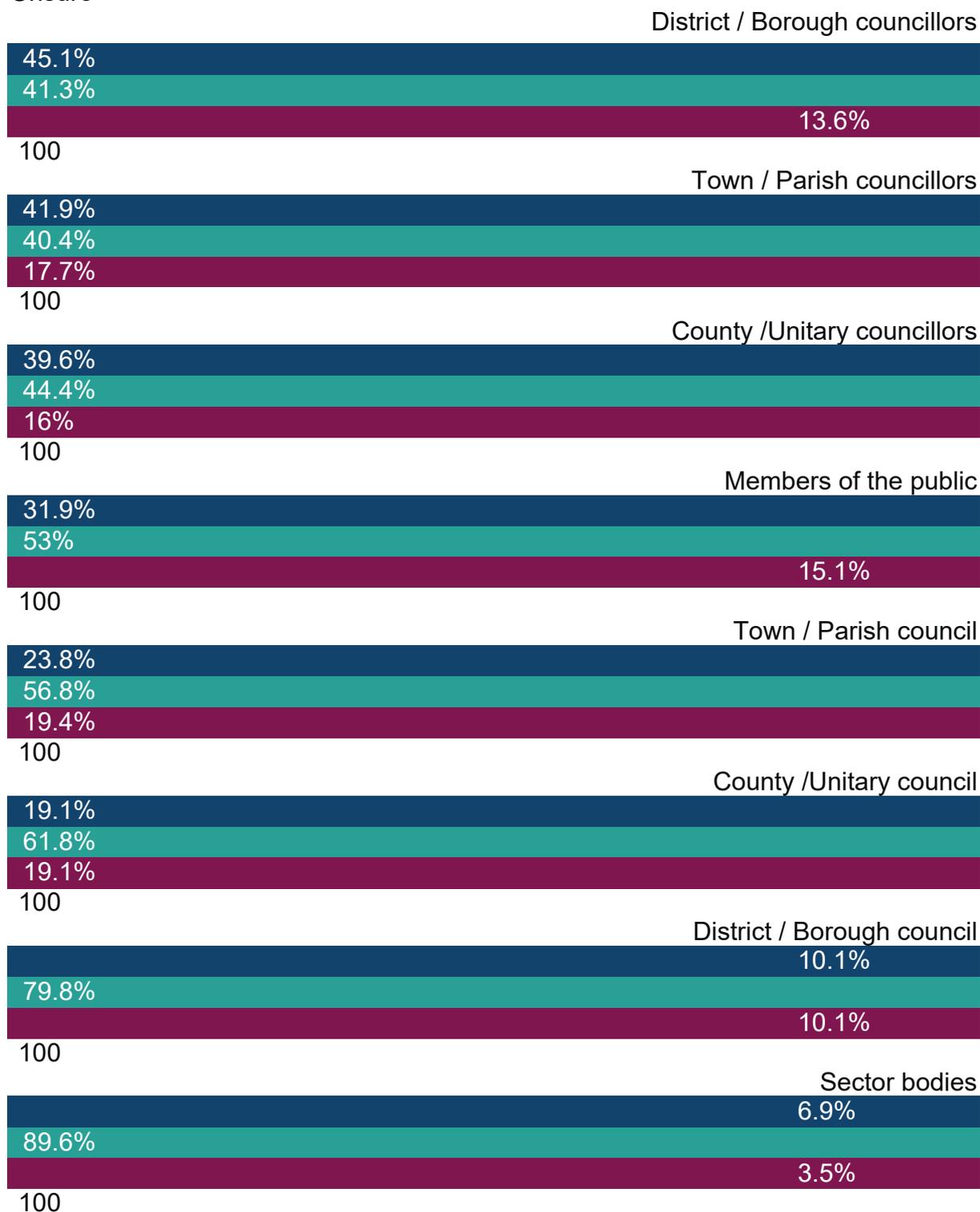


**Figure 15**

Yes

No

Unsure

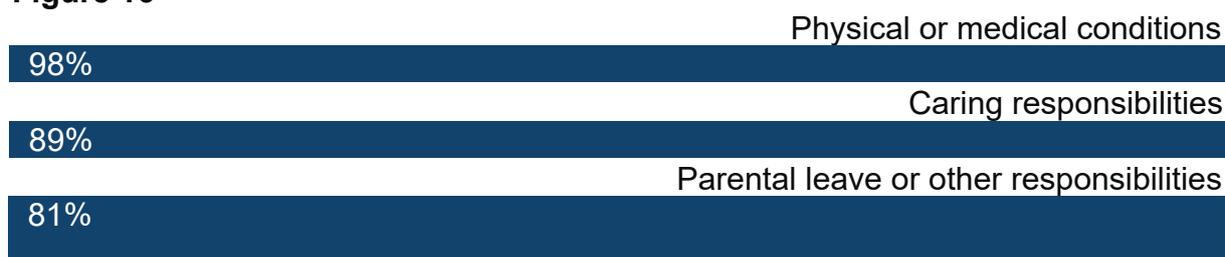


**Question 11: If yes, for which of the following reasons which may prohibit a member's participation in council meetings do you consider it would be appropriate?**

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**



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.

## Appendix 1

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.