



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

GUIDANCE

# Statutory and non-statutory guidance on democracy within principal councils

Explains what county and county borough (principal) councils must do to meet relevant law in Wales.

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# Part 1: about this guidance

## Purpose of this guidance

This guidance is consolidated statutory guidance intended to support principal councils meet requirements under the Local Government Act 2000, the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 and the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

## Navigating this guidance

This guidance consists of 4 parts as set out below:

- **Part 1: about this guidance**
- **Part 2: guidance for elected members' support, training and development**
- **Part 3: guidance on public participation strategies and petition schemes**
- **Part 4: guidance on constitutions, executives, scrutiny, governance and audit committees and conducting meetings**

## Terminology

For the purposes of this guidance the terms Principal Council and Local Authority are to be considered to mean County Council or County Borough Council.

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# Part 2: members' support, training and development

## Timing of Council Meetings Statutory Guidance

### Status of this Guidance

This is statutory Guidance made under Section 6 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 (the Measure). By virtue of section 6 (2) of the Measure, local authorities must have regard to this guidance in respect of the times and intervals at which meetings of a local authority are held. The relevant meetings in the context of this guidance are meetings of the full council and any committee or sub-committee of the council.

### Purpose

Part 1 of the Measure contains provisions related to the strengthening of local democracy. More specifically, this guidance deals with “promoting and supporting membership of local authorities” and section 6 relates to the timing of meetings.

The times at which the meetings of a council take place is of considerable significance as it can affect the extent to which individuals may contemplate standing for election. It is also important to provide for flexibility to support the changing needs of councillors when they are elected so that diversity can be maintained. This is an area for concern as it may impact on the diversity of membership of the council and thus impact on the council's ability to make decisions which are informed by and reflect the diversity of people living in the council area. Decision making informed by insight from people of all ages and backgrounds is likely to be more balanced and have more focus on sustainable and long term solutions which balance the needs of different people in keeping with the principles set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act

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2015.

For example, whilst the requirement to provide the facility for multi-location meetings for members who wish to join meetings remotely (see section 47 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 (the 2021 Act)) should overcome some concerns, many people will find attending, sometimes lengthy meetings, in the day is incompatible with their paid employment and certain times of day are challenging for people with caring responsibilities such as young children. Therefore, for the purposes of this guidance the timing of meetings also includes their frequency and length.

## Reviewing existing arrangements

Only members of council executives are considered to be “full-time” councillors and this is reflected in the levels of payments they are entitled to for their special responsibilities. By contrast, non-executive members are considered to undertake the equivalent of a part-time role, which will, in many cases, need to be fitted around whatever other commitments councillors may have.

For many prospective and serving councillors in full-time employment, the extent to which their employers are supportive of their new commitment is a vital concern. Although employment legislation entitles councillors to time off for public duties, operating that in practice may be more difficult (see Section 50 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 (1996 c18)).

The timing, length and frequency of meetings is the most problematic issue in this respect. Other duties may be fulfilled at times which suit the individual but a meeting is at a set time and (subject to any arrangements made for remote attendance) at a set venue.

It is neither practical nor desirable for the Welsh Government to prescribe the times, length and frequency of meetings of the full council, its committees and sub-committees as these are matters for each council to consider in individual circumstances. However, it is important that councils do not simply continue to

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hold their meetings at the same time, in the same way as they have always done, simply out of inertia. What may have been tradition or an arrangement which suited the previous cohort of councillors will not necessarily serve the interests of the current one. It is recommended that meetings should be held of a length and at times, intervals and locations which are convenient to its members, having regard to equality and diversity issues. Also, regardless of whether meetings are fully on-line, multi-location or in person, agendas should provide for suitable breaks as this not only promotes a more effective meeting but is essential for members' and officers' health and well-being.

Therefore, all local authorities should review the times, frequency and length of meetings at least once in every term, preferably shortly after the new council is elected. However, it would be prudent to consider an increase in this frequency to accommodate changes in circumstances that may accrue during that period.

Councils should survey their members, at least once shortly after each election, to assess their preferences and should be committed to act on the conclusions. The survey should be carried out at such time as it will be of most benefit to incoming members but no later than 6 months following ordinary elections. It will then be for each authority to decide on the regularity of such surveys.

Issues to be taken into account in conducting a survey could include:

- whether daytime or evening meetings are preferred
- whether meetings are to be in person, fully online or multi-location
- the preferred meeting length
- whether particular times cause difficulties for councillors with particular characteristics, such as age, gender, religion, having caring responsibilities or being in employment

When considering the results of the survey, councils will need to balance a range of responses and while committed to flexibility it may not be possible to accommodate every individuals' circumstances at all meetings. In these circumstances councils should also consider whether there may be advantages to rotating meeting times due to an impossibility of meeting all of their members



needs all of the time. Any such arrangements will, of course, need to be clearly publicised for the benefit of interested members of the public.

# Training, Development and Support for Local Authority Members Statutory Guidance

## Status of this Guidance

This is statutory guidance made under Section 7(4) of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 (the Measure), a local authority (a county or county borough council in Wales) must have regard to it.

Section 38 of the Local Government Act 2000, as amended by section 45 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. A local authority (a county or county borough council in Wales), elected mayor or an executive leader must have regard to it; and Section 71 of the Government of Wales Act 2006.

## Purpose

Part 1 of the Measure contains provisions intended to strengthen local democracy. Chapter 1 of that Part concerns the support provided to members of a local authority and section 7 within that chapter provides for the training and development of these members. This guidance relates to matters local authorities must take into account in securing reasonable training and development opportunities for its members as required under section 7 of the Measure.

## What the Measure requires

Section 7 requires local authorities to secure the provision of reasonable training and development opportunities for its members. Each member should also have

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the opportunity to have a review of their training and development needs on an annual basis. However, it should be noted that these provisions do not apply to the executive leader of an authority which operates a leader and cabinet executive.

Should a member decide to have an annual review of their training and development needs, the authority must ensure that the review includes an opportunity for an interview with someone who they consider to be “suitably qualified” to advise about the training and development needs of a member.

In relation to these functions, a local authority is under an obligation to have regard to guidance issued by Welsh Ministers.

## **Reasonable Training and Development Opportunities**

The Measure does not define what constitutes reasonable training and development opportunities for the purposes of section 7. The Welsh Government recommends that local authorities provide opportunities for what is essential for a local authority member to perform their role effectively.

The role of councillors is constantly evolving as legislation changes, for example, the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 (the 2021 Act) brings in provision enabling executive members to job share executive posts and for there to be assistants to the executive, it amended the remit of Governance and Audit Committees and placed new duties on councils to encourage the public to participate in decision making. Likewise the social and environmental context in which councillors undertake their roles is constantly changing, new developments in social media, structural change in the way the public services are organised and the way councils interact with individuals and communities.

