

ISLE OF ANGLESEY COUNTY COUNCIL

MEETING:	County Council
DATE:	26 October 2021
TITLE:	Protocol for Multi Location (Hybrid) Meetings
REPORT BY:	Lynn Ball, Director of Function (Council Business) / Monitoring Officer
PURPOSE OF REPORT:	To adopt a Protocol for the conduct of Hybrid Meetings
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1. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1. The document at **Enclosure 1** to this report is adopted as the Protocol for the conduct of hybrid meetings; with officers to progress the technical solutions required to conduct such meetings.
- 1.2. Any changes to the Protocol, which fall outside the Monitoring Officer's existing authority under 3.5.3.6.6 of the Scheme of Delegation, shall be made by the Monitoring Officer, but only with the explicit consent of all the Group Leaders. Any changes which do not have such consent to be authorised first by full Council.
- 1.3. Whilst Covid restrictions remain in place, any informal meetings/briefings and training/development sessions to continue to be held remotely.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1. The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 (the Act) introduces the statutory requirement for hybrid meetings to be put in place for all Council and committee meetings. Hybrid meetings are, as members will be aware, those meetings where some members/officers/public attend remotely and some attend in person. This is part of the Welsh Government's modernisation agenda for Councils and is not a response to the Covid although, obviously, for the time being the way in which hybrid meetings operate will be affected by ongoing Covid restrictions.
- 2.2. A draft Protocol is attached at **Enclosure 1** and sets out general principles around how hybrid meetings should be conducted at this time, when there are still Covid restrictions in place and social distancing requirements reduce seating capacity in the Chamber/committee rooms.

- 2.3. The document at **Enclosure 1** is intended to be a working Protocol which is likely to need revision, especially in the period of training, testing, piloting and prior to implementation. It will also need to be revised once restrictions have been further eased/lifted. To reflect the fact that the situation is “fluid”, delegated authority is sought in order to avoid the need for full Council to formally re-visit the Protocol for every change/amendment.
- 2.4. Once all restrictions have been lifted, the Act requires that the Council must provide for any/all members to attend some/all meetings remotely; as they wish. Members cannot be required to attend meetings in person. Members can insist on being able to attend meetings remotely.
- 2.5. It should also be noted that the Protocol relies upon the Welsh Government’s Interim Guidance on Multi-location Meetings (published 4th August 2021) so, while it is not considered likely that there will be significant changes in the final Guidance, it may have an impact on the substance of the draft Protocol.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1. Following the first lockdown, in March 2020, the Welsh Government introduced the Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Meetings) (Wales) Regulations; enabling Councils to hold virtual meetings as an alternative to physical attendance.
- 3.2. Support and training was put in place by IT and Democratic Services to enable members and officers to attend meetings remotely and to enable the democratic process to continue, insofar as was possible under the limitations. All Council and committee meetings open to the public have also been live streamed for public viewing and a recording uploaded once meetings have been concluded.
- 3.3. Under the Act, from the 1st of May 2021, a requirement was introduced for Councils to offer a hybrid solution for all its Council and committee meetings. Although this requirement is now in force, its application remains subject to Covid restrictions. To enable the Council to provide the hybrid solution, work is currently being done by IT and Democratic Services to identify, procure, test, pilot and implement the systems required to facilitate hybrid meetings, webcasting and translation. A plan and timescale is currently being devised. Thereafter the intention is to test the system thoroughly with a view to formally introducing Hybrid meetings as soon as possible in 2022. We shall develop a training module and a rolling programme of trials and pilots. This new arrangement will create additional demands for committee chairs and specific training will also be provided for those members affected.
- 3.4. It is suggested that resources and capacity shall be focused on Council/committee meetings and that whilst, Covid restrictions remain in place, any informal briefings/meetings and training/development shall continue to be held remotely. It would be the intention to expand hybrid meetings into these activities as well, once capacity permits.
- 3.5. The draft Protocol is intended to provide guidance to members, officers, and the public as to the processes that will be followed by the Council when conducting hybrid meetings whilst there are still Covid restrictions in place. Prioritising the

health and safety of members/officers and public is paramount and the current Welsh Government Guidance advises people to work from home where possible. Additionally, there is still a requirement to maintain social distancing which means that seating capacity in meeting rooms will be significantly reduced. The maximum number permitted also needs to take account of support staff in Democratic Services, possibly one or two senior officers, which inevitably reduces the number of seats available for members.

