

[Local authority remote meetings: call for evidence](#)

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Closes 17 June 2021

The call for evidence seeks views on the use of the current arrangements which have provided express provision for local authorities to hold meetings remotely or in a hybrid format during the coronavirus pandemic.

This call for evidence seeks to understand the experience of local authorities in the whole of the UK regarding remote meetings. It will inform a decision about whether to make these arrangements permanent.

For England, Wales and Northern Ireland, this call for evidence refers to the [Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels \(Coronavirus\) \(Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings\) \(England and Wales\) Regulations 2020](#) ... under powers granted by section 78 of the Coronavirus Act 2020. The regulations come into force on 4 April 2020 and apply to meetings taking place before 7 May 2021.

In respect of these regulations, 'local authority' means: ...

- a London borough council
- the Greater London Authority

The government would like to gather evidence about the use of the current arrangements for local authorities to meet remotely or in hybrid format.

We are aware that experience of remote meetings has been varied. The government would like to hear from interested parties about the pros and cons of making such arrangements permanent in England and the use of the arrangements to date. We are particularly interested to receive any quantitative data that can be included to substantiate the responses you make.

The regulations make express provisions for local authorities to hold meetings remotely, for example through typical digital conference software (e.g. Zoom, Skype, Teams) or telephone conference calls. However, they do not require them to be held remotely or even in a single format. This means, for example, that local authorities can hold 'hybrid' meetings (where some members attend virtually and other members attend in person) and they are also still able to hold fully 'in-person' physical meetings.

Any reference to 'remote meetings' or 'remote meetings arrangements' also refers to hybrid meetings.

No impact assessment has been conducted at this time.

You can only respond to this call for evidence through our online consultation platform, [Citizen Space](#).

Survey questions and suggested responses

1. Generally speaking, how well do you feel the current remote meetings arrangements work?

Very Well

Well

Neither well nor poorly
Poorly
Very Poorly
Unsure

Please explain your answer in more detail, though note you will be asked about specific advantages and disadvantages of remote meetings in further questions

The GLA has held 7 representation hearings chaired by the Mayor or Deputy Mayor to determine called in planning applications since the start of the pandemic. The remote format works well for these types of meeting because they are very structured and formal. Our hearings follow a set agenda, with pre-arranged participants, and none of the participants are permitted to speak until it is their turn or if the Mayor/Deputy Mayor asks them a question. This is well suited to the remote format, which the GLA operates through MS Teams, where participants can remain muted until it is their time to speak. Officers can give presentations clearly through screen-sharing. The software also allows for decision makers to go to break out rooms if required. MS Teams allows is sufficient to host the number participants required and up to 10,000 people to watch remotely (or larger figures if using a different piece of broadcasting equipment), which is ample for our purposes and enables us to conduct remote hearings in the same manner as we would in person.

To implement remote meetings, we published an Interim Hearings Procedure. We were able to publish this through our internal decision-making process which allowed us to make any changes as were necessary.

2. Generally speaking, do you think local authorities in England should have the express ability to hold at least some meetings remotely on a permanent basis?

Yes

No

Unsure

Please explain your answer in more detail.

In relation to London Plan Examinations and call-ins, and supporting London Local Planning Authorities to carry out efficient decision making, we suggest that meetings are held both remotely and face-to-face or by telephone to ensure that different groups can take part and influence decision making.

Remote meetings offer many advantages for different groups to take part. However, accessibility and inclusion need to be key considerations when organising meetings to ensure different groups, such as disabled people, neurodiverse people and who are D/deaf¹, can take part. Face-to-face and telephone options can ensure that people who are not online, or who are less confident online, can take part. Support for people who are less confident online to join remote meetings is also needed.

