On 2nd April 2020, the government published **The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020**. These regulations came into force on 4th April 2020.

The regulations that allow local authorities to hold meetings remotely apply to local authority meetings that are required to be held, or held, before 7th May 2021. This means that, without any further action from the government, all local authorities including local councils must return to face to face meetings from 7th May 2021.At this time government has no plans to extend these regulations and so councils should start preparing for the real possibility of face to face meetings from May.

NALC's position remains that all local councils should continue to meet remotely while the regulations are in force. The guidance below has been written to help local councils prepare for the scenario that remote council meetings cannot lawfully take place from 7th May 2021. There is still much uncertainty around how legislation or COVID-19 risks may change over the coming weeks and months. NALC will update this guidance as the situation evolves. Each council will have to decide which course of action will best fit their needs and manage risks.

To help local councils prepare for this possibility some advice and suggestions are below:

- Consider what council business can be conducted before May so that the council can dedicate time to those issues in remote meetings. The more discussion and decisions you can conduct in remote meetings means the council can aim to hold fewer and shorter face to face meetings after May.
- This may require more meeting time than is currently planned, so the council should look at the meeting schedule in the run-up to May and see if more time or more meetings are required. Where possible, consider holding the annual council meeting and the parish meeting while the current Regulations permit for them to be held remotely (see also NALC's **Legal Briefing L01-20**).
- Consider when the council does need to meet face to face, and whether meetings can be delayed to later in the year when the potential COVID-19 risk may be further reduced.
- The council might consider holding a remote meeting as late as possible in April so that councillors who are unable to attend face-to-face meetings will have as much time as possible before disqualification by virtue of s.85 of the Local Government Act 1972 becomes an issue.
- It may help the council's business continuity to implement (or review) a scheme of delegation. This would allow the clerk to make certain decisions for the council, which would be especially important if the council were unable to hold meetings due to COVID-19 risks. In reviewing/adopting a scheme of delegation the council should ensure there is clarity around which decisions are delegated and which are not, for how long the scheme of delegation is in place, and when the scheme of the delegation will end or be reviewed.