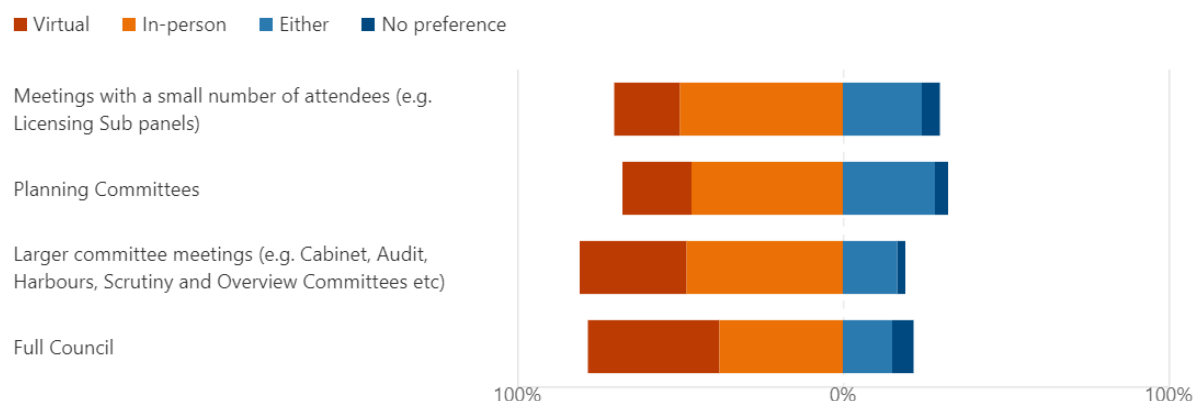


Survey results - Returning to face to face committee meetings September 2021

Introduction:

The week commencing 6th September, councillors were asked to complete a survey about the possibility of returning to in-person committee meetings. 75 responses were received from 82 councillors. The results from the survey were as follows.

Question 1 - Would you like the following meetings to be virtual or in-person?



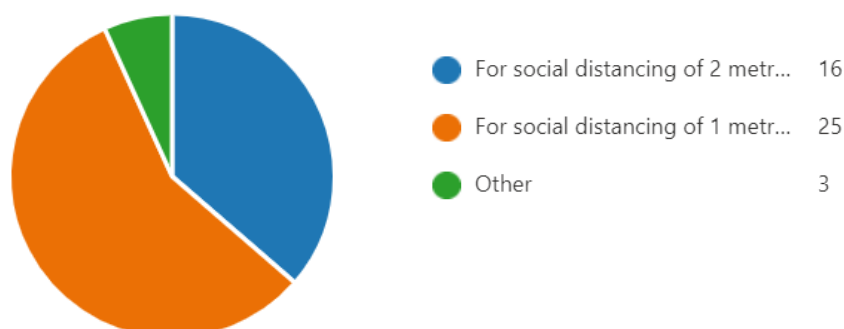
Results from above displayed as percentages:

	Virtual	In-person	Either	No Preference
Small meetings	20.3%	50%	24.3%	5.4%
Planning committees	21.1%	46.5%	28.2%	4.2%
Larger meetings	32.9%	47.9%	16.4%	2.7%
Full Council	40.5%	37.8%	14.9%	6.8%

Question 2 - If face to face meetings were restarted would you wish to see a limit placed on the number of people able to be accommodated in the chosen venue?



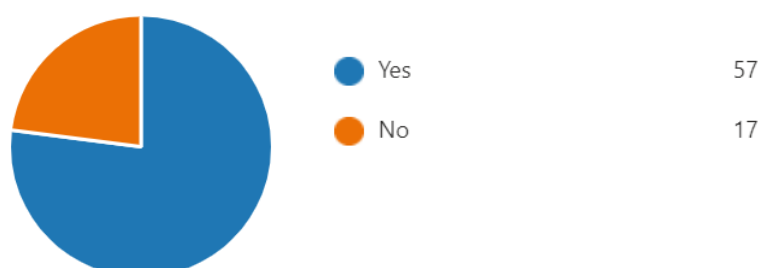
Question 3 If councillors answered yes, to Question 2 they were asked this question: What limits would you like to see on numbers of attendees?