3. What do you think are some of the benefits of remote meetings?

- More accessible for local authority members
- Reduction in travel time for members
- Meetings more easily accessed by local residents
- Greater transparency for meetings

¹ People who associate themselves as culturally deaf or as part of the Deaf community – often people who are born deaf and who use a British Sign Language interpreter

- Documents (e.g. minutes, agendas, supporting papers) are more accessible to local residents and others online
- Easier to chair meetings in an orderly fashion
- A virtual format promotes greater equality in speaking time during meetings
- I do not think there are any benefits to remote meetings
- Other (please specify below)

For each benefit you have selected, please explain each of your answers in more detail. Quantitative evidence upload option.

- More accessible for local authority members and local residents and reduction in travel time

Remote meetings offer cost saving benefits to individuals, as people do not need to travel to a physical place or pay for transport or parking. This is particularly important for the GLA, as we operate across the whole of London and City Hall may not be accessible for everyone. Virtual meetings could play a role in increasing participation and awareness of what we do.

However, accessibility and inclusion need to be key considerations when planning and organising meetings to ensure that everyone can take part and influence decision making. It is important to note that conditions can be invisible and fluctuate, and people can be affected by multiple impairments. Meetings need to be planned for in advance to consider digital access, the needs of disabled people, D/deaf people, neurodiverse people, and people with speech conditions for example. With this in mind, the GLA planning team increased its notification period for representation hearings from 14 to 21 days as part of our Interim Procedure for Representation Hearings, to give officers more time to engage with participants and ensure that individual needs are taken care of.

Asking about accessibility requirements in advance and ensuring effective procedures/processes are in place for meeting different needs can improve efficiency and ensure that different groups can take part and influence decision making

Virtual meetings offer advantages for people to attend, particularly those who are online. They are likely to help increase participation from neurodiverse people and people who experience anxiety in group settings for example. Research² shows that Autistic people may find changes to room layout or background noise a distraction for example. Disabled people, older people and people with small children who are online may be more likely to take part due to removing the need to physically travel. The cost of travelling to a meeting may be removed, which may mean that people on low incomes are more likely to take part. There are positive environmental impacts from reduced travel.

Research³ shows that providing the meeting location, subjects for discussion and meeting materials (e.g. copies of slides) in advance, as well as receiving written notes afterwards can help different groups to fully benefit and take part, for example neurodiverse people. Autistic people and people who are Deaf may find reading and listening at the same time difficult for example. Allowing sufficient time for questions can help people to benefit and take part also.

However, certain groups less likely to be online (for example older people, disabled people, women, people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds and people on low incomes) may be unable to join remote meetings. The technology does allow for people to join the meeting by telephone which could be one way to gain participation from people who are not able to be online. Similarly, we have also previously read out statements on behalf of residents who were not able to

² <https://www.acas.org.uk/neurodiversity-at-work-report>

³ <https://www.acas.org.uk/neurodiversity-at-work-report>

attend virtually or in person (for a variety of reasons). Further thought could be given to allowing people to use office/meeting space if they are not able to join online.

- Easier to chair meetings in an orderly fashion

Our meetings are, for the large part, well-structured e.g. clear agendas and timings for speakers which is suited for holding remote meetings. Additionally, meetings held remotely result in greater control of non-speaking participants thus ensuring there is less disruption to the meeting.

- Other (please specify below)

Remote meetings may support the engagement of under-represented groups, for example, by removing travel time and the transport costs required to join a meeting.

Certain groups may find it harder to engage / participate in face-to-face meetings, such as Autistic people or people affected by anxiety, people who do not like giving their views in public and people who do not like conflict, so virtual or part-virtual meetings could be a benefit to them.

Digital training

Support should be provided for groups who are less likely to be online to take part in online meetings. For example, training videos could help upskill people on how to use Zoom, Teams, and other platforms. Staff need to be aware about how to dial in to telephone meetings and any costs associated, so that they can support groups less likely to be online to take part in remote meetings.

We offered to provide support to participants on our virtual Representation Hearings which was well received and resulted in participants being confident about using the technology they needed. Often, a staff member would hold a run-through with participants so they could test how it would work.