Therefore, it is essential that councils do not have a static view of what constitutes reasonable training and development needs for the purposes of section 7 of the Measure. The definition should be one which is regularly and frequently kept under review, most likely by the democratic services committee,

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to ensure it reflects legislative changes and the needs of members identified through their annual reviews. It is not sufficient to offer a package of training to a member immediately on their election and take a position that is sufficient to support them for the whole of their term.

Subjects for an on-going training programme of member development should, but not exclusively, include:

- induction: an introduction to the work of a local authority and its relationship with key bodies and the role of those bodies. Councils should plan a comprehensive induction programme for new councillors for delivery shortly after ordinary elections and also for new members elected at a by election
- training on the role and functions of the executive, the council and its officers
- an overview of the council's constitution, including the operation of meetings, how to raise questions with the leader and executive, access to information and research support
- training for the chairs of committees including effective chairing skills
- training on specific roles members may undertake such as governors or representatives on health boards, fire and rescue authorities or national parks including a short brief on the purpose of the role and the member's responsibilities in keeping the council apprised of developments on the body they are representing the council on, the level of decision making that is delegated to them and how they may access assistance to support them in the role
- training on the role of the councillor as a local member, the delegation of functions to ward members and councillor calls for action
- training on public engagement, the council's strategy to encourage participation in local decision making and the role members can play in engaging communities
- specific training for councillors carrying out certain regulatory or quasi-judicial roles (training for councillors sitting on planning or licensing committees, for example)
- specific training for councillors carrying out roles relating to the operations of the council. Governance and Audit, Democratic Services and Standards Committee members might be seen as in particular need

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- training on the operation of overview and scrutiny and its relationship with the council executive
- training on rights and responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 and more broadly the Social Model of Disability
- training on ICT, including how to participate in multi-location meetings and how the use of ICT can support the councillor's work
- training on the effective use of social media and the opportunities for better engagement between councillors and the communities they serve. Also the risk of councillors being victimised or harassed by opponents or campaigners overstepping the bounds of reasonable debate
- training on wellbeing and safety, including ways of keeping safe when undertaking their role
- councillor induction should include training on the expected standards under their authority's Code of Conduct, emphasising the issues that arise as a result of application of the Code in the context of social media. It should also include the role of the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) in handling the complaints about breaches of the Code. Refresher of that training should also form a part of the ongoing programme of member development
- training on councillors' corporate parenting responsibilities
- regular briefings and updates on changes in the law, policy and other issues that impact on the role of the elected member such as the economy
- training on equality and diversity (EDI), and the council's responsibilities in respect of the wellbeing of future generations (WFG)
- training on keeping safe when working alone, including when visiting others

Training can also be carried out using a variety of formats; traditional classroom-style teaching is one option, as is more bespoke coaching and mentoring of individual members. Training and development opportunities might also be 'designed' in to council business to make learning opportunities more practically relevant, for example, a briefing on a technical issue as part of preparation for a scrutiny meeting. Training can be sourced and delivered in-house, in collaboration with other councils, or with the support of external individuals or organisations.

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Training is a process, not an event. Councils could put together a member development strategy, which should reflect the need to keep councillors' skills refreshed and updated. This should incorporate the opportunity for organising briefings for councillors on emerging areas of law and policy. In producing such a strategy councils should consider any guidance including any charters or councillor development frameworks, developed by the WLGA and resources and guidance issued by the PSOW.

Training in the above areas need not be exclusively delivered. Training which combines one or more of the above areas is not discouraged. It is recommended that each member has their own personal development plan which is reviewed on a regular basis. This could be used to inform the annual review of a local authority member's training and development needs as required under the Measure.

It is recommended that the Democratic Services Committee (DSC) has overall responsibility for deciding what should be regarded as reasonable training and development opportunities as part of its function of providing support to members to carry out their functions. In addition to the list above the DSC may consider adding some policy areas for which training is considered essential, such as planning or licensing. It may also consider how it could maximise the opportunities within the council's membership and that of other councils to provide for peer support and mentoring, shadowing and opportunities to observe meetings and other activities.

The agreed, training and development opportunities could be contained within a published development strategy which should include how the development will be provided and the process for commissioning external training and development. The Welsh Local Government Association's Charter for Member Support and Development ("the Charter") could be used for guidance purposes by local authorities in developing their strategies. Local authorities may wish to consider the requirements to achieve the Charter when developing their strategies and programmes.

## Annual Review

Every local authority member, other than an executive leader, must be offered the opportunity to have their training and development needs reviewed on an annual basis. It is recommended that much of the training and development needs of local authority members is identified by such reviews.

The review must include an opportunity for a pre-planned interview between the member and a suitably qualified person (see below). The interview could include a review of the training and development received by the member over the last year (or appropriate period if the local authority member has only been recently elected).

Local authorities may wish to consider detailing the outcome of the interview in an agreed plan which sets out training and development needs, if any, identified for the year ahead. It is recommended that this personal development plan is provided for the member and signed by both member and reviewer. This is a private document which is not expected to be published by the authority or member, although a member is free to publicise in his or her annual report any training and development undertaken if he or she so wishes.

Good practise suggests councils should adopt role descriptions to ensure that all members have a full understanding of the expectations placed upon them. The descriptions can then be used as a guide to the skills required by the relevant member. The WLGA's competency framework sets out the expected skills and knowledge across a range of councillor roles ([WLGA Councillor Development \(Competency\) Framework](#)).

The annual review can then be an assessment of training and development needs to support the councillor in their role. A local authority may wish to consider making it clear to members that the review is not a performance review or an assessment of how well or how badly a member has conducted their duties. Ensuring members feel supported to undertake their role and can ask for training and development is integral to engendering a relationship of trust

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between backbench members, the executive and officers.

Councils could consider the drafting of a personal development plan for each councillor, arising from the statutory interview discussed above. Collated (and anonymised), these individual plans could then form the basis of a corporate member development strategy.

## Suitably Qualified

It is for the local authority to determine who could be considered a suitably qualified person to conduct interviews with local authority members to discuss their training and development needs as part of their annual review. This responsibility could be allocated to the DSC within the authority. In most cases, this may not be a question of naming individuals, but of describing a post or office holder, (see below). It would probably be neither suitable nor desirable for a single person to be made responsible for conducting all interviews.

It is also possible for group leaders to conduct interviews with their members or interviews to be conducted by the leader and the executive members. Both these practices are perfectly acceptable methods of complying with the requirements of the Measure.

Authorities may prefer, however, to divest the duty with their human resources officers. If this is the preferred option, local authorities may consider making the Head of Democratic Services (HDS) responsible for co-operating with human resources officers for this part of their work. If the chief executive was selected as a suitably qualified person to conduct an interview it would not be expected that they would work under the supervision of the HDS.

Some authorities may prefer to hire external consultants or peers to conduct interviews, which is also acceptable. Local authorities are encouraged to appoint a Member Development Champion from amongst its councillors.

It is recommended that there should be no surprises in the system and that

individual members know who they can expect to conduct their interview. Local authorities may wish to consider including an option in their arrangements for members to make a request to the HDS to arrange for a different person to conduct their interview if there is good reason for so doing.