- 3.6. The draft Protocol will not be finalised until the systems have been implemented and tested and, in particular, will need to include such factors as how members should indicate their wish to speak, vote etc.

YNYS MON COUNTY COUNCIL

PROTOCOL FOR HYBRID COUNCIL / COMMITTEE MEETINGS

1. PURPOSE OF THIS PROTOCOL

- 1.1 The purpose of this Protocol is to provide guidance to members, and to the public, about the processes to be followed when conducting hybrid Council/committee meetings.
- 1.2 Hybrid meetings combine face to face meetings, and virtual meetings, with some members attending the Council Chamber/committee rooms and some attending remotely.
- 1.3 Hybrid meetings are now a statutory requirement with members having the right to attend remotely.
- 1.4 It is a statutory requirement that, during hybrid meetings, all participants must be able to see and hear each other and that simultaneous translation facilities be provided.
- 1.5 As a result of Covid restrictions, physical attendance in the Chamber/committee rooms is currently limited in line with the maximum safe capacity identified in the Council's risk assessments, from time to time.

2. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- 2.1 The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 is the statutory basis on which hybrid meetings are being introduced, and the Council's Constitution has been amended in line with the legislation.
- 2.2 For the time being hybrid meetings/attendance in person, by members, officers, the public and the press will need to be considered alongside the Council's own arrangements for access to buildings, social distancing rules, the expectation that people work from home where possible, and any other restrictions in place from time to time.
- 2.3 To ensure that the public and press continue to have access to public meetings of the Council, and to ensure transparency in decision making, such meetings will

continue to be live streamed simultaneously. Recordings will also be uploaded to the Council's website for public record and be available for viewing for six months from the date of the meeting.

- 2.4 Approval of minutes and items for noting will be dealt with by affirmation of the meeting. This means they will be taken as read unless there is a specific objection.
- 2.5 All other voting will be carried out using an electronic voting system available to all members present at a meeting, both remotely via Zoom, and in person.
- 2.6 All voting results, for, against and abstaining, will be announced by the chair before moving to the next item of business.
- 2.7 Underpinning this Protocol are the fundamental principles that conduct shall be compliant with the Members' Code of Conduct and that the integrity and security of any exempt/confidential information shall be maintained.
- 2.8 Finally, acknowledging the limitations, the Council's objective shall be to make hybrid meetings as similar as possible to the Council's former practice and they shall follow the usual procedural rules in the Constitution, where possible. Members have already adopted a Protocol for Remote Meetings which has identified suitable adaptations where required.

3. PROTOCOL FOR HYBRID MEETINGS

- 3.1 The Council will operate hybrid meetings using facilities within the Council Chamber and committee rooms, to enable both remote attendance and physical attendance at Council and committee meetings.
- 3.2 Members will only be able to access the Chamber/committee rooms by following any safety measures put in place, from time to time, to support safe access and use.
- 3.3 In advance of any meeting, Democratic Services will ensure that all members, relevant officers and any other participants have been invited to join the meeting and understand how they must digitally connect to the meeting.
- 3.4 For the time being, all Council and committee meetings will take place in the Chamber; although the new facilities will be available in the committee rooms, to be used once all Covid restrictions have been lifted. The decision to use the Council Chamber is to enable all members of any committee to attend in person should they wish to do so; although all members have the right to attend remotely should

they prefer. Any non-committee members wishing to attend will be expected to do so remotely. However, numbers will be limited in Council meetings owing to the current risk assessment which permits only a maximum of 20 members to be present in the Chamber. The number of officers will be limited in order to maximise the available space for any members wishing to attend in person.

- 3.5 As far as Council meetings are concerned Group Leaders will need to decide, with their members, as to who would prefer to attend any meeting in person. Group Leaders will need to inform Democratic Services staff to ensure that maximum figures are strictly adhered to.
- 3.6 The following criteria will be used for the allocation of seats at Council meetings:-
- Chair/Vice Chair (to be included as part of a group's quota should they opt to attend in person)
 - Democratic Services Officer
 - Senior lead officer
 - As far as other Council members are concerned, political balance will be applied based on the numbers permitted pursuant to any current risk assessment, the number of Council members wishing to attend in person, and the Council's overall political balance
- 3.7 If a quorum is achieved, any meeting will proceed, notwithstanding that any member or members have been unable to achieve a connection. Should a member join a meeting late, they should make themselves known immediately to the chair and comment and vote only on those complete agenda items remaining. This may be done using the chat function within Zoom.
- 3.8 When attending remotely, members need to ensure that they are able remain on-line throughout debates, and during voting, in order to maintain the integrity of the decision making process and to reduce the opportunity for any legal challenge to a decision. Should a member need to leave a meeting temporarily, they should ensure that their video is turned off and post a message using the chat function within Zoom e.g. "I need to leave for 5 minutes" and "I'm back". This emulates the situation within the Council Chamber or committee rooms when the Democratic Services Officer notes such activity.
- 3.9 When attending remotely, members and any participants must ensure that the room from which they are accessing the remote meeting is secure, that the door to the room is closed and that no disturbance occurs during the course of the meeting as it is important to ensure a degree of formality during the proceedings. Members are advised to sit in front of a neutral background or to use a suitable 'corporate' background.