Supports people to take part who experience social anxiety or who fear conflict

During face-to-face meetings, intimidating behaviour can take place, which may deter people from taking part. In remote meetings, individuals can be muted, which if managed appropriately, can prevent discussions from quickly escalating.

People may feel more comfortable taking part or observing the meeting

An individual may feel nervous to speak at a public meeting but may want to get their points across. People may feel more comfortable taking part in remote meetings if they are not required to turn their video on and/or if they can remain anonymous. However, it is important to note that a person having their video turned on could support some people to lip read. It is key that captions and a transcript of the event can therefore be provided, for example to support people who are D/deaf to take part, and that staff are aware of the accessibility requirements of participants before the meeting.

Attending an event in person can require a significant amount of time and energy, in addition to financial cost. If participants have not invested so much time in attending an online meeting, they may feel less pressure to speak at the meeting, when compared to a face-to-face meeting.

People can observe a remote meeting (both from attending the meeting online and/or from watching a meeting that is being live-streamed) whilst remaining anonymous. Allowing people to comment via a web chat, where applicable, can support participation from different groups, including people who are D/deaf. This may support understanding of how decisions are made and encourage participation.

Events that are recorded and made available publicly allow that people can watch in their own time. They can take a break and leave the meeting easily.

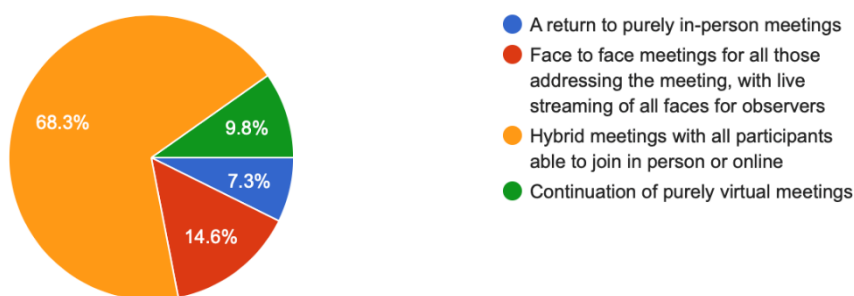
Hybrid meetings can help ensure that an environment is created that is about genuine listening and collaboration. It is important to address barriers to different groups to ensure that they can engage in debates and influence decision making.

Hybrid meetings can take place where face-to-face meetings are filmed and shared online in real-time. Online technology can be used to enable people to comment online during the meeting and ask questions.

Research by the London Forum of Amenity and Civic Societies highlighted that three-quarters of the 41 respondents would like to see partial or complete continuation of virtual meetings, with a majority in favour of hybrid meetings in which all parties could participate virtually or in person.

Which would you prefer to see in the future, once Covid restrictions are lifted:

41 responses



Comments included: "Availability of online meetings ... has increased participation by those who have an interest in one agenda item only."

4. [For local authorities only] Have you seen a reduction in costs since implementing remote meetings in your authority?

Yes

No

Unsure

Please explain your answer in more detail.

If you have quantitative evidence that you would like to upload e.g. a spreadsheet of monthly expenses, please upload a file using this link.

There have been savings from not needing to book physical venues for meetings and from reduced printing. Furthermore, there is no need to wait for room or venue availability (providing that the software used for online events allows multiple events to take place at the same time within an organisation).

However, there are costs such as from providing support for people who are less confident online to join online meetings, and using software such as Zoom for larger meetings, including staff familiarisation time and for ensuring that multiple events can take place on Zoom at the same time. There may also be a cost for using the professional version of Eventbrite in the future.

There are costs for including live captions for remote events (for example, through a Speech-to-text report/Palantypist). We have received quotes ranging from £70 to £134 per hour (without VAT) or £290 for 2 to 4 hours (without VAT), plus £5 for streaming. Weekend and evenings may incur additional costs.

