



# Protocols for Attendance at Local Authority Multi-location Meetings and Electronic Broadcasts of Meetings

**June 2023**

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V1	05/05/2022	This protocol supersedes the previous protocol relating to the Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Meetings) (Wales) Regulations 2020

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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 continued to form the basis for the arrangements post 5 May 2022.

In addition to the current arrangements, Ceredigion County Council implemented 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 and Welsh Government's the Draft Statutory and Non Statutory Guidance for Principal Council in Wales 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.

#### **1. Deciding which meetings will have physical provision made for them and which will be conducted wholly through remote means**

A discussion paper for consideration by the Democratic Services Committee will form the basis of a separate policy for determining which meetings will have physical provision made for them (hybrid meetings) and which will be conducted wholly through remote means (remote meetings). This may be reviewed from time to time in consultation with Members of the Democratic Services Committee.

#### **2. Meeting platform**

Currently the meeting platform used by Ceredigion County Council for holding remote and hybrid meetings is zoom, however this may be reviewed in line with emerging technologies and revised as appropriate.

### **3. 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, and must remain available in an electronic format and be available for a minimum of six years following the date of the meeting. A monthly schedule of meetings is also published on the Council's Facebook page.

### **4. Paper Copies**

In accordance with the legislation a small number of hard copies will be available to members of the public physically attending a hybrid meeting.

### **5. Attending multi-location meetings**

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

Please note that attendance in person may be subject to limitations on numbers due to space

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

### **6. Invitation to join the meeting remotely**

#### Councillors

Committee Members, and other Councillors presenting to the Committee (e.g. Chair of Scrutiny presenting report to Cabinet) will be sent an electronic link for each individual meeting. This link must not be shared with any other person. Councillors that are not Members of the Committee, who wish to join the meeting will be able to register as an 'Attendee'. If an Attendee wishes to speak at the meeting, they should notify the Chairman by raising an 'electronic hand'. If the Chairman invites a non-

Member to speak, the non-Member will be temporarily transferred to 'Panellist' status for the duration of the agenda item.

### 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](mailto:democracy@ceredigion.gov.uk) or telephone CLIC on 01545 570881.

## **7. Accessing the meeting remotely**

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.

## **8. 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
- 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, in particular those attending remotely.

Councillors are encouraged to bring their Council devices to physical meetings so that they can view the agenda papers online.

Members of the public addressing 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 Management 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.

## **9. 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 20)
- the discretion of the Chair to terminate the meeting (para 21)

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

## **10. 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 Facebook site or alternative site and in the archive record of the meeting. The images and sound recording may also be used for training purposes within the Council.

Members of the public addressing an Overview and Scrutiny Committee, or Development Management 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.

## **11. 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 the meeting is not quorate, 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.
- 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.

## **12. Member participation**

The legislation stipulates: *'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.'*

All Members participating in the Council and Cabinet meetings must ensure that their cameras are on, when attending remotely. 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. It is however recommended that Committee Members attending remotely keep their cameras on, in order that members of the public attending the meeting are able to see all the Members in attendance.

### **13. Attendance at Meetings whilst out of the Country**

Members wishing to attend meetings whilst out of the Country and using their own personal or Ceredigion County Council devices will be able to do so by accessing free Wifi facilities. The Council will not be able to reimburse costs. However, to enable access to meetings on Ceredigion laptops abroad, Members will be required to notify Democratic Services at least two weeks prior to departure.

Should Members wish to access meetings using their mobile phones, due to costs of international calls the Council would not be able to reimburse call costs.

Technical support on Council devices whilst abroad will not be provided by the Council's ICT or Democratic Services Officers.

### **14. Chairing of Meetings**

Chairing a multi-location meeting is very different to chairing a face-to-face meeting, and Chairs will need to be supported to carry out their role in specific ways.

Where the Chair is attending in person a Democratic Services Officer should also attempt to be present in person to provide support with the agenda and reports, and to draw their attention to Members who have raised their hand or wish to speak.

