

# CYNGOR SIR CEREDIGION COUNTY COUNCIL

**Report to:** Council

**Date of meeting:** 26 October 2023

**Title:** Pilot for remote only meetings

**Purpose of the report:** For Council to consider approving a pilot for remote only meetings.

**For:** Decision

## **Cabinet Portfolio and Cabinet Member:**

**Councillor Bryan Davies, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Democratic Services, Policy, Performance and People and Organisation**

## **Introduction**

The Welsh Government's Statutory and Non Statutory Guidance for Principal Council in Wales stipulates that each Local Authority must set out a policy, which stipulates which meetings will have physical provision made for them, and which will be conducted wholly through remote means:

- 15.54 *Sitting alongside the core requirements of the "meeting arrangements" – the legally mandated arrangements that relevant authorities must make for multi-location meetings – can be a wider multi-location meetings policy, which will also reflect the general principles set out from paragraph 15.32 while setting out more detailed procedures to ensure that multi-location meetings work efficiently, effectively and accountably...*
- 15.58 *The exact contents of a policy will be agreed at local level. The experience of relevant authorities in the past however suggests that it should include:*
- *How to decide which meetings will have physical provision made for them, and which will be conducted wholly through remote means (from paragraph 15.60)*
- 15.60 **Some relevant authorities may decide that all meetings will be conducted through remote means by default. Relevant authorities may wish to adopt different approaches for different bodies, and for different circumstances.**

## **Development of the draft protocol**

A discussion paper was considered by Members of the Democratic Services Committee at its meeting dated 9 June 2023 which formed the basis of the recommendations outline in the attached protocol. This was further scrutinised by Member of the Constitution Working Group during its meeting dated 26 September 2023.

The Democratic Services Committee considered the benefits of conducting multi-locations meetings, and considerations as to deciding which committees are best met via a hybrid style, and which are best met via a remote only style. In doing so, the Committee considered the following factors

- The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 which requires relevant authorities to think about, and act on, long term needs in the way that policy is developed and made
- The reduced carbon footprint
- Reducing the risk of future unexpected events, such as extreme weather, or equipment failure
- Making the use of the Welsh language much easier
- Reducing the need for travel and associated costs and time pressures, especially where relevant authorities cover large geographical areas
- Making it easier for participants to take part if they have professional and caring responsibilities, potentially removing some barriers to standing for office
- Better support for members from diverse backgrounds, including support that recognises the social model of disability. Just as barriers are being removed to public participation, multi-location meetings have made it easier for care providers, or disabled people, or people with other protected characteristics, to engage on an equal footing. In some cases, participants have found the formality of physical meetings to be off putting, and multi-location meetings have removed this factor
- Better behaviour, making it easier for the Chair to understand who wants to make a contribution, although it is harder to read body language.

In addition to this, supporting hybrid meetings is very resource intensive, requiring 2 Officers from Democratic Services to attend each meeting.

The Committee also took into consideration data relating to prior attendance at all meetings; ensuring a hybrid option for committees where members of the public are able to participate; and actions to be taken to reduce risk in circumstances such as extreme weather.

The Democratic Services Committee resolved to recommend to Council that the Democratic Service Committee and the Governance and Audit Committee and held on a remote only basis for an 18 month pilot period for the following reasons:

#### Democratic Services Committee

- This would provide this committee with a direct insight into the pilot exercise;
- The number of members attending in person compared to remotely is circa 50:50;
- Members of the public cannot contribute to this committee;

#### Governance and Audit Committee

- The majority of Members currently attend remotely (almost three-quarters);
- Members of the public cannot contribute to this committee;

- Membership of the Committee includes Lay Members and there is no requirement for Lay Members to live within reasonable travelling distance of the Council Chamber;
- The Chair of the Committee is a Lay Member, and all Committees held between May 2021 and March 2022 were Chaired remotely;
- Meetings are attended remotely by Audit Wales.

### **Next Steps**

Subject to approval by Council, the Chair of each Committee will be notified of the decision, and following the pilot period, a report will be presented to the Democratic Services Committee to include feedback from both Committees to consider whether it wishes to extend the provision of remote meetings to other committees, or to revert to supporting all Committees in a hybrid manner.

The Protocol for Attendance at Local Authority Multi-location Meetings and Electronic Broadcasts of Meetings, as published in the Council's Constitution will be amended to reflect the decision of the Council, and reviewed in 18 months' time.

### **Wellbeing of Future Generations:**

**Has an Integrated Impact Assessment been completed? If not, please state why.**

No, this is to reflect the requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

### **Summary of Integrated Impact Assessment:**

**Long term:** N/A  
**Collaboration:** N/A  
**Involvement:** N/A  
**Prevention:** N/A  
**Integration:** N/A

### **Recommendation(s):**

**For Council to approve the pilot to conduct the Democratic Services Committee and the Governance and Audit Committee by remote means only for a period of 18 months.**

### **Reasons for decision:**

**To inform the ongoing development and review of a Multi-Locations Meetings Policy.**

### **Overview and Scrutiny:** N/A

### **Policy Framework:** N/A

### **Corporate Well-being Objectives:** N/A

**Finance and Procurement implications:** Small savings to be made from having remote only meetings.

**Legal Implications:** Failure to comply with requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

**Staffing implications:** N/A

**Property / asset implications:** N/A

**Risk(s):** N/A

**Statutory Powers:**

Welsh Government Statutory and Non Statutory Guidance for Principal Councils in Wales;

The Local Government Act 2000;

The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011;

The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

**Background Papers:**

[Discussion Paper presented at the Democratic Services Committee, 9<sup>th</sup> June 2023](#)

**Appendices:** N/A

**Corporate Lead Officer:**

Lowri Edwards, Corporate Lead Officer, Democratic Services

**Reporting Officer:**

Nia Jones, Corporate Manager, Democratic Services

**Date:**

01/10/2023