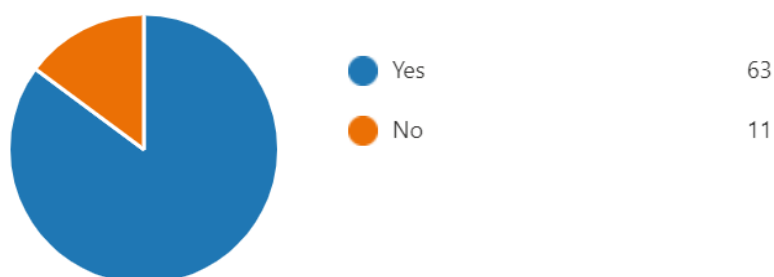
3 councillors answered with 'other' and stated the following:

- No public in the same room
- I would like all those attending meetings to have taken a lateral flow test prior to the meeting and have had 2 vaccinations.
- Proof of having had two Covid 19 jabs.

Question 4 - Subject to the safe capacity of a room, members of the public are entitled to attend council meetings. If meetings are webcast would you support a strict limit on the number of members of the public who can attend a meeting in person?



Question 5 - For virtual meetings questions from members of the public have been read out by officers. If hybrid meeting technology permits this, should members of the public be able to join in-person meetings remotely to ask their questions?



Question 6 - Are there any other comments you would like to make?

- Hybrid is the way to go so everyone can do either whichever that suits them
- Hygiene measures at each venue. Ventilation where possible. Facemasks to be worn but removed when speaking possible
- No Questions on Face Coverings! If limited numbers should meet inside I believe Face Coverings should be worn. Also believe we should continue virtually as long as C19 cases remain high.
- For Full Council to return we need to be spaced apart and the chamber needs to be ventilated. As from the past it can be stuffy in the chamber and I feel we should continue to wear facemasks for the time being as well as in any face to face meetings.
- This should be discussed fully in an officially meeting not a survey
- Whilst I am sympathetic to those who are anxious about Covid we need to learn to live with it. Those testing positive are reducing, there is evidence that those hospitalised are mainly the unvaccinated, and the death rates are those who die within 28 days of testing positive, which includes the already terminally ill. Most Town and Parish Councils have reopened offices with sensible precautions, and commercial businesses have done the same. As a councillor I miss the mentoring aspect of council work and having a face to face chat with more experienced members would be very valuable to me. Teams and WhatsApp have been useful but we need to get back to as near normal as we can.
- While I am for going back to normal for most meetings it should only be for the committee members and relevant officers to be in the room. Everyone else including some contributing officers should be virtual. Full council is still just too large. Those asking questions either the public or councillors not on the committee should do that virtually.
- I have a concern about the time management implications of this stage of re-opening. Working in Dorchester was fine when it was possible to schedule lots of meetings. The overhead to get changed, drive, park, meet, drive home, change again, for just one short meeting. You could end up with a 30 minute meeting costing two or three hours. The cost will not be offset by the opportunity to make other meetings because the people you would want to meet will not be there. I feel really strongly that we shouldn't dribble back but should return substantively on a fixed day. And I don't think we are at that point yet.
- In the same committee meeting does technology allow for some members to attend in person and other member to attend remotely
- Children are going back to school to resume their education and start a near as normal life. We should also lead by example and return to face to face meetings, where possible the public can attend so that we can be an open and transparent council once again
- I think the quality of our interactions is gradually being de-graded by virtual meetings. I've really noticed the difference at the face to face Licensing sub-committees I've been to, hence my enthusiasm for getting back to nearly normal. But I'd like to keep public virtual participation, one silver lining has been the increased public interest.
- I would suggest asking attendees to show proof of negative lateral flow test before entering a meeting
- I think banning some of the public is undemocratic and how would you choose. Also see many issues around this around discrimination. I would like to know about ventilation for the rooms and I would like to know will we use Lateral flow testing results prior to meetings for councillors and staff and other attendees? Many people do not have the apps on phone, how will we keep a record of attendees and how to contact them if an attendee becomes ill? I would love to attend face to face meetings but then do not want to transfer virus elsewhere if people are not testing.

