

## Can we resume In Person Meetings or should we continue with Virtual meetings?

This includes the current NALC Corporate view 30<sup>th</sup> June 2020

This guidance is for the EALC Member Councils, Chairman and Mayors, Councillors and Clerks.

You are strongly advised to read this guidance in its entirety. Please note the guidance was issued on the 26<sup>th</sup> June, however the EALC sought further assistance and was not ready to publish this until we received some clarification. The clarification is included in this email.

### The NALC writes

Following the government announcement of further easing of lockdown restrictions from 4 July 2020, as at 26<sup>th</sup> June 2020 both NALC and SLCC strongly advise local councils to continue to meet remotely, without the need for face to face contact. The government rules still state that we should all work from home if we can.

Local councils have the powers to hold public meetings remotely by using video or telephone conferencing technology until May 2021 and so most councils will have no need to meet in person. Furthermore, local councils have the duty to allow the public to observe council meetings without placing restrictions on the number attending, which many council meeting venues will not be able to accommodate in a safe way at this time.

**\*\*If a Local council does have an identified need to hold a physical meeting, as they are unable to conduct council business any other way, they can consider doing so from 4<sup>th</sup> July. These meetings must be managed within the social distancing and 'safer workplaces' guidance produced by Government, which includes the requirement to conduct a risk assessment to determine if it is feasible and safe to hold a physical meeting.**

It is important that this risk assessment is carried out, and any identified actions to reduce risk to attendees are implemented before any face to face meetings resume. Councils must keep documentation of this risk assessment and the reasons why the council has taken the decision to return to face to face meetings.

### Clarification from the NALC/EALC.

The difficulty comes because this isn't a situation where the law provides a definitive solution. The NALC changed our stance on Friday, where they added in the caveat around the possibility to consider an in person meeting. However, NALC still strongly discourage in person meetings. The NALC statement aims to lay out this situation where we still strongly advise councils to meet remotely – providing the information for why we are still holding that view despite other parts of society easing lockdown, and what actions they would need to take if they wish to take a different approach.

The NALC statement describes the Government line that all organisations must work from home where they can. However, the Government has left open the option for employers to go back to working face to face where there is

- 1) a need
- 2) the 'safer workplaces' guidance is followed
- 3) a risk assessment takes place which shows it is acceptable to return to work
- 4) any risk mitigation activity takes place before any meeting.

**\*\*The tricky bit comes with determining what would constitute such a need. With the remote meetings regulations it is hard to see why a council would 'need' to meet physically – a 'need' is different to a desire or wish for physical meetings. However, that is a matter for the council to decide. With the diversity of the sector perhaps there is a council that absolutely cannot make use of remote meetings in any form to conduct essential council business, this would be an exceptional case and not the norm. And even in that case, we state a council can 'consider' a physical meeting, but even then only if a risk assessment finds this to be feasible and safe.**

### Risk Assessment

Any risk assessment needs to be thorough, and needs to look at the risks and try to mitigate against them. In the case of in person meetings, it is suggested if you cannot mitigate against the risks then you should continue to meeting virtually.

Councils must consider if meeting in person presents a risk of a localised outbreak of Corona Virus.

In concluding the thoughts on this the EALC strongly advises that Councils should continue to meet virtually.

### Documents for further reading

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-guidance-launched-to-help-get-brits-safely-back-to-work>

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/5-steps-to-working-safely>

### **5 steps to working safely**

Practical actions for businesses to take based on 5 main steps.

Make sure you read all the guides relevant to your workplace. Each guide has specific actions for businesses to take based on these steps. Further guidance will be published as more businesses are able to reopen.

#### **1. Carry out a COVID-19 risk assessment**

Before restarting work you should ensure the safety of the workplace by:

- carrying out a risk assessment in line with the [HSE guidance](#)
- consulting with your workers or trade unions
- sharing the results of the risk assessment with your workforce and on your website

## **2. Develop cleaning, handwashing and hygiene procedures**

You should increase the frequency of handwashing and surface cleaning by:

- encouraging people to follow the [guidance on hand washing and hygiene](#)
- providing hand sanitiser around the workplace, in addition to washrooms
- frequently cleaning and disinfecting objects and surfaces that are touched regularly
- enhancing cleaning for busy areas
- setting clear use and cleaning guidance for toilets
- providing hand drying facilities – either paper towels or electrical dryers

## **3. Help people to work from home**

You should take all reasonable steps to help people work from home by:

- discussing home working arrangements
- ensuring they have the right equipment, for example remote access to work systems
- including them in all necessary communications
- looking after their physical and mental wellbeing

## **4. Maintain 2m social distancing, where possible**

Where possible, you should maintain 2m between people by:

- putting up signs to remind workers and visitors of social distancing guidance
- avoiding sharing workstations
- using floor tape or paint to mark areas to help people keep to a 2m distance
- arranging one-way traffic through the workplace if possible
- switching to seeing visitors by appointment only if possible

## **5. Where people cannot be 2m apart, manage transmission risk**

Where it's not possible for people to be 2m apart, you should do everything practical to manage the transmission risk by:

- considering whether an activity needs to continue for the business to operate
- keeping the activity time involved as short as possible
- using screens or barriers to separate people from each other
- using back-to-back or side-to-side working whenever possible

- staggering arrival and departure times
- reducing the number of people each person has contact with by using 'fixed teams or partnering'