Transcripts generated automatically can be provided for free using software such as the app Otter (although this would need to be linked to software such as Zoom to appear for live events and there may be a cost incurred) or by using the automatic captions function in Microsoft Teams for example. Automatic captions can be provided for events that are livestreamed on YouTube for free it is believed.

British Sign Language (BSL) interpretation costs for example between £40 to £80 per hour. Organisations may have BSL interpretation included within a contract for interpretation and translation.

Documents can be converted to audio files automatically using free software (such as [Natural Reader](#) or [From Text-to-Speech](#)), however to ensure greater accuracy a paid-for service may be needed (for example, by organisations such as A2i Transcription). For short documents, easy read versions can be produced for around £200 by companies such as Easy Read Online.

1. What do you think are some of the disadvantages of the remote meetings arrangements?

It is harder for members to talk to one another informally

Meetings are less accessible for local authority members of local residents who have a poor-quality internet connection

Meetings are less accessible for local authority members or local residents who are unfamiliar with video conferencing/technology

There is less opportunity for local residents to speak or ask questions

Some find it more difficult to read documents online than in a physical format

Debate is restricted by the remote format

It is more difficult to provide effective opposition or scrutiny in a remote format

It is more difficult to chair meetings in an orderly fashion

Virtual meetings can be more easily dominated by individual speakers

It might enable democratically elected members to live and perform their duties outside their local area on a permanent basis, therefore detaching them from the communities they serve

It may create too substantial a division between the way national democracy (e.g. in the House of Commons) and local democracy is conducted

I do not think there are any disadvantages to remote meetings

Other (please specify)

For each disadvantage you have selected, please explain each of your answers in more detail

It is harder for members to talk to one another informally

Opportunities for informal conversations and networking may be reduced in remote meetings, however these could be built in using break out rooms and scheduling time into meetings. Body language and non-verbal communication may be difficult to pick up in online meetings.

Use of instant messaging and/or webchat can support communication within organisations during remote meetings and between stakeholders.

Meetings are less accessible for local authority members of local residents who have a poor-quality internet connection

Households with multiple people working from home and people on low incomes may experience a poor-quality internet connection, slow speeds or limited data. Pre-recording presentations can help to address problems with technology during meetings. The GLA has produced internal guidance on pre-recording presentations, which we would be happy to share.

Consideration needs to be given to support for groups to take part who have poor-quality wifi and /or who lack access to digital technology (e.g. providing equipment to take part and/or covering the cost of people joining a meeting by telephone).

Meetings are less accessible for local authority members or local residents who are unfamiliar with video conferencing/technology

Groups less likely to be online or who have less experience of joining remote meetings may be fearful of using the software for remote meetings, for example, due to security concerns. Training, support and resources may be needed to help people feel comfortable using the technology. Live streaming events (for example on YouTube) can enable people with access to online technology to observe meetings and potentially take part (e.g. via a webchat or commenting) without needing to download any software. Live streaming and recording events can help to ensure transparency and enable more people to participate and understand decision making.

There is less opportunity for local residents to speak or ask questions

Accessibility and inclusive should be a key consideration for planning meetings. Informal engagement opportunities should be built in e.g. through the use of break out rooms. People should be able to contribute to a discussion in a range of ways, e.g. through the use of webchat and speaking. Support needs to be available for people to develop their confidence using technology, particularly for those who are less likely to be online, and financial reimbursement should be available to support people on low incomes who are not online to take part (e.g. by telephone).

Some find it more difficult to read documents online than in a physical format

It is important to ensure that people are asked about accessibility requirements in advance of the meeting and that accessible information formats are provided where people have a disability e.g. audio, easy read, large print etc.

The nature of the meetings we hold, means the vast majority of documentation is published well in advance of the meeting online. It is important that the documents are as accessible as possible, achieving the (or exceeding the minimum) Government standards on accessibility and WCAG 2.1 for the relevant web pages.