Finally, authorities must ensure that anyone conducting an interview must themselves have received suitable training in how to do this and are advised to liaise with the WLGA to ensure the provision of this. Therefore, even if the authority has chosen to allocate the duty of conducting reviews to a post, rather than an individual, that post holder should have received the necessary training before conducting reviews.

## **Executive Leader of the Local Authority**

Section 7 of the Measure does not apply to the executive leader (or elected mayor) of an authority. However, there may, of course, be occasions where the leader wishes to receive training or development and there is no suggestion that, by excluding them from the provisions of the Measure, they should not be able to receive training, nor, indeed, an annual review or an interview with a suitably qualified person.

## **On-going Training, Development and Support for Members**

The annual review should not be seen as the only point in the year when a discussion is held with a member about their training, development, support and well-being. It should also not be seen by the member as the only opportunity available to them to proactively consider their own development and training needs or other forms of support. Increasingly, councillors are subjected to significant personal demands as a consequence of their work. Representing local people is a privilege but with it comes challenges which, at their most extreme, pose challenges to the mental and physical health of elected representatives.

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Councils have a general responsibility to develop an awareness and an understanding of the constraints under which councillors operate, and to ensure that the support arrangements put in place for councillors reflect these needs. This could be done alongside work carried out by political parties, and national sector bodies.

Councils should take every opportunity to support the well-being and personal safety of councillors and their families and should note carefully legislation which requires councils to provide councillors with an office contact address, both electronic and postal, (section 43 of the 2021 Act) to ensure members' privacy and that of their families is preserved and protected. This is critical to member's well-being and encouraging and supporting a diversity of membership which reflects the diversity in the council's area.

The Welsh Government considers the protection of members addresses should be a priority for councils to support their members' well-being and promote diversity of membership. Therefore, the Local Authorities (Amendments Relating to Publication of Information) (Wales) Regulations 2022 amend sections 100G (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 and the Regulation 12 (1) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Decisions, Documents and Meetings) (Wales) Regulations 2001 to remove the requirement to make the register of members addresses and the register of members of the executive addresses available for public inspection.

It is, of course, important that the public are aware of the interests members may have or hold, in particular where those interests could influence the decisions they may be involved in making in their role or roles on the council. Therefore, Part 4, paragraph 15 of the Model Code of Conduct requires members to register personal interests in the authority's register of members interests falling within a category mentioned in paragraph 10(2)(a), by providing written notification to the members' authority's monitoring officer. This includes any land and property in the authority's area in which members have a beneficial interest (or a licence to occupy for more than 28 days).

The Welsh Government is therefore mindful of the need to protect members'

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safety and welfare, whilst ensuring all relevant interests are captured and openness and transparency is maintained. However, it is the view of the Welsh Government that while members have an obligation to declare interests and not to participate in or influence council business, there is no requirement for members to include their full primary address (or any other address) when registering beneficial interests in land in the authority's area. It would be sufficient for members to state that they own a property in the authority's area (for example identifying the road or ward), in order to discharge their duties under paragraph 15 of the Code.

In addition, councils are reminded, under paragraph 16 of the Model Code, members, with their agreement, need not include information relating to any of the members' personal interests that is deemed sensitive information. In the code, "sensitive information" means the availability of the information for inspection by the public creates, or is likely to create, a serious risk that the member or a person who lives with the member may be subjected to violence or intimidation.

Councils and councillors have a role in supporting the presence of an open, accountable and respectful political culture in local areas. Despite this, councils will need to be aware of the risks that come with high profile public service. Councillors may at times be at physical risk of harm, particularly where they are associated with unpopular or controversial decisions or issues. Councils must seek to understand where and how such risks emerge, and to work closely with local police and other community safety partners to, where necessary, put in place protective arrangements for councillors, as proactively as possible.

Councils are required to put arrangements in place for supporting councillors on family absences but there may be times when a member is in need of targeted, unplanned support for example:

- where councillors are the subject of attacks on social media which go beyond acceptable political discourse. As far as possible, councillors should be supported to use social media to be more accessible to their constituents, but safe and reliable avenues need to be available to them to highlight such

attacks, and for the council to support police action where appropriate. Legally there is a principle that councillors are expected to have “thicker skins”, but this should not limit the extent of informal support and advice that councillors should be given under these circumstances. Political parties may provide advice to councillors on the effective and safe use of social media, but councils should be aware of the comparative vulnerability of councillors who might be members of smaller parties, or acting as independents, and who therefore might not benefit from this support

- where councillors have chronic health conditions and/or are disabled, and councils should consider the support from the perspective of the social model of disability and remove barriers that may be disabling councillors with impairments
- where their circumstances make them less able to engage with their roles and duties, for example caring responsibilities. These may require temporary or permanent accommodations therefore councils should consider councillors’ wider support needs in respect of their personal commitments;
- where councillors have other commitments (including professional commitments), or operate under other restrictions, which may limit temporarily or permanently their ability to attend meetings or to otherwise engage in the life of the council

Political groups may put in place arrangements for peer mentoring and support, for example, ‘buddying’ newly elected councillors with colleagues returning to office. This is an important element of training and support for many members. However, councillors unaffiliated to a political group (or part of a small, or geographically-specific, political group) may have particular needs, and councils can consider how these can be met in such a way that does not disadvantage other members.

A council culture where member well-being, learning and development is valued and nurtured amongst elected members could be considered an important element of a council being able to meet its duties in sections 89 and 90 of the 2021 Act to keep its performance under review and consult the public on performance. The active involvement of all members will be important to demonstrating these duties are being met and members must be receptive to

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training and development to support them in this role and the council must be receptive to the importance of doing so.

# Research Support and Services for Councillors Statutory Guidance

## Status of this Guidance

This is statutory guidance issued under section 8(1A) of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011. This section enables the Welsh Ministers to issue guidance to which a local authority must have regard when exercising its functions in respect of providing the head of democratic services (HDS) with the staff, accommodation and other resources which are, in its opinion, sufficient for the HDS to discharge their functions.

## Purpose of this Guidance

Councillors who are part of the executive or assistants to it have the benefit of working closely with officers of the council and have ready access to information and professional support. In order to undertake their roles effectively all elected members should be able to access a range of information and support. It is anticipated this will mainly focus on signposting individual members to existing sources of information or available training for example, brief prepared for scrutiny committee meetings or how to use research, statistical or legislative websites. It may also include targeted support for groups of members for example, leading a task and finish group investigation or support for individual members to research issues impacting on their communities where they are taking forward a councillor call for action under section 21A of the Local Government Act 2000, they have been delegated functions under section 56 of the 2011 Measure or with which they are involved through their role on the council, for example as chair of a committee.

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The democratic services committee should consider the provision of this kind of support to elected members as part of its considerations as to what constitutes sufficient resources for the HDS to discharge their functions. The case for resources for this support should form part of the DSC's budget considerations and discussions with the council. It is anticipated that the DSC will begin this process by identifying the baseline of support which is already available to members, then work with members to identify how this support and its parameters could be developed over time. The council should set out what steps it will take to improve research services to members where appropriate, with actions and timelines and communicate this to members.