- 3.10 When attending remotely, members must access the meeting individually. No other person/s may be present in the room from which members are accessing a remote meeting.
- 3.11 Should a member declare a personal and prejudicial interest in a particular agenda item, in order to comply with the Members' Code of Conduct they will be removed from the meeting by the Democratic Services Officer and placed in the 'waiting room' for the duration of the relevant item. The Democratic Services Officer will also be authorised to add and remove other attendees, such as public speakers, or members of the public after members have voted to go into a closed session in order to discuss exempt business. Should any member attending in person declare a personal and prejudicial interest, they will be expected to physically leave the room for the duration of the item; in accordance with usual practice.
- 3.12 During the course of any meeting, whilst a member is not speaking, their microphone should be set to mute and this should be clicked to un-mute when the member is invited to speak by the chair. Members are asked to avoid setting their devices to the highest volume, sit too close to the microphone, having other electronic devices operating during the course of the meeting, or shuffling papers in front of the microphone, as this is likely to cause feedback, creating difficulties for the chair and other members. Council/committee members are encouraged to keep their cameras on at all times in order that they may be seen by members of the public throughout debates and voting. However, it is accepted that if a member is experiencing poor connectivity, it may be necessary to turn off their video feed.
- 3.13 It is accepted that the chair plays a vital role in the orderly conduct of any Council/committee meeting. Chairs will be fully supported by a Democratic Services Officer, and the lead officer for the meeting, to enable the chair to conduct the meeting in accordance with the Rules of Procedure (Part 4.1 of the Council's Constitution) and the principles of this Protocol.
- 3.13 At the start of the meeting, the chair will ensure that the system allows everyone to participate. The chair will also:
- introduce themselves, the Council/committee members, officers present and other participants, in order to ensure that those watching or listening to a broadcast understand the respective roles and responsibilities.
 - provide a reminder of the meeting arrangements (including any technical issues)
- 3.15 Given the nature of hybrid meeting, the chair will use their absolute discretion as to the order in which members are given the opportunity to contribute to the debate on any item. The chair will ensure that every member has the opportunity to contribute to the meeting, in accordance with the Rules of Procedure.
- 3.16 The chair will allow officers to speak, should they indicate that they wish to do so.

- 3.17 In relation to exempt reports, members will be first asked to vote on applying the exemption. If the exemption is applied, then members must ensure that they strictly abide by paragraphs 3.10 and 3.11 above. The live link for the public will cease before the item commences and therefore there may be a hiatus in proceedings to ensure that no recording is taking place. Individuals who are not entitled to be present during the item will physically leave the Chamber / meeting room, and will be removed from the virtual meeting by the Democratic Services Officer. No member shall film, photograph or audio record any part of the proceedings which relate to exempt business.
- 3.18 Should connectivity be lost for any member attending remotely, and thereby lose the quorum, the chair will require the meeting to be paused in order to allow re-establishment of connectivity, if at all possible. If this proves impossible then any meeting which becomes/remains in quorate will have to be adjourned to a later date.
- 3.19 Any public speakers will be contacted by Democratic Services in advance of the committee meeting, in order to establish whether they wish to attend in person or remotely. Those attending remotely will be provided with a link to the meeting. All remote public speakers will be invited to join the meeting when they enter the 'waiting room' but must remain muted until invited to speak by the chair. The chair will invite each speaker to begin their presentation at the appropriate time. The Public Speaking Protocol for the Planning and Orders Committee shall be followed, together with the Public Speaking Protocol for Scrutiny, as appropriate.
- 3.20 Press will not receive invitations to meetings as all public meetings are now livestreamed. This will be an interim measure until Covid restrictions are removed when press and public will be able to attend in the usual way.