We are often publishing documents that have been sent to us by external stakeholders e.g. Applicant for a planning application that is for public consultation. To improve the quality of documents that are sent to us, we intend to publish guidelines to the stakeholders at the earliest opportunity so that documentation that is sent to us is of a higher standard.

The London.gov.uk site also includes instructions for anyone who requires a document in a more accessible format using assistive technology and this can be included in any communication to the public e.g. when sending out statutory consultation notifications.

Other (please specify)

Digital exclusion

Certain groups are less likely to be online and therefore may be excluded from taking part in remote meetings. We have outlined our thinking on this in question 11.

Access for D⁴/deaf people, disabled people, people with low literacy, people who speak limited English, and people on low incomes

We all have different needs. Offering different ways for people to take part and accessible information and communication formats can support people's needs being met, and their participation. It is important that remote meetings are accessible for D/deaf people, people with a learning disability, people with low literacy levels and people who do not speak English, or who speak English as a second language.

Transcripts should be automatically generated for meetings at least and in best practice scenarios, should be live.

Using a webchat/chat function can support people who are D/deaf to take part. Use of text/SMS can support people are D/deaf or hard of hearing and who are not online to take part.

Training and guidance on the use of technology, including tips for presenters should be provided. For example, having a window in the background / behind a participant whose video is on may make a person harder to see, which could particularly people affected by sight loss.

Cost impact on individuals

There are cost implications to individuals. For example, there is still a need for technology and wifi (including speed / quality of connection) to take part in online meetings. This can be more considerable if participants are not given an allocated time within which to speak in the meeting or the agenda and timings are not clear.

Describing visual information

Key information that is presented visually (e.g. images and charts) should be described to participants (e.g. to support people with a visual impairment and/or a learning disability to understand the information- it can also be useful generally to help people understand potentially complex information).

Online safety

Participants, if required to share their details and/or turn on their video, especially in a meeting that is being recorded and made available publicly, may feel concerned about being targeted by abuse and / or they may be concerned about making their views publicly available, for example, if they go against the majority views within their communities. Online safety measures need to be considered and /or consideration for people to remain anonymous when taking part in online meetings. For example, statements have been read out on behalf of people in past.

2. What do you think are some of the main advantages of holding face-to-face meetings, as opposed to remote meetings?

Please provide your answer in the box below

Face-to-face meetings allow body language and non-verbal communication to be observed. Where decisions are particularly sensitive, face-to-face meetings may offer additional information that can help to inform judgement and decision making. Face-to-face meetings may be more likely to be needed for particularly sensitive decisions.

Face-to-face meetings may support the involvement of particular groups such as people with learning disabilities and people who rely on a support worker, depending on whether accessibility and inclusion are key considerations (such as factoring in breaks and avoiding acronyms and complex language for example).

Face-to-face meetings can help different stakeholders to build relationships, which may lead to collaboration / partnership working.

Face-to-face meetings should be available to watch online to enable people with different needs to take part (for example, people with caring responsibilities).

3. If permanent arrangements were to be made for local authorities in England, for which meetings do you think they should have the option to hold remote meetings?

For all meetings

For most meetings with a few exceptions (please specify)

Only for some meetings (please specify)

I think local authorities should be able to decide for themselves which meetings they should have the option to hold remotely

I do not think local authorities should have the option to hold any meetings remotely Unsure

Please explain your answer in more detail.

Hybrid meetings should be possible for all meetings to enable as many people as possible to take part. Remote meetings remove the need to physically travel, and reduce costs, for example, from public transport, fuel for driving and/or parking and in some circumstances may be more appropriate than a Hybrid meeting.

As outlined in our responses to other questions, we believe that there are substantial benefits to holding meetings remotely, contributing to gaining greater participation/awareness of the work we do.

4. If permanent arrangements were to be made for local authorities in England, in which circumstances do you think local authorities should have the option to hold remote meetings?

