

ISLE OF ANGLESEY COUNTY COUNCIL	
Committee:	Democratic Services Committee
Date:	28 June 2023
Title of report:	Members' Protocol for Hybrid Meetings
Purpose of report:	To review the protocol and raise awareness of members around the arrangements.
Author:	Head of Democracy

Background

1. The Council has extensive experience by now of conducting virtual and hybrid meetings and of web-casting its main meetings. Multi location meetings have allowed the Council to transform the way it conducts its business. It has allowed the Council to be more flexible and efficient, and enabled the Council to raise its profile in the local community and bring its work directly into people's homes.

2. Arrangements were first made in legislation to allow for "remote meetings" in section 4 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011. At the outset of the coronavirus pandemic in March 2020, the Welsh Government produced the Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Meetings) (Wales) Regulations 2020. These established a framework within which all relevant authorities convened meetings by remote means throughout 2020 and part of 2021. By now, the statutory requirements around remote meetings and web-casting are included in the Local Government and Elections Act (Wales) 2021.

3. The Council has two documents providing guidance to Members on conduct and the function of hybrid and virtual meetings: the "Protocol for Hybrid Council / Committee Meetings" and the "Remote attendance at meetings guidance for Councillors".

4. The guidance document was written initially in response to the Covid regulations and the Protocol was developed in response to the 2021 Act. Some elements of

the information in both documents, and in the guidance document especially, need updating and there is some duplication between the two.

Next steps

5. It is timely therefore to review the arrangements and to combine the two documents so that guidance for Members is up to date and in one place.
6. The aim of the draft Protocol presented to the Committee is to support and complement the guidance and procedures contained in the Council's Constitution, by providing additional information on hybrid meeting arrangements. It also aims to support the Member Code of Conduct by explaining the expectations on Members when they take part in remote meetings.
7. The Protocol contains information on general principles including the Council's aim to ensure that hybrid / remote meetings are conducted as closely as possible to meetings in one location.
8. It also deals with a number of practical issues, including:
 - Joining and leaving meetings
 - Ensuring confidentiality when taking part remotely
 - Conduct when joining remotely
 - Charing and voting
 - Exempted reports
 - Further support and guidance
9. The Protocol is in draft form, so we welcome comments and suggestions from Members, but note that will have to keep to statutory duties.

Recommendation

10. The Committee is asked to consider the draft Protocol and subject to any comments, to recommend that the Council approves the document.

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PROTOCOL FOR HYBRID COUNCIL / COMMITTEE MEETINGS

1. PURPOSE OF THIS PROTOCOL

- 1.1 The purpose of this Protocol is to provide guidance to members, about the processes to be followed when conducting hybrid Council/committee meetings. It is relevant to the Council's main formal 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 Local authorities must make arrangements for conducting hybrid meetings, or virtual meetings in accordance with Part 3 of the Local Government and Elections Act (Wales) 2021. The Council's constitution has been revised in accordance with this provision.
- 1.4 It is a statutory requirement for the Council to webcast its main meetings and to ensure access to those meetings remotely. It is also 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 The Council's Constitution provides guidance on the governance and arrangements for Council meetings. The aim of this Protocol is to support the requirements of the constitution and to provide additional guidance on hybrid meetings.

2. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- 2.1 multi-location meetings offer authorities the potential to update and transform the way they do business. It provides opportunities for authorities to become more flexible and efficient and also raise their profile in the local community and to bring their work directly into people's homes. Public access to multi-location meetings is likely to be significantly higher than the level of audiences of formal meetings when all were held physically.
- 2.2. Members of the public can still attend the Council Chamber, or the committee room to listen to public meetings, as long as the overall capacity does not go beyond any limitations imposed by health and safety or risk assessments.

- 2.3 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. Members who are attending remotely are expected to conduct themselves as they would if they were attending in person in the Chamber or committee room. They are also expected to take account of the fact that meetings are broadcast and recorded.
- 2.4 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.

3. PROTOCOL FOR HYBRID MEETINGS

- 3.1 The Council will operate hybrid meetings using facilities within the Council Chamber and committee room, to enable both remote attendance and physical attendance at Council and committee meetings.
- 3.2 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.
- 3.3 In order to facilitate the arrangements in some meetings, Democratic Services may be required to have advance notice of the members likely to attend in person or remotely. In those circumstances group leaders will be asked in advance.
- 3.4 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 verbally or by sending a message to one of the Democratic Services officers attending the meeting.
- 3.5 When attending remotely, members need to ensure that they are able to remain on-line throughout debates with their camera turned on, 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 send a message to one of the Democratic Services officers attending the meeting e.g. "I need to leave for 5 minutes" and "I'm back". This emulates the situation within the Council Chamber or committee room when the Democratic Services officer notes such activity. This will need to be managed carefully to ensure the accuracy of attendance and who can vote on any matter.

- 3.6 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 encouraged to use the Council's corporate background. Democratic Services officers can help with this if needed. Otherwise, members are advised to sit in front of a neutral background.
- 3.7 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 when confidential matters are discussed.
- 3.8 Members are required to declare any personal interests and prejudicial interests that arise when attending remotely in the same way as they would when attending in person. Should a member declare a prejudicial interest on 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. At the end of the item and before moving on to the next item on the agenda, the Chair will call the member back and the process will be administered by officers.
- 3.9 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 should keep their cameras on at all times in order that they may be seen by members of the public throughout debates and voting.
- 3.10 Chairs will be fully supported by Democratic Services Officers, or 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.
- 3.11 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)
- 3.12 Approval of minutes and items to be noted will be dealt with by affirmation of the meeting. This means they will be taken as read unless there is a specific objection.
- 3.13 All voting will be carried out by raising a hand if attending in person or by raising a virtual hand if attending remotely. All voting results, for, against and abstaining, will be announced by the chair before moving to the next item of business.
- 3.14 Given the nature of hybrid meetings, 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 in the constitution.
- 3.15 The chair will allow officers to speak, should they indicate that they wish to do so.
- 3.16 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 3.6 and 3.7 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. Democratic Services officers will administer this process. 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.
- 3.17 Should connectivity be lost for any member attending remotely, and thereby lose the quorum, the chair will require the meeting to be paused 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 or time.
- 3.18 Any public speakers will be contacted by Democratic Services, or the lead department in the Council, in advance of the committee meeting, 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.

- 3.19 If there are any questions about the content of the Protocol, or any problems with the arrangement of hybrid meetings during meetings, Democratic Services officers will be available to try to resolve any issues. Training will also be offered to members as needed on the arrangements around participating in hybrid or virtual meetings.

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