## Support for Research

It is for the DSC to advise on the nature and level of support for research by elected members that would be suitable for their council and the level of resources that the HDS might require to provide a sufficient set of services in this regard. This guidance sets out the sorts of services the DSC should consider when making its deliberations.

The proportionate use of research support by councillors is an important part of ensuring local democracy is functioning effectively. It is also important to ensure that members do not get frustrated by feeling they are not able to access or have available to them the support they need to make a difference to their local community or undertake a role they have been asked to do on behalf of the council effectively.

Councils should, through their democratic services committee, put in place a protocol or other set of rules governing how councillors should expect to be able to access and use research services, to ensure that it is accessible to all councillors and that it is used equitably and proportionately. This should dovetail with the democratic services committee's oversight of the overall resourcing available for democratic services in an authority.

The aim should be to provide support to assist backbench councillors and their

staff to work with constituents, scrutinise legislation, develop policy, undertake any roles they may be asked to do on behalf of the council and undertake effective overview and scrutiny. Research may be related to a specific issue or issues that have a more general impact on the work of elected members across the council but would usually be connected to the delivery of the council's priorities or the scrutiny of their delivery. It should work in harmony with and not be expected to duplicate the support members might be provided by virtue of their membership of a political group, for example where political assistants have been appointed (section 9 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989). Research provided to councillors through this part of the guidance should not be politically motivated or compromise officers' political neutrality.

## Research Support and Services

Examples of research support and services include:

- collating and distributing background papers to assist councillors to better understand forthcoming key decisions including analysis of complex data and information which may be provided as background papers for council meetings such as the budget discussion
- preparing and sharing regularly management information, including performance management shared as a part of formal assessments either by performance panels or Audit Wales
- preparing and sharing demographic information, and information on the use of services by local people
- responding to councillors' requests for research on specific topics to be undertaken either by council officers or an external source. Councils should set out clear processes and procedures to ensure councillors have access to this kind of research but also that they understand the requirement for its judicious use within the budget and other resourcing parameters set by the council
- signposting of members to useful sources of information they can access on the issue in which they have an interest
- circulation of calendars of events held by local and national organisations

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which may be of interest to members and help inform their knowledge of particular issues

The service should not be solely reactive, the proactive provision of timely briefings on new policies, changes in the law or other matters that could impact on the work of members should form part of the service. These briefings should be published and made available to the public as they will be of wider interest and can form part of the Council's strategy for meeting its duties under sections 39 to 41 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 to encourage local people to participate in decision making and the publication of a participation strategy.

However, it is also important the DSC and HDS should consult and involve members to shape and regularly review the usefulness and effectiveness of the support provided.

## Benefits

The benefits of pro-active research support for councillors are:

- it means that councillors are better able to engage with the business of the authority in an informed, proactive manner
- different officers do not have to deal with requests for information and duplication is reduced
- there is less demand for the bringing of reports to committees (particularly scrutiny committees) for information, or to note, because there are systematic methods to share research with councillors through other means thus freeing up committee time and resources
- the products and outcomes of research can be shared equitably, rather than through one-to-one councillor-officer conversations which privileges those more capable in "navigating" the authority and its officer structures

## Support in accessing information

Councils should adopt a proactive and permissive approach in how they engage with councillors' information needs. Councillors cannot always know what information they need to know, and as such may not be in a position to frame requests in a way that captures these needs succinctly. In particular, councils should recognise that it is not optimal for councillors to be expected to make FOI requests of their own authority, and should put in place arrangements to ensure that they can access this, and other information in an expedited manner.

As such councils should:

- frame councillor access to information procedure rules expansively with a presumption in favour of the release of information to councillors unless a clear public policy reason exists not to
- proactively provide councillors with management information and other data to ensure that they are kept informed about the business of the authority. Councils could produce an information bulletin or digest for councillors on a regular basis, subject to resources as suggested above
- engage with members to better understand how and where their roles will require that they access certain information sources, and support them to gain that access. This may include negotiation with partners, and others who may hold information relevant to councillors' roles
- ensure mechanisms are in place to protect personal data in line with appropriate legislation

As far as possible councils should specify publicly why a matter is exempt from publication or from discussion in a public forum, ideally providing more information than just the description given in Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

Equally, councillors should be made aware that councils are frequently under legal obligations to others with regard to maintaining the confidentiality of certain information, in particular, commercial information and personal information, and

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such releases could open up the council to challenge.

# **Statutory Guidance on duties of leaders of political groups in relation to standards of conduct**

## **Status of this Guidance**

This is statutory guidance issued under section 52A of Local Government Act 2000 (the 2000 Act) inserted by section 62 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 (the 2021 Act).

## **Purpose of this Guidance**

This guidance sets out how leaders of political groups in principal councils should meet their duties contained in section 52A of the Local Government Act 2000 (“the 2000 Act”), inserted by section 62, of the 2021 Act, which relates to the promotion and maintenance of high standards of conduct by the members of the group.

This guidance is designed to support leaders of political groups understand and discharge their duties in relation to high standards of conduct, whilst recognising that they will wish to and should be encouraged to develop their own approach in line with their wider statutory obligations, local circumstances, and best practice. However, the basic principles set out in the guidance should apply to all.

This guidance specifically addresses the following duties:

## **Duty to take reasonable steps to promote and maintain**

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## **high standards of conduct by the members of the group**

Section 52A(1)(a) of the 2000 Act requires that a leader of a political group consisting of members of a county council or county borough council in Wales, must take reasonable steps to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by the members of the group.

## **Duty to co-operate with the council's standards committee (and any sub-committee) in the exercise of the standards committee's functions**

Section 52A(1)(b) of the 2000 Act requires that a leader of a political group consisting of members of a county council or county borough council in Wales, must co-operate with the council's standards committee (and any sub-committee of the committee) in the exercise of the standards committee's functions.

This guidance refers specifically to these duties on a leader of a political group, and sets out the expectations on how they will perform these duties. All of the duties apply from 5 May 2022.

There are other provisions within Part 3 of the 2000 Act relating to standards committees, inserted by sections 62 and 63 of the 2021 Act. These aspects of the 2021 Act are also described in this guidance.

This guidance is set out as follows:

- policy context within which the duties are set and the purpose of the duties
- duty to take reasonable steps to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by the members of the group
- duty to co-operate with the council's standards committee (and any sub-committee) in the exercise of the standards committee's functions

# Policy context and purpose of the duties set out in section 52A of the Local Government Act 2000

## Policy context

Part 3 of the 2000 Act established a statutory framework to promote and maintain high standards of ethical conduct by members and employees of relevant authorities in Wales. A 'relevant authority' is a county or county borough council ("a principal council"), community council, fire and rescue authority, a national park authority and a Corporate Joint Committee.