Before the start of each meeting, the Chair should ensure that the translation facility is working, and that those attendees who wish to utilise the translation function know how to do so.

At the beginning of the meeting, the Chair should introduce the Committee and provide a reminder of meeting arrangements and policies.

The relevant Democratic Services Officer will have provided the Chair in advance with details of all apologies, declarations of personal interest and personal matters.

The Chair should call upon each Member individually in the sequence that they were received for their contribution to an item.

The balance between individuals attending in-person and those joining by remote means will have a significant effect on how business will be transacted. However, the Chair should not prioritise Members in accordance with their mode of attendance and should invite members to make their contributions to discussion in the order that they have notified the Chair of their wish to speak, either in advance of the meeting, or by raising their hands. The Chairman however does have discretion to amend as necessary.

## **15. Voting**

Unless a ballot is required or recorded or a recorded vote is requested, the Chairperson will take the vote by show of hands, or if there is no dissent, by the affirmation of the meeting.

Members need to ensure that they are able to remain on-line, with the camera switched on, or in the room if attending in person, 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.

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. In addition to this, for the purpose of the Development Management Committee, the Chair will call the names of all Committee Members present, and details of how each member has voted will be minuted when voting on a proposal which is contrary to the recommendation of Officers.

Where recorded votes apply and a Member is unable to provide a vote on the initial attempt, the Chairman will return to the Member at the end of the roll-call. If no response is received and the meeting remains quorate, the Member will be considered not present for that part of the meeting.

## **16. Using the chat function in the software system**

The chat function should only be used by Members to:

- Alert the Chair they wish to speak and are unable to access the option to raise their hand;
- Alert the Chair if they are leaving the meeting; or to
- Alert the Chair if they are having technical problems which prevent them from taking part in the voting.

The chat function is not to be used for discussion, as all discussions must be made verbally in the meeting for the benefit of individuals observing the meeting, attending in person or observing the meeting where it is live-streamed or recorded.

## **17. Record of attendance**

The record of attendance for each Committee member will be recorded by the Democratic Services Officer supporting the Committee. Those attending in person will be required to sign the Register of Attendance, and a record of all members attending remotely will be kept by the relevant Democratic Services Officer. These records will be combined and added to the minutes of the meeting and the record of attendance recorded on the Council's website.

## **18. 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 raising their hands if attending in-person or equivalent if attending remotely; and when invited to speak, to verbally declare as above.

## **19. 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.

## **20. 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 and recordings 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.

## **21. 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.

## **22. Etiquette at Remote / Hybrid Meetings**

Members should:

- Dress appropriately for the meeting
- Be mindful of body language
- Not display advertising logos or product placement
- Ensure that the Council device provided has been set up in such a way that they look professional and are fully visible during the meeting
- Ensure that their microphone is muted if not speaking
- Ensure that their camera is switched on at all times during Council and Cabinet meetings. It is also recommended that Members of other Committees keep their cameras on, in order that members of the public are able to see that they are in attendance.
- Stay in the room and be seated. If the member has to leave to meeting for any reason (e.g. to accept a telephone call, or to leave the room), it is presumed that they are no longer taking part in the discussion, and will not vote on said item. The camera should be switched off at such times
- Respect the Chair and others present
- Do not interrupt
- Do not use inappropriate language
- Behave professionally

- Do not invite unnecessary guests
- Be mindful of disclosing sensitive information
- Behave appropriately and be mindful of the Members' Code of Conduct
- Use the chat function appropriately (as noted in item 16 above)
- Keep their background professional (Corporate backgrounds are available for Members' use)
- Do not eat on camera, whilst attending remotely or in person
- Act as you would in person
- Do not drive whilst attending a meeting
- Avoid distractions
- Be mindful of the public perception at all times, for example, Members should not give the impression that they are not focussed or otherwise distracted

### **23. 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.

All Councillors, Officers, participants and the public will be informed of any changes.

### **24. Arrangements relating to Joint Committees**

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