- Planning meetings with comments read out are slow and give no feel of public opinion in general but preference the first and most articulate to speak out.
- Well ventilated rooms are paramount!
- We need to consider climate implications of large numbers of councillors driving many miles to in many cases sit in a room and say nothing, or not make a meaningful contribution. Also cost. Hopefully government will soon enable these virtual meetings to have same status as face to face
- Ventilation is an important safety measure and if smaller meetings are permitted face to face, I believe that windows should be open.
- Although I have some natural reservations about meeting face to face, this is overridden by a strong belief that democracy and accountability and indeed good decision making is much better achieved face to face,
- At council meetings there has pre Covid been a limit on the number of members of the public in the public gallery of the council chamber. There is no credibility in having virtual meetings when other politicians are having face to face meetings in Parliament. The sooner we return to normality the better
- I believe as a council we should be leading by example moving out of covid restrictions. The majority of towns and parishes are doing face to face meeting, as is Parliament. Schools have returned with no restrictions and many other large events are taking place. We need to learn to live with covid and move along rather than shutting ourselves away.
- Can briefings go back to in person as well. Personally, I have found them completely useless since they have been online. Online is a one-way communication, we are being talk at not with. Also, when they are online, they are less accessible for working people as they all seem to be in the middle of the day rather than late afternoon/evening. By having in-person meetings it gives councillors an opportunity to pop up stairs and chat to officers about outstanding issues. Since 'working from home' the response rate to emails is very poor.
- Having said the above, I think that there would be a good case for non-decision-making meetings (EAPs/working groups) to meet virtually.
- Some smaller meetings or those with a 'short' agenda would be more time productive if still held virtually.
- We need to return to normal ASAP
- Despite the official government line this pandemic is far from over. We cannot return to normal yet.
- If meetings are to return to face to face, are we able to have adequate ventilation?
- Virtual meetings definitely contribute to our environmental challenges, but as a responsible Authority, we need to be accessible in person to those who don't find it easy to carry out virtual meetings. Also, I am not sure about delegating decision making to officers.
- I'd be happy to take a lateral flow test before any meetings I may be attending if required by the council
- Please take into account current Government advice. This is that those in close contact with a person who is clinically vulnerable to Covid should avoid unnecessary social interaction. Members who are in this situation may choose not to attend face-to-face meetings at the present time.
- The statistics of covid are now closer to those of flu. We need to be careful but not panicky.
- Remote meetings have worked perfectly well and have actually enabled me to attend more meetings that I would have been able to do in person.
- For any face to face meetings I would want adequate ventilation and carbon dioxide monitors to assess this. I would also like the facility to change back to all virtual should the science dictate it. Could lateral flow testing be considered for all attendees?

- I'm still not double jabbed and have concerns entering a packed meeting room as don't want to contract the virus and then have time away from work resulting in a loss of income, also need to consider safety of our staff and don't want them to contract the virus and have time away of work as they are already stretched
- All people attending would be required to show a lateral test taken that day to be negative.
- Meetings are - or should be - about communication. Successful communication amounts to more than disembodied voices. So 'virtual' meetings are not adequate or satisfactory substitutes for in-person gatherings.
- Whether virtual or in person depends very much on the type of meeting. If public are involved, then they should be allowed to attend in person. However, I believe hybrid meetings are the way forward to allow everyone access to meetings and save on officer time if they can attend virtually in some cases.
- It is time we restarted Face to face meetings with caution i.e. face masks, cleaner and social distancing.
- Covid infection rates and new variants will dictate the safe approach taken along with government guidance. However, face to face meetings need to start; provided the necessary safety measures are in place to mitigate against infection as best as possible.
- My answers could change over time, especially if the pandemic gets worse
- Retaining the use of technology to allow the public to follow meetings and participate is important.
- I have been chairing face to face meetings of the appeals committee for four months now and see no reason why others cannot be held in person. Covid is here and we must learn to live with it. Having a survey on how we conduct meetings is largely irrelevant as the powers that be will dictate their own preference upon the rest of us, as at the moment.
- Any decision should be ratified by a full council vote
- Virtual meetings have worked really well and it keeps the attendance rate of members high, it doesn't matter how you are feeling as you can still attend without turning out.
- I think we need to be as flexible as we can and be able to react quickly if necessary. Wherever it is possible to meet face to face with safety we should strive to do so but we should respect the feelings of those who still feel it is unsafe to do so. That applies to both staff, members and public.
- Keep all non-public meetings virtual
- Holding large meetings virtually is far from ideal. Perhaps that's why virtual meetings of the full council have become so fractious. You shouldn't underestimate the frustration of being an onlooker with a microphone and video feed switched off and just half a dozen postage stamp sized talking heads on the laptop with the rest of the screen taken up by a page from the agenda. Such events are not real democratic participation and not what we got elected for.
- Although many people have had their vaccinations, I believe a Winter wave puts people at risk. It's too risky for large face to face meetings
- Protection of members from the upstairs gallery will be essential in the chamber, better still segregate the public if they wish to attend. Public must apply to attend rather than just turn up
- I will say that I have a hearing impairment which makes virtual meetings very difficult. They cannot come to an end quickly enough.