

# Portishead Town Council

The Folk Hall, 95 High Street, Portishead, BS20 6PR Tel: 01275 847078  
[www.portishead.gov.uk](http://www.portishead.gov.uk)



March 1st, 2022

Dear Mr Gove

The temporary enabling of virtual Council meetings in response to the coronavirus pandemic allowed our Council to continue making democratic decisions efficiently, transparently, and safely without the need for physical meetings in one place. Portishead Town Council continued holding meetings without interruption throughout the pandemic. We welcome the return to in-person meetings where they can safely and efficiently take place, but also recognise the benefits to democracy of providing flexible meeting options, including opening local democratic decision-making, and creating a more accessible experience for Councillors and the public.

We note in particular the following advantages of being able to hold remote and hybrid Council meetings:

- a) All town Councillors are unpaid and many of our Councillors have work or caring commitments limiting their ability to attend meetings in person. Virtual meeting options provide more opportunity for Councillors to attend Council meetings, significantly reducing the need to take time off work or pay for childcare.
- b) In the future, a permanent online meeting option could help to attract a wider range of potential Councillors, especially those still at work or with young children. Face to face only meetings best suit retired people who have the time and flexibility to attend regularly.
- c) Travelling to attend short meetings is not the most efficient use of Councillor time; remote attendance would in many cases be more efficient.
- d) A reduction in unnecessary travel by attending some meetings virtually rather than driving would reduce emissions and cut down on the Council's carbon footprint.
- e) Virtual meeting options make Council meetings more accessible and produce better engagement from the public especially younger people and those with families who are often too busy and may have work or care commitments which prevent them from participating in traditional meetings and hence the democratic process.

Portishead Town Council would like to have the flexibility to hold virtual, hybrid and in-person meetings to suit the local context and needs of residents and Councillors.

We urge you to bring legislation forward to give virtual and hybrid meetings the same legal status as physical in person meetings.

Yours sincerely

Patricia Sterndale

Chairman Portishead Town Council