

### 5.3 PARTICIPATION IN VIRTUAL MEETINGS CONSULTATION PAPER

Responsible Senior Officer: Jarrod Doake, Chief Operating Officer

**RECOMMENDATION**

*That Council:*

- 1. Responds to the "Virtual Meeting Participation" consultation paper.*
- 2. Determines its support for option 1, detailed in the consultation paper.*
- 3. Advises Local Government Victoria of its decision by 30 June 2021.*

**INTRODUCTION**

On 10 June 2021 Local Government Victoria released a consultation paper on a proposed policy that would permanently allow councils and regional libraries to conduct meetings virtually.

**BACKGROUND**

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, temporary provisions were inserted in the *Local Government Act 2020* allowing councils and regional libraries to conduct their meetings virtually. These provisions expire on 27 April 2022.

Local Government Victoria has advised that there has since been support for virtual meetings to be made permanent by councils.

**DISCUSSION**

In response to support for this arrangement, it is being proposed that councils and regional libraries be permanently allowed to conduct meetings virtually.

The policy reform focuses on developing a regulatory framework for virtual meetings to ensure standards of transparency and integrity in decision making are maintained.

Local Government Victoria advises that the proposed policy would also contribute towards the Victorian Government's Gender Equality Strategy, Safe and Strong i.e. to achieve 50/50 target gender representation for Councillors and Mayors by 2025.

Three options have been put forward in the consultation paper:

**Option 1:** Councillors, members of council delegated committees, and members of governing bodies of Regional Library Corporations (RLC) would have an automatic right or entitlement to attend meetings by electronic means.

*OR*

**Option 2:** Councillors, members of council delegated committees, and members of governing bodies of Regional Library Corporations can attend meetings by electronic means subject to approval (in accordance with the relevant Governance Rules, or Local Laws in the case of RLCs), which cannot be unreasonably refused.

*OR*

**Option 3:** Discontinue the use of council and RLC virtual meetings when the current emergency provisions in Part 12 of the *Local Government Act 2020* expire on 27 April 2022.

The strengths and limitations to each option are identified in the consultation paper, which is Attachment 1 to this report.

### ***CONSULTATION***

Councils have until 30 June 2021 to respond to the consultation paper.

Councillors have considered all 3 options. Option 1 is being proposed to be supported.

### ***POLICY IMPLICATIONS***

There are no policy implications. However, should either option 1 or 2 be adopted, this will necessitate a review of Council's Governance Rules.

### ***FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS***

There are no financial implications to the options.

Council already has the relevant equipment and procedures in place to conduct meetings with virtual attendance.

### ***CONCLUSION***

Council is requested to respond to the consultation paper in relation to the 3 options presented in that paper it supports.

Council's response to the consultation paper and the decision regarding the options contained in the paper will then be conveyed to Local Government Victoria by the 30 June 2021 deadline.