In any circumstances

Only in extenuating circumstances where a meeting cannot be held face-to-face or some members would be unable to attend (e.g. severe weather events, Coronavirus restrictions) I think local authorities should be able to decide for themselves which circumstances they should have the option to meet remotely

I do not think local authorities should have the option to hold remote meetings under any circumstances

Other (please specify)

Unsure

Please explain your answer in more detail.

In all circumstances, the option to hold remote meetings should be possible, alongside other means of taking part, for the reasons outlined above, particularly for Questions 3 and 7.

Meetings should be open to everyone to participate and express what life is like for them. People are more likely to know about issues that they themselves are affected by. If different groups cannot take part, the benefits of their thoughts and the planning of our city misses out on the lived experience of so many.

A small minority of people have the capacity to engage in planning decision making meetings and there is a lack of representation in participation generally. To ensure communities can genuinely take part in planning decisions, multiple ways of engaging are needed.

People have different needs and therefore different formats are needed for people to take part and to ensure greater diversity in representations and in influencing decision making. We need to offer multiple ways for people to participate/engage to ensure that people's different needs are met.

Remote meetings should be offered for all circumstances whilst factoring in issues around digital exclusion/accessibility that should always be considered in advance of meetings.

For the nature and importance of meetings that we hold in GLA Planning, we would most likely be looking to hold hybrid meetings. However, there may be circumstances where a fully remote meeting is advantageous e.g. all participants wish to join virtually or the meeting is short.

5. Would you have any concerns if local authorities in England were given the power to decide for themselves which meetings, and in what circumstances, they have the option to hold remote meetings?

Yes

No

Unsure

Please explain your answer in more detail.

A lack of consistency between Local Planning Authorities in London, and confusion for Londoners about how to take part in making planning representations and in influencing decision making.

6. If yes, do you have any suggestions for how your concerns could be mitigated/overcome?

Please provide your answer in the box below

Whilst consistency could be an issue, it could be overcome by using existing networks (Local Government Association, POS or within London ALBPO) to agree a code of conduct or guidance. This could ensure that there is consistency where it is needed but also allow for it to be flexible dependent on a local authority technology platforms/restrictions as this differs between authority. It would also ensure that as technology advances, it could be updated.

It would also foster cross-working on support and learnings from the different authorities, sharing tools and good practice examples amongst one another.

7. In your view, would making express provision for English local authorities to meet remotely particularly benefit or disadvantage any individuals with protected characteristics e.g. those with disabilities or caring responsibilities?

Yes

No

Unsure

Please explain your answer in more detail.

It is noted in our previous responses that consideration must be given to individuals with protected characteristics. We do believe that these can be overcome by ensuring that the correct tools/practices are in place.

We have outlined some of our thoughts on how this could impact different individuals/groups and hope that this information is useful in the consideration of holding meetings remotely.

Age

Research (2018) estimated that 82 per cent of the adult population (15 years and over) in London are estimated to have basic digital skills (BDS).⁵ Younger adults (15-34 years) have the highest prevalence at 96 per cent. People who are a student/school pupil have higher rates of basic digital skills.

Older adults (65 and over) have the lowest prevalence of basic digital skills at 49 per cent, followed by 75 per cent for 55 to 64 year olds. Older adults tend to be more recent adopters of the internet⁶. Their low rates of digital usage and skills adults has been flagged as a growing concern. As more information moves online, many older adults risk becoming disadvantaged.⁷

[GLA research](#) (2019) notes that individuals in accommodation rented from local authorities have the lowest basic digital skills at 58 per cent.⁸ Outside of gender, these patterns are likely to be related to age. Retired individuals, owner-occupiers and social renters have particularly low rates of basic digital skills. This may be related to the older age profile of these groups.

Older Londoners are also more likely to not hold increasingly important skills such as those around IT, and may also be less confident about their skills being up to date. The latter may be due to the fact older workers are less likely to have experienced work-related training.

