



Pilot for Remote Only Meetings Policy

October 2023

Introduction

The Welsh Government Statutory and Non-Statutory Guidance for Principal Councils in Wales states that a policy on multi-location meetings which is distinct and sitting alongside the mandated arrangement of the legal “meeting arrangements”, will make it clear to those involved where processes are put in place because of legal requirements, and where local decisions have been made about the operation of multi-location meetings.

The policy should set out more detailed procedures to ensure that multi-location meetings work effectively and reflecting the consideration of local circumstances in deciding what approaches are ultimately adopted. The process should be led by those involved in participating in meetings and supporting those meetings’ operations – always informed by the needs and expectations of the public. The guidance states: *‘For local authorities The Democratic Services Committee is expected to lead this process.’*

How to decide which meetings will have physical provision made for them and which will be conducted wholly through remote means

The Democratic Services Committee will lead on the process and seek approval by Council prior to implementation. Pilot exercises may be carried out to provide the committee with first hand experience of the effectiveness of different styles and methods.

In deciding which meetings are best met via a hybrid style, and which are best met via a remote style, the following considerations should be taken into account:

- Enhancing and supporting local democracy, reducing barriers that might previously have been in place
- Working more productively. When participants come together by remote means, they have often been able to get more done.
- Making it easier for the public to attend meetings, with public attendance via multi-location meetings reportedly higher than previous via in person meetings, and examples where the public have found multi-locations meetings to be less intimidating, and having the potential to encourage more people to stand for public office.
- 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
- The capacity by Democratic Services Officer to support hybrid meetings which is far more resource intensive, requiring 2 Officer to attend each meeting
- Data relating to previous modes of attendance by Members
- That meetings where members of the public are able to participate are delivered by hybrid means in order to provide them with greater options