The framework consists of the 10 general principles of conduct for members (derived from Lord Nolan's 'Seven Principles of Public Life'), set out below:

- Selflessness.
- Honesty.
- Integrity and propriety.
- Duty to uphold the law.
- Stewardship.
- Objectivity in decision-making.
- Equality and respect.
- Openness.
- Accountability.
- Leadership.

These are included in the statutory Model Code of Conduct ("the Code") (as required under section 50 of the 2000 Act), which lays down a set of enforceable minimum standards for the way in which members should conduct themselves, both in terms of their official capacity and (in some instances) in their personal capacity. It also guides members on the declaration and registration of interests. All elected members must familiarise themselves with and give a written undertaking to observe the Code before they can take up office. As the Code may from time to time be updated members must familiarise themselves with

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any changes with which they are required to observe.

Watch a video on:

- [the local authority ethical standards framework in Wales](#)
- [how councillors should behave and interact with people](#)
- [how to complain about a councillor in Wales](#)

Building on the existing arrangements, section 62 of the 2021 Act inserts a new section 52A into the 2000 Act which places a duty on leaders of political groups within a principal council to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by members of their group. Group leaders are required to co-operate with the council's standards committee in the exercise of its general and specific functions for promoting high standards (see below).

Subsection (3) amends section 54 of the 2000 Act to extend the specific functions of a standards committee to include monitoring compliance by leaders of political groups with the new duty imposed on them by the 2021 Act to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by members of their group. A standards committee must also provide advice or provide or arrange training for group leaders on the new duty.

## **Purpose of the standards of conduct provisions**

The ethical standards framework in Wales aims to promote the observance of consistent standards of conduct by local government members. High ethical standards underpin and maintain public confidence in democratic governance and the decision making process. For any organisation to be effective it must respect diversity in all its forms and treat everyone with the respect they would expect for themselves. Engendering a culture within a principal council which embraces high standards of conduct, requires both local leadership and all elected members to accept responsibility and accountability for their actions both individually and collectively.

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The standards of conduct provisions in the 2021 Act complement the existing statutory ethical framework and support the Code of Conduct process. The provisions are designed to ensure leaders of political groups in principal councils, supported by standards committees, promote and maintain high standards of conduct by the members of their group.

## **The wider environment in which the standards of conduct duties operate**

The standards of conduct provisions contained in the 2021 Act support the Welsh Government's wider commitment to equality and diversity in public life. Action has been taken through the Diversity in Democracy Programme to tackle the barriers which prevent individuals' active participation in local democracy. Within local government, and through the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), there has been a commitment to Diversity in Democracy, including councils signing Diverse Council declarations which seek, amongst other actions, to ensure councils 'demonstrate an open and welcoming culture to all'. Furthermore, the WLGA, working with the Local Government Association (LGA), Northern Ireland Local Government association (NILGA) and the Scottish body, COSLA, has been promoting the Civility in Public Life programme, which seeks to promote civil, constructive and respectful political discourse.

The Anti Racist Wales Action Plan sets out a series of goals and actions designed to improve the outcomes for black, Asian and minority ethnic people in Wales. It includes a number of goals and actions for local government relating to its leadership and representation role. It recognises that a more diverse elected representation is good for decision making and likely to lead to decisions which better reflect society as a whole. This in turn contributes to greater public confidence.

Duty to take reasonable steps to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by the members of the group

## Introduction

This is statutory guidance issued under section 52A of the Local Government Act 2000 (the 2000 Act) as amended by section 62 of the Local Government and Elections Act 2021 (the 2021 Act). This section of the guidance should be read by a leader of a political group in a principal council to support the discharge of their duties in section 52A of the 2000 Act, to take reasonable steps to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by the members of the group. The guidance here reflects the minimum requirements, recognising that leaders are best placed to build on this to develop the detail of their own approach, and work together to share best practice across political groups and with standards committees.

## Definition of political groups and group leaders

Section 52A(3) of the 2000 Act enables the Welsh Ministers to make provision in regulations about the circumstances in which (a) members of a county council or county borough council in Wales are to be treated as constituting a political group; (b) a member of a political group is to be treated as a leader of the group.

The Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990, made under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, currently governs the position in this respect, until such time as regulations passed under 52A(3) of the 2000 Act are made.

Section 52A(1)(a) of the 2000 Act requires that a leader of a political group consisting of members of a county council or county borough council in Wales, must take reasonable steps to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by the members of the group.

The duty does not make leaders of a political group accountable for the behaviour of their members as conduct must be a matter of individual responsibility and accountability. However, they do have a role in taking

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reasonable steps in maintaining high standards, setting an example, using their influence to support a positive culture, being proactive in promoting high standards of conduct in their group and addressing issues of alleged non-compliance as soon as they arise.

Reasonable steps the group leader may undertake include:

- demonstrating personal commitment to and attending and participating in relevant development or training around equalities and standards, including on the Code of Conduct
- actively encouraging group members to attend relevant development or training around equalities and standards including in relation to the Code of Conduct
- ensuring nominees to a committee have received the recommended training for participating on that committee
- promoting modelling civility and respect within group communications and meetings and in formal council meetings
- supporting informal resolution procedures in the council, and working with the standards committee and monitoring officers to achieve local resolution
- encouraging a culture within the group which supports high standards of conduct and integrity
- attend a meeting of the council's standards committee if requested to participate in discussions on Code of Conduct issues
- drive forward work to implement any recommendations from the standards committee about improving standards
- work with the standards committee to proactively identify, consider and tackle patterns of inappropriate behaviour
- work together with other group leaders, within reason, to collectively support high standards of conduct within the council and where any issues identified involve more than one political group

As set out above, the purpose of the new duties is to build on and support a culture which is proactive, acts on and does not tolerate inappropriate behaviour. The Guidance from the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales for members on the Code of Conduct provides advice on the Code and its requirements. It

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includes examples of cases considered by the Ombudsman and decisions reached by local standards committees and the Adjudication Panel for Wales which demonstrate behaviours which are unreasonable or inappropriate. Leaders of political groups and all members, including independent members, should have regard to the Ombudsman's Guidance, which can be accessed on the [Ombudsman's website](#).

The importance of attendance at training on the Code of Conduct has been highlighted by the Ombudsman and was raised under the independent review of the Ethical Standards Framework and Model Code of Conduct carried out by Richard Penn. Leaders of political groups should actively encourage all members in their group to read the Ombudsman's Guidance and any local guidance issued by the monitoring officer or standards committee and to take up any offer of training. They should also work constructively with standards committees and monitoring officers to identify the training requirements for themselves and for their group members.