In 2017, just over half of those aged over 75 had used the internet. Forty-one per cent of those aged over 75 years in Britain were recent internet users in 2017, compared with 99% of those aged 16 to 34. Although this age gap is narrowing, showing a steady increase from 38.7% of over-75s in 2016 and 33% in 2015, older people still accessed the internet least of all age groups in 2017 (ONS 2017; 2016; 2015).

The Mayor of London's [Inclusive London](#) (2018) strategy highlights that disabled and older Londoners are more likely to lack basic digital skills. Disabled Londoners and those over 65 are least likely to have Internet access (76 per cent and 64 per cent compared with 99 per cent for younger Londoners).⁹ Disabled and older Londoners are also less likely to own a smartphone. Poor basic digital skills (managing information, communicating, transacting, creating and problem solving) can be a barrier for some groups, and can stem from a lack of confidence or affordability issues¹⁰. Disabled¹¹ and older Londoners, as well as women and those on low incomes are more likely to be digitally excluded, which includes having no access to the Internet¹².

Younger people more likely to be online. Young people may prefer to attend online and may find it easier to attend. They may however be unable to take part in evening meetings.

⁵ IPSOS (2018) [Basic Digital Skills UK Report 2018](#)

⁶ Ofcom (2018) [Adults' Media Use and Attitudes Report](#)

⁷ Centre for Ageing Better (2018) [The digital age: new approaches to supporting people in later life get online](#)

⁸ GLA (2019) [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Evidence Base for London](#)

⁹ An Age Friendly City: How far has London come? Kings College London, 2016

¹⁰ 138 Home Internet and Social Media Use, ONS, 2016

¹¹ 139 The real digital divide? Understanding the demographics of non-users and limited users of the internet, Good Things Foundation, 2017

¹² Labour Force Surveys, 2011-2015

Disability

Disabled people are much less likely to be online than non-disabled people. The EHRC (2018) report [‘Is Britain Fairer?’](#) showed that in 2017 80.8% of disabled people had used the internet compared to 95.8% of non-disabled people.

The digital divide is considered to be based on social inequalities that lead to low levels of digital access for some groups (Martin, Hope and Zubairi, 2016). Being older, a disabled person, or living in a rural area remain risk factors for digital exclusion, although personal internet use is improving among those groups.

Twenty-two per cent of disabled adults in Britain had never used the internet in 2017, which was an improvement from 27.4% in 2015 (ONS 2017). Some disabled people who use the internet still face problems with digital accessibility.

Disabled people may fear traveling at night due to the risk of hate crime, the cost of travelling (disabled people have lower incomes and higher expenditure than non-disabled people) and barriers experienced travelling. Disabled people may therefore prefer to attend remote meetings.

Consideration needs to be given to people with different information and communication needs related to a disability or impairment. Accessibility guidance should set out processes for arranging accessible information and communication formats. Information online needs to be accessible for people with a visual impairment. D/deaf people may be excluded if provisions are not made for captions, a transcript and BSL interpretation. Provisions need to be made and communicated clearly in advance to encourage people who are not online to take part e.g. by telephone and/or text/SMS.

Gender reassignment

Transgender people may fear traveling at night due to a risk of hate crime, and may therefore prefer to attend remote meetings due to a reduced risk of physical crime, especially at night.

Race

The ONS has provided some evidence of how internet usage varies by ethnicity within London. They find that Asian Londoners are more likely to be lapsed internet users or to have never used the internet than other ethnic groups (7.9 per cent versus 7.2 per cent among all adults).¹³

Research has explored digital exclusion among the Gypsy and Irish Traveller community, 1 in 5 of whom have never used the internet. The research found that only 38 per cent of Gypsies and Travellers had a household internet connection, compared to 86% of the general population.¹⁴

People from BAME backgrounds have lower incomes and are under-represented in planning representations. People from BAME backgrounds are less likely to be online. Female lone parents from BAME backgrounds are likely to experience intersecting inequalities. They are likely to have lower

¹³ Office for National Statistics (2017) [Recent and Lapsed Internet Users and Internet Non-Users, by Ethnic Group then by UK Region and Age group: 2017](#)

¹⁴ Friends, Families and Travellers (2018) [Digital Exclusion in Gypsy and Traveller communities in the United Kingdom](#)

incomes and are therefore less likely to be online and be time poor, and have caring responsibilities which may limit their ability to take part in evening meetings.

