



Protocols for Attendance at Local Authority Meetings and Electronic Broadcasts of Meetings

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Introduction - Purpose of document

The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 (LG&EW2021), Section 47 requires principal councils to make and publish arrangements for the purpose of ensuring that from 5 May 2022, that local authority meetings are able to be held by means of any equipment or other facility which enables persons who are not in the same place to attend the meetings, to speak to and be heard by each other, and in the case of meetings to be broadcast (under Section 46 of the regulations), to speak and be heard by each other and to see and be seen by each other.

In addition, the LG&EW2021, Section 46 requires principal councils to make and publish arrangements for the purpose of ensuring that from 5 May 2022-

- (a) a broadcast of proceedings at a meeting to which subsection (2) applies is available electronically so that members of the public not in attendance at the meeting can see and hear the proceedings;*
- (b) the proceedings are broadcast as they take place, subject to any specified exceptions;*
- (c) the broadcast is available electronically for a specified period after the meeting.*

This subsection applies to proceedings at a meeting, or any part of a meeting, which is open to the public of—

- (a) a principal council;*
- (b) any of the following specified bodies—*
 - (i) the executive of a principal council;*
 - (ii) a committee or sub-committee of an executive of a principal council;*
 - (iii) a committee or sub-committee of a principal council;*
 - (iv) a joint committee, or a sub-committee of a joint committee, of two or more principal councils.*

The Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Meetings) (Wales) Regulations 2020 which came into force on 22 April 2020 made provision in relation to local authority meetings, as a result of the covid-19 outbreak. The regulations related to participation at meetings held between 22 April 2020 and 1 May 2021. As a result of these regulations, all Ceredigion County Council meetings open to the public were held remotely, and the Council and Cabinet meetings were broadcasted as they took place, and made

available electronically for a specified period after the meeting. These arrangements have continued and will form the basis for the arrangements post 5 May 2022.

In addition to the current arrangements, Ceredigion County Council will also implement hybrid style meetings from 5 May 2022, whereby Members, Officers and the public are able to attend meetings remotely or in person.

This protocol has been created, in line with the LG&EW2021 Act to provide a guide as to the implementation of the Regulations and to outline the process to apply to the public meetings of Ceredigion County Council, and sets out the practical issues that will need to be addressed in relation to protocols for hybrid meetings. It is based on the principle of full or partial remote attendance so long as persons who are not in the same place are able to speak to, and be heard by, other participants, and in the case of meetings that are broadcasted to also see and be seen by each other.

Underpinning this Protocol are the fundamental principles that conduct shall be compliant with the Code of Conduct for Members and that the integrity and security of any confidential information is maintained.

The objective will be to make hybrid meetings as close as possible to the Council's usual meetings practice which will follow normal procedural rules in the Constitution where possible.

1.0 Attending in person or remotely

Members, Officers and members of the public will be able to attend meetings of the Council that are open to the public in person at the Council's Penmorfa Offices, Aberaeron or remotely (wherever possible).

Please note that attendance in person may be subject to limitations on numbers due to space and any regulations that may be in place at that time, such as the 2 metre social distances regulations or guidance. In person meetings may also be suspended at any time should regulations or guidance deem it necessary due to COVID-19.

Priority will be given to Committee Members, Officers presenting or advising on reports, facilitating officers, translators and members of the public addressing the committee.

1.1 Invitation to join the meeting remotely

Councillors

Councillors will be sent an electronic link for each individual meeting. This link must not be shared with any other person.

Members of the public

Members of the public who wish to attend a meeting remotely, should contact Democratic Services at least 1 hour prior to the commencement of the meeting to request a link to the meeting. We cannot guarantee that later requests will be processed, as Officers will be involved in setting up the meetings, or minute taking once the meeting has commenced. Please e-mail your request to: democracy@ceredigion.gov.uk or telephone CLIC on 01545 570881.

The electronic meeting will be open to Members and those that will be addressing the meeting 30 minutes before the start of the meeting. Members are requested to join the meeting at least 15 minutes prior to the time of commencement in order to check that everyone is able to participate. Access to simultaneous translation will be checked prior to the commencement of the meeting.

1.2 Electronic broadcasts of meetings

Meetings of the full Council and Cabinet will be broadcasted as they take place in order that members of the public not in attendance in person or remotely can see and hear the proceedings, subject to the following exceptions:

- consideration of exempt / confidential information (para 1.12)
- the discretion of the Chair to terminate the meeting (para 1.13)

The broadcasting will be available electronically for a period of up to 6 years following the meeting.

1.3 Preparations in advance of the meeting

Committee Members are asked to confirm the following information with the Meeting Facilitator prior to the date of the meeting:

- Attendance / apologies
- Whether they wish to attend in person or remotely
- Declarations of interest
- Any personal matters that they wish to submit
- Non-Committee Members must notify the Chair and facilitator in advance if they are aware in advance that they wish to speak on a specific agenda item

Members of the public address the following committees, (subject to the terms of reference for addressing said committee as published in the Council's Constitution):

- a) Overview and Scrutiny Committees
- b) The Development Control Committee

must contact Democratic Services by mid-day, two days prior to the meeting, confirming the following:

- a) the committee that they will be addressing, and the agenda item
- b) whether they wish to attend in person or remotely
 - (i) if attending remotely, an e-mail address in order for the link to be sent.

1.4 Filming the Meeting

The Chair will remind everyone at the commencement that the proceedings of the meeting that the Council and Cabinet meetings will be filmed for live or subsequent broadcast via the Council's internet site and in the archive record of the meeting. The images and sound recording may also be used for training purposes within the Council.

All Council Members participating in the Council and Cabinet meetings will be seen and heard during said meeting.

