



From: **Cllr Dinah Barry**
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Luke Hall MP

Minister for Regional Growth and Local
Government

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Ministry of Housing, Communities and
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Fry Building,

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2, Marsham Street,

Date: 12 April 2021

London SW1P 4DF

Via email: luke.hall@communities.gov.uk

Dear Minister,

Remote Council Meetings

I am writing on behalf of the Community First Group on Enfield council to ask you to reconsider your decision to allow the emergency legislation that temporarily removed the legal requirement for local authorities to hold meetings in person to lapse at the beginning of May.

Community First's reasons for asking for this legislation to be extended are:

- Flexible meetings have increased participation and therefore improved democracy:
 - Attendance of the public at virtual and hybrid meetings has increased - in some recent meetings which we had hitherto considered to be well attended it has increased by approximately 400%.
 - If council meetings have to be held with social distancing, they cannot be held in the council chamber which will decrease public participation below its previous level.
 - Many people with young families had felt encouraged to stand for election because the ability to attend meetings on line made it possible for them to consider standing. This opportunity to increase participation in public life will be lost.
- The cost of hiring venues to hold socially distanced meetings will be considerable and together with other costs associated with running council meetings during a pandemic, will impact on the council's ability to provide essential services to our residents. This is in addition to the costs incurred earlier of providing suitable IT equipment to some councillors so they can attend virtual meetings.

We hope you will reconsider your decision and allow virtual and hybrid meetings to continue - even beyond the pandemic. Not only do such meetings save money, they also increase public participation and thereby the accountability of the council to our electorate; something that is much needed in Enfield at present as you are aware. To lose this benefit to local democracy would be a retrograde step.

Your sincerely,

Cllr. Dinah Barry
Leader Community First Group