People who speak limited English and /or have low literacy may find it harder to take part in face-to-face and online meetings. Linking to Google Translate, providing captions in different languages, sharing materials in advance, factoring in breaks during meetings, sharing recordings meetings and providing foreign language interpretation can help to support participation. 5

Religion or belief

People who have a religious belief are more likely to have larger families and may therefore be more likely to be sharing technology, and therefore find it harder to access remote meetings. Consideration should be given to religious times of the year and days of the week – for example, avoiding meetings on a Friday when people are more likely to attend a mosque.

Pregnancy and maternity / people with caring responsibilities

Carers are less likely to be online and are more likely to be ‘time-poor’ and have lower incomes (for example, due to being more likely to work part-time and have higher expenditure due to their caring responsibilities). Women tend to be responsible for providing informal care.

Carers may find face-to-face events difficult to travel to and attend for example due to the costs and time involved. They may find it easier to take part in remote meetings, particularly if a webchat option is available. Regular breaks should be factored in to support participation. Consideration for the school day should be factored in (e.g. avoiding meetings around 3.30pm). Starting meetings from 10 – 10.30am onwards is generally considered to be good practice.

Sex

There is a gender gap in basic digital skills of 7 percentage points. Women are likely to have lower incomes than men and are less likely to be online.

Women are more likely to be responsible for informal unpaid care. 90% of lone parents are women. Women may therefore be more likely to be ‘time-poor’ and may find it harder to attend face-to-face meetings. Online meetings may be easier to attend for women who are online.

Sexual orientation

LGBTQI people may experience fear traveling at night due to hate crime. LGBTQI people who are online may therefore prefer to attend remote meetings due to a reduced risk of physical crime, especially at night. Young LGBTQI people are more likely to experience homelessness and may therefore be less likely to be online. Provision needs to be ensured for groups less likely to be online to take part and influence decision making.

LGBTQI people from BAME backgrounds and/or who identify with the protected characteristic of religion or belief may not feel comfortable sharing their experiences and/or views publicly, particularly if they relate to their sexual orientation. Consideration for people’s anonymity should be given, as this may support people to take part.

People on low incomes

People on lower incomes are less likely to be online.

Research (2018) showed that by social grade, 91 per cent of adults in the AB socio-economic category had basic digital skills compared to 60 per cent in the DE group.¹⁵ Those in the DE socio-economic group are less likely to go online, and research has shown they are less likely to make critical judgements about online content, use security features or understand how price comparison websites work.¹⁶ There are higher rates of basic digital skills among people who are employed. Individuals in accommodation rented from local authorities have the lowest basic digital skills at 58 per cent.¹⁷ Outside of gender, these patterns are likely to be related to age.¹⁸

The cost of taking part in a meeting should be considered for people experiencing financial hardship. Expenses could be provided for low income groups to take part, for example, to join a remote meeting by telephone. The Government could provide guidance on access to technology for groups who are less likely to be online, for example through the use of procurement and social value. For example, when procuring software for remote meetings, consideration could be given to covering the cost of joining by telephone for people who are less likely to be online and who are in financial hardship through the use of social value.

¹⁵ IPSOS (2018) Basic Digital Skills UK Report 2018 in GLA (2019) [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Evidence Base for London](#)

¹⁶ Ofcom (2018) Adults' Media Use and Attitudes Report

¹⁷ GLA (2019) [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Evidence Base for London](#)

¹⁸ GLA (2019) [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Evidence Base for London](#)