For all other meetings that are open to the public, the legislation requires that Members are able to speak to and be heard by each other. However, the hybrid system does allow for those present at the meeting to see and be seen by each other in addition to the requirement to speak to and be heard by each other. Members of the public addressing an Overview and Scrutiny Committee, or Development Control Committee

will be visible and audible to all those attending the meeting during their presentation only, whether in person or remotely, however as these meetings are not broadcast this will not be available to the general public in the broader sense as per the Council and Cabinet meetings.

1.5 Confirmation of the speaker

Normally, the Chair will invite those present to speak by their full name. However, if the speaker has not been introduced, it is recommended that each individual introduce themselves with their full name before speaking, in order that participants and minute takers are in no doubt who is speaking.

1.6 Quorum

The normal quorum requirements for meetings as set out in the Authority's Constitution will also apply to a hybrid meeting.

In the event of any apparent failure of a Member's video, or conferencing connection, the Chair should immediately determine if the meeting is still quorate:

- if it is, then the business of the meeting will continue; or
- if there is no quorum, then the meeting shall adjourn for a period specified by the Chair, expected to be no more than ten or fifteen minutes, to allow the connection to be re-established.
- Should any aspect of a Member's remote participation fail, the Chair may call a short adjournment of up to five minutes or so to determine whether the connection can quickly be re-established. If the connection is not restored within that time, the meeting should continue to deal with the business whilst this happens, providing the meeting remains quorate.
- In the event of connection failure, the remote Member(s) will be deemed to have left the meeting at the point of failure and if the connection cannot be re-established to those Member(s) before the end of the meeting, then the presumption will be that the meeting should continue to deal with the item/s.

- If the connection is successfully re-established, then the remote Member(s) will be deemed to have returned at the point of re-establishment.

If the connection cannot be restored within a reasonable time, the meeting will proceed, but the Member who was disconnected will not be able to vote on the matter under discussion as they would not have heard all the facts.

1.7 Member participation

Members of the relevant committee will be asked in turn for their contribution to an item by the Chairman.

Members should be able to speak to and be heard by each other. Where meetings are broadcasted, Members will also need to be seen and to see each other.

The facilitator will have provided a list to the Chair of non-Committee Members who wish to speak on specific agenda – in the order they were received. If any matters arise during the discussion, non-Committee Members will need to alert the Chairman that they wish to speak, by pressing the ‘Speak’ button on the delegate microphone system if attending in person, and similarly the ‘Speak’ button on screen if attending remotely.

1.8 Voting

Details of how Members voted will not be kept or minuted unless a Recorded Vote is called. Where a Recorded Vote is requested, the Chair will call the names of all Committee Members present, alphabetically, and Members will be required to confirm verbally their vote.

Members need to ensure that they are able to 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 legal challenge of any decision.

1.9 Declaration of interest

Wherever possible, declarations in any item of business must be made in advance of the meeting, and in any case under the “Personal and/or prejudicial Interests” agenda item. Members must declare their interest verbally during the meeting. Members must state the agenda item which their declaration relates to, and stipulate whether their declaration is ‘personal’ or ‘personal and prejudicial’. Members who declare a ‘personal and prejudicial’ interest will leave the Council Chamber (if attending in person), or leave the meeting if attending remotely for the duration of the discussion on said agenda item. Members should also confirm if they have been given dispensation to speak or to speak and vote, as this would allow Members to remain in the meeting.

Where it becomes apparent during the meeting that a Member will need to declare a disclosable interest after the Personal and /or Prejudicial Interest agenda item has passed, he/she must immediately notify the Chair by selecting the ‘Speak’ button and when invited to speak, to verbally declare as above.

1.10 Translation

A translation facility will be provided which can be accessed by selecting the appropriate language via the ‘Interpretation’ button on the screen, or by using the headphones provided if attending in person. The simultaneous translator will turn the translation option on and off as required during the meeting as the committee changes from speaking Welsh to English, therefore individuals attending in person or remotely will not need to change the choice of language once set prior to the commencement of the meeting.

It is recommended that Members using the translation facility allow plenty of time to ensure that they the correct settings prior to the commencement of the meeting.

1.11 Notice of Meetings

Public notice of the time of the meeting will be given by publication on the Council's website at least three clear days before the meeting or, if the meeting is convened at shorter notice, then as soon as reasonably practicable. A monthly schedule of meetings is also published on the Council's Facebook page.

1.12 Exclusion of Public and Press

There are times when council meetings are not open to the public, when confidential, or "exempt" issues (as defined in Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972) are under consideration. Members will be reminded that the item is an exempt report and if they wish to discuss the content of the exempt report, members of the public and press will be asked to leave the Council Chamber if attending in person, or to leave the meeting if attending remotely.

The meeting Facilitator will ensure that there are no members of the public in remote attendance or in person that are able to hear or see the proceedings once the exclusion has been agreed by the meeting. Live streaming of the meeting will be suspended temporarily.

Each Member in remote attendance must ensure that there are no other persons present with them who are not entitled to be present (either hearing or seeing), or to have access to such exempt items, and/or recording of the proceedings. Any Member in remote attendance who failed to disclose that there were in fact persons present who were not so entitled would, in our view be deemed to be in breach of the Members' Code of Conduct.

1.13 Terminating filming of the Meeting

The Chair has the discretion to terminate or suspend filming, if, in his/her opinion continuing to do so would prejudice the proceedings or that continued filming might infringe the rights of any individual.

1.14 Revising or replacing arrangements in relation to Attendance and Electronic Broadcasting of meetings

Any revisions or replacement to the arrangements in relation to Attendance and Electronic Broadcasting of meetings will be published on the Council's website.

1.15 Arrangements relating to Joint Committees

Protocols relating to the arrangements for Attendance and Electronic Broadcasting of Joint Committees will be published separately.