It is essential that relationships with members are established which encourage them to raise issues with the group leader. The group leader has a significant role to play in creating a culture of trust and mutual respect in their group. Where issues arise, the importance of resolving low-level complaints at a local level has been raised by the Ombudsman and the independent Review of the Framework. Typically, these complaints are about alleged failures to show respect and consideration for others and the making of frivolous and low-level complaints. The group leader should be pivotal in preventing the escalation of these complaints to the stage where more formal interventions become necessary. Leaders of political groups should have informal discussions with members who may be showing early signs of inappropriate behaviour to 'nip this in the bud' before it becomes problematic or in danger of breaching the Code. This may include suggesting and requesting appropriate training or refresher training for the members concerned, asking for social media posts they have made to be removed, and requesting they apologise where appropriate.

A leader of a political group who fails to comply with the new duty in a meaningful way, may potentially be regarded as bringing their office into

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disrepute, and likely to be in breach of the Code (see the Ombudsman's Guidance).

Political group leaders will want to ensure they are able to evidence the steps they have taken to help create an environment in which members demonstrate appropriate standards of behaviour, undertake appropriate training and address, with members, instances where standards of behaviour falls short of that expected. It is a matter for individual group leaders how they choose to evidence their compliance with this guidance, but it may include notes of meetings, copies of correspondence, audits of member training on issues such as equality and the Code of Conduct and action taken to address any gaps in that training.

A political group's internal disciplinary procedures remain a matter for that group or any associated political party's own rules on discipline. However, it is expected that the group leader will take reasonable steps to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by members within group communications and meetings as well as their 'public' conduct outside of the group setting.

## **Duty to co-operate with the council's standards committee (and any sub-committee) in the exercise of the standards committee's functions**

### **Introduction**

This section of guidance is issued under section 52A of the Local Government Act 2000 (the 2000 Act) as amended by section 62 of the Local Government and Elections Act 2021 (the 2021 Act). It is about the duty to co-operate with the council's standards committee (and any sub-committee) in the exercise of the standards committee's functions within section 52A of the 2000 Act.

The duties came into force on 5 May 2022.

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## Duty

Section 52A(1)(b) of the 2000 Act requires that a leader of a political group consisting of members of a county council or county borough council in Wales, must co-operate with the council's standards committee (and any sub-committee of the committee) in the exercise of the standards committee's functions.

## Role of leader of political group

It is essential the leaders of a political group co-operate, and ensure the members within their group co-operate, with the monitoring officer and standards committee when an issue is referred to the standards committee.

Leaders of a political group should build good relations, and work constructively with the monitoring officer, seeking advice from them and the standards committee on matters of behaviour and conduct when required, both promoting positive behaviours and addressing inappropriate ones. Group leaders should also report compliance with their duty to the standards committee. This can take the form of a short letter or report at a frequency agreed by the political group leaders in the council and its standards committee. Group leaders should also report any serious concerns about members' behaviour which have not been remedied by informal actions, in line with the requirement in the Code of Conduct to report such breaches.

At the beginning of each council year Political group leaders should meet with the standards committee to agree the following:

- how group leaders and the standards committee will work together to ensure appropriate standards of behaviour
- frequency of meetings between group leaders and the standards committee throughout the year
- the threshold which the standards committee will use to establish whether it is content that political group leaders have complied with the duties of the

2021 Act

- the mechanism for political group leaders to provide reports to the standards committee about the actions they have taken to comply with the duties within the 2021 Act

If a member is found by the standards committee to be in breach of the Code of Conduct and is disciplined by the committee, the leader of the political group must support the action, in order to maintain the high standards of conduct expected in public life and the Code. Group leaders should observe the Ombudsman's Guidance and the Sanctions Guidance issued by the President of the Adjudication Panel for Wales, which can be accessed on the [Adjudication Panel's website](#).

## Statutory Guidance on the Functions of Standards Committees

### Status of this guidance

This guidance is issued under; section 54(7) of the Local Government Act 2000 (the 2000 Act) inserted by section 63 of Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act (the 2021 Act).

The duties came into force on 5 May 2022.

### Purpose of this guidance

Local standards committees play an important role in supporting members, individually and collectively, to develop and maintain a culture which embraces high standards of conduct.

A principal council is required by section 53 of the 2000 Act to establish a standards committee.

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The general functions of a standards committee under section 54(1) of the 2000 Act are to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by members and co-opted members of a “relevant authority” and to assist them to observe the members Code of Conduct.

In addition, a standards committee also has specific functions under section 54(2) of the 2000 Act, namely to:

- advise the authority on the adoption or revision of a Code of Conduct
- monitor the operation of the Code of Conduct
- provide advice or provide or arrange training on the Code of Conduct for members of the authority

Section 56(1) of the 2000 Act provides that a principal council’s standards committee (or a sub-committee established for the purpose) also exercises these functions in relation to members of community councils in its area. Principal council standards committees should play a proactive role in promoting and supporting high standards of conduct in the town and community councils in their area, for example, by visiting them, working together to share good practice and identifying training opportunities.

Monitoring officers work closely with standards committees and support them in providing day-to-day advice to members on conduct matters.

A principal council may arrange for its standards committee to exercise such other functions as it considers appropriate, for example, monitoring the operation of corporate maladministration complaint procedures.

An important aspect of governance arrangements is the approach taken to gifts and hospitality. While there has been some support for a Wales wide approach we consider this is a matter to be dealt with by individual councils. We would expect standards committees to regularly review the approach taken in respect of gifts and hospitality and the use of thresholds. We would recommend this to be a matter included in standards committees annual reports. In addition it is considered this is a matter which would be routinely discussed at regular

meetings of Monitoring Officers across Wales.

# **Duty of a standards committee to monitor group leaders' compliance with the duties, and provision of advice and training**

## **Status of this guidance**

This guidance is issued under section 54 of the Local Government Act 2000 (the 2000 Act) as amended by 62(3) of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 (the 2021 Act).

## **Purpose**

Section 62(3) of the 2021 Act amends section 54 of the 2000 Act to extend the specific functions of a standards committee to include monitoring compliance by leaders of political groups with the duty imposed on them by the 2021 Act to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by members of their group. As noted above, a council's political group leaders and its standards committee should agree on the form and frequency of a report from each group leader to the standards committee. The standards committee should then consider each report and provide feedback to the group leaders.

A standards committee must also provide advice and training or arrange to train group leaders on the new duty. At the start of each administration this should take place within 6 months of the election and be reviewed at least annually.

As set out earlier in this guidance the standards committee should meet with group leaders at the beginning of each council year to agree a number of issues, including the frequency of meetings between political group leaders and the standards committee through the year to discuss compliance with the duties

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covered by this guidance, annual reporting processes and issues arising from the analysis of complaints in respect of standards of behaviour.

## **Duty of standards committee to make annual report**

### **Status of this guidance**

This guidance is issued under section 54(7) of the Local Government Act 2000 (“the 2000 Act”).

### **Purpose**

Section 63 of the 2021 Act inserts section 56B into the 2000 Act which places a requirement on standards committees in each “relevant authority” to make an annual report to the authority concerned. In the case of a principal council, the requirement to report to “the authority” in this context includes any community councils in its area.

As a minimum, the report must:

- describe how the committee has discharged its functions during the preceding financial year
- confirm the operation of a local protocol for the resolution of complaints and provide an assessment of its impact. Where no local protocol has been adopted, the standards committees must consider whether the adoption of such a protocol would support its functions in relation to promoting high standards of ethical conduct
- include an analysis of complaints. This analysis must include information about the number of councillors who have been the subject of a complaint which has been upheld, and whether they have or have not attended a training session on the Code of Conduct prior to or after the complaint was

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received

- include a summary of reports and recommendations made or referred to the committee by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales relating to the investigation of alleged breaches of the member; Code of Conduct, and any subsequent action taken by the committee
- include a summary of notices given to the committee by the Adjudication Panel for Wales, relating to the Panel's decisions on possible breaches of the member Code of Conduct
- describe the advice it has provided on training for all members and how that has been implemented; in the case of a principal council set out how it has worked with the town and community councils in its area to promote and maintain high standards of conduct amongst town and community councillors
- in the case of a principal council, include the committee's assessment of how political group leaders have complied with the new duty under section 52A(1) of the 2000 Act (inserted by section 62 of the 2021 Act) to promote high standards of conduct, including the advice the standards committee has provided and the training it has suggested

The committee may also wish to report on the number of cases considered under local resolution processes. This would help to capture data on an "all Wales" basis, on matters which do not reach the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.

Approaches to the management and monitoring of gifts and hospitality are often sensitive matters. It is recommended the approach to this is reviewed and agreed within individual principal councils and that the regular review of thresholds for declaration of gifts, hospitality, material benefit or advantage, are included in standards committee's annual report. This will assist in terms of transparency of the arrangements.

The requirement to make an annual report is intended to ensure there is a regular and consistent approach to the reporting and consideration of standards of conduct by members of relevant authorities in Wales. This is intended to promote local ownership and collective responsibility by members for ensuring

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high standards of conduct within their authority. To this end, section 56B places an obligation on a relevant authority to consider the report and any recommendations made by its standards committee within 3 months of its receipt. The authority's consideration of a report will be a matter of public record through the published minutes of the meeting.

The standards committee should consider whether there are improvements that can be made to strengthen the standards of behaviour of members. This may include recommendations to the full council and town and community councils in its area about matters such as mandating training in equalities and the model code of conduct.

It would be good practice for standards committees to share their Annual Reports with the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales and town and community councils.

## **Part 3: public participation; strategies and petitions**

### **Statutory Guidance on Public Participation Strategies**

#### **Status of this Guidance**

This is statutory guidance made under section 44 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 (the 2021 Act). A principal council (a county or county borough council in Wales), must have regard to it.

#### **Purpose of this Guidance**

This guidance is to support councils in the preparation and maintenance of their

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public participation strategies which aim to support and encourage decision making, which is informed by, understands and reflects the diversity of the communities in the council area.

## Policy intent

Public participation is essential to ensuring the needs and aspirations of communities are at the heart of local decision making. Councils must demonstrate they recognise and value the contribution of local people in identifying, shaping and evaluating the services they and their families rely upon as part of their democratic decision-making processes. This is central to the ethos of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (the 2015 Act) and sections 39 to 41 of the 2021 Act are intended to work in harmony with the pursuit of councils' well-being goals and complement the five ways of working set out in the 2015 Act.

This is because the 'participation duty' in the 2021 Act relates specifically to participation in the democratic processes of the council, recognising the democratic dimension of councils which is specific and integral to their constitution. Its focus is on maintaining the participation, trust and interest of the public in democracy in the years between elections. Also, if this trust interest can be grown, supported and built upon in the years between elections, there is the opportunity to further build on this and encourage higher levels of voter registration and turnout at election time.

The aim of the public participation strategy is therefore to set out the arrangements the council intends to put in place to embed and deliver a culture of partnership with the public. To build this culture of partnership and for the public to have confidence in the council's commitment to encourage and act on their views, the participation strategy must be developed with all diverse communities within the council area.

The 2021 Act does not provide a definition of participation but for the purposes of this guidance and the preparation of the public participation strategy

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'participation' should be interpreted as an all-encompassing term for activities or methods which inform, engage, consult, involve or use co-development or co-production between council and the public. It should also be interpreted as participation of everyone no matter their age, protected characteristic or characteristics or socio-economic background. The council's public participation strategy should be clear how it will enable participation for everyone including by reference to the social model of disability.

## What the 2021 Act requires

The 2021 Act places a duty on principal councils (a county or county borough council in Wales) to encourage local people to participate in their decision making. This includes where councils are making decisions in partnership with another principal council or in conjunction with another individual or body such as a local health board. This is set out in section 39 of the 2021 Act and is specifically intended to encourage public participation in the democratic processes of the council as a bridge with the public's direct engagement with councillors.

Section 40 of the Act then requires a principal council to prepare and publish a public participation strategy setting out how it will encourage local people to participate in its decision making. These strategies must include (section 40(2):

- ways of promoting awareness among local people of the principal council's functions
- ways of promoting awareness among local people of how to become a member of the principal council, and what membership entails
- ways of facilitating access for local people to information about decisions made, or to be made, by the principal council
- ways of promoting and facilitating processes by which local people may make representations to the principal council about a decision before, and after, it is made
- arrangements made, or to be made, for the purpose of the council's duty in section 62 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 (bringing views

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of the public to attention of overview and scrutiny committees)

- ways of promoting awareness among members of the principal council of the benefits of using social media to communicate with local people

The strategy may also address how a principal council proposes to comply with a duty imposed by any enactment. This enables the council to set out in one place how it will address a variety of duties to eliminate any duplication and to make it easier for the public to understand the many different ways in which the council is encouraging participation across the range of its activities.

In developing its public participation strategy councils must consult people who live, work or study in the council's area and anyone else it thinks appropriate. Section 41 of the 2021 Act requires a council's first strategy made under this section to be published as soon as reasonably practicable after the local government elections in May 2022.

There are many ways of involving, engaging and interacting with individuals and groups of individuals within communities for example, formal consultations, focus groups, public meetings and citizens juries. No one mechanism is the key to developing a partnership approach between members of the public and the council which serves them, and councils will need to consider which approaches are best matched to different aspects of the strategy and the different communities they must engage.

A public participation strategy must go beyond relying solely on traditional requests for feedback on pre-determined plans and establish a relationship with communities built on trust, a commitment to listen to all voices and for those voices to be heard and to work together with the community to explore and resolve issues of concern, promote and recognise achievements and face new challenges together. The public participation strategy must set out how this will be achieved.

Section 41 then enables the council to determine the frequency of the subsequent reviews of its strategy but it must consult with people who live, work or study in the council's area and anyone else it thinks appropriate when

undertaking a review. The revised or new version of the strategy must be published as soon as possible after the review.

## Preparing the strategy

In preparing the strategy the council should be clear about those it is required to consult with under section 41 of the 2021 Act on its purpose. The purpose is to set out how the council will achieve the requirements set out in section 39 of the Act.

Each of the requirements cannot be met solely through formal consultation, although formal consultation may be one of the pathways for participation, demonstrating that the requirements are being met will involve setting out a basket of measures. For example, demonstrating the council is meeting the requirement relating to ways of promoting and facilitating processes by which local people may make representations to the council about a decision, before, and after it is made could include formal consultation processes but could also include how to make representations to your ward member, how to submit questions to the council leader, how to submit evidence to scrutiny committees, how to become a member of a citizens' panel or a co-production forum, systematic publication of council, cabinet and committee forward work plans and agendas and so on.

Whilst meeting the requirement relating to promoting awareness among local people of how to become a member of the principal council and what membership entails could include youth councils and youth cabinets, outreach in local communities and opportunities for shadowing elected members, promotion of how to attend council meetings, podcasts and webcasts about the work of elected members and so on.

The development of the strategy should be informed by discussions and involvement of the public as to its purpose and what participation pathways would best enable them and support them to engage in local decision making. The approach to the development of the strategy and the routes for participation

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it sets out must go beyond this, focusing on a partnership approach with those impacted by decisions made and services provided by the council.

An effective approach to public participation cannot be achieved without investment. It is essential as part of any baseline assessment the current level of resource allocated to engaging with the public is identified with an explanation of what those resources deliver.

The requirement to develop a public participation strategy should not be seen as an indication that councils are not already engaging with the public. Many councils will already have a number of mechanisms in place aimed at helping the council to understand the views of the public it serves. Councils should use the strategy to build on the strengths it already has in this area, while developing new ways of working within a wider partnership approach to demonstrate its commitment to public participation.

Councils should have regard to their statutory duties in respect of equalities, Welsh language and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 when preparing their strategy. Councils should also be aware that a well-rounded public participation strategy is integral to demonstrating it is meeting its duties under section 89 of the 2021 Act to keep its performance and governance under review and its duties under section 90 to consult local people on performance.

## **Baseline assessment**

An important part of any strategy is being clear about the starting point. In the case of a public participation strategy it is necessary to understand what is already in place, what works well and where the gaps are. It is essential there is an understanding of the demographics within the local authority area. A local authority should conduct a baseline assessment as part of its preparation for developing a public participation strategy.

Key issues which should be considered as part of this assessment are the

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demographic profile of the local authority, the existing level and nature of community engagement and the current approach to public participation. The following questions, while not exhaustive, may be useful in establishing the baseline assessment:

- What is the local authority's demographic profile?
- What community networks already exist and under what circumstances does the local authority engage with them?
- What community leaders and local issues champions has the local authority identified, developed and maintained relationships with?
- What mechanisms currently exist for members of the community to put forward ideas to the council for consideration? How is this communicated to the public?
- How does the local authority act upon complaints received and how does the public know whether changes have been made to services/processes as a result? Information published by the PSOW about levels of complaints for councils is a rich source of information
- What resources are dedicated to community engagement/involvement? What has changed as a result?
- How does the public contribute to the scrutiny of the council's work?

The baseline assessment will help the local authority to focus on its strengths while developing a holistic, public-centred strategy.

In advance of drafting a strategy the council should consider the requirement placed on it through sections 39, 40 and 41 of the 2021 Act alongside the baseline assessment. This will provide an opportunity to identify key issues which will be important in developing the strategy, the timelines for action and the potential for investment to support both the development of, and implementation of the strategy.

## **Designing effective public participation**

Building on good practice and working with the public, councils can move from

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traditional approaches and design more collaborative, tailored and imaginative participation. Strategies should explain the approach and guiding principles the council has adopted. There are many approaches a council could follow in the development of its strategy and the following is intended to set out a high level approach of the key steps:

## Design

- Set out clearly the purpose of the strategy and the intended outcomes.
- Identify and set out the process for development such as public and stakeholder engagement and how this will be inclusive and extensive.
- Involve a wide range of staff across the council to bring together an understanding of existing interactions with the public, understand good practice and generate ideas.
- Ensure the design fulfils the statutory requirements relating to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, equalities and Welsh language and considers the social model of disability and responsibilities in relation to children's rights.
- Set out how it will be ensured that the council executive and the council provide leadership for the development and implementation of the strategy.
- Set out how ward councillors will be involved in championing and leading the development process in their communities.

## Development

- Map existing participation pathways, existing strengths and weaknesses, identify gaps.
- Identify opportunities where digital could add value or provide new opportunities.
- Use the development process to create participation, harness democratic involvement, both inside the council and with the public, and build it into involvement in decision making.
- Road test proposals in communities.

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- Benchmark proposals with other councils.
- Identify on-going resource needs to implement and evaluate the strategy.

## Evaluation and revision

- Develop and use evaluation measures.
- Set timeframes for evaluation and revision.

This should not be approached as a sequential process. It should be noted that the above are interrelated, iterative tasks, not a step-by-step template.

## Promoting awareness

Effective public participation relies on there being a range of information available to the public which includes information about the following:

- the role of the council
- how the council is structured
- who represents them on the council and what has their contribution been;
- how decisions are made
- how decisions are scrutinised
- key contacts within the council for general and specific issues
- short, medium and long term plans
- financial aspects of the Council
- information about council service or activities complaints and trends in terms of complaints as well as actions/changes made as a result
- key contact points

The above is not an exhaustive list, there are many other examples of information which should be easily accessible to the public. It is however important that the public help define what they consider to be important to them as opposed to an approach which solely relies on the council determining what it thinks is important to people.

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Much of the above information should be included in the council's constitution and constitution guide which it is required to prepare, publish and keep up to date by section 37 of the Local Government Act 2000. Separate guidance has been published about constitutions and the constitution guide.

The council's public participation strategy should include how it will improve the way it promotes awareness for example by:

- improving the relevant sections of the council's website
- ensuring the council's forward plan supports public engagement by being accessible, timely and user friendly
- ensuring information for potential councillors is available and fit for purpose;
- communicating through council publications, local media and social media, taking steps to use languages such as BSL and Braille
- information and support for schools
- how individuals can submit positive comments to the council and the arrangements for making complaints about services or activities, including the role of the PSOW
- staff from across the council being involved in its design, development, review and revision so that all interactions with the public can be harnessed
- staff training and development on good practice engagement, encouragement to see the participation strategy as a living document with continuous opportunity for improvement
- how it will measure progress in terms of public participation
- providing information to individuals interested in standing to be a councillor

## **Reviewing, revising and replacing the strategy**

Encouraging and implementing measures to encourage public participation is a challenging aspect of council business. It is expected that as participation levels increase, the new partnership approach between the council and individuals and communities will present more ways of working together which may necessitate amendments to the strategy, which should be developed in conjunction with the public.

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The council must review its public participation strategy as soon as possible following each ordinary election, but may review its strategy at any other time. When reviewing the strategy the council must consult local people, and others it considers have an interest in the strategy. Following a review, the council may revise its strategy, or replace it with a new strategy.

The council must publish the revised or new strategy as soon as possible setting out the changes and the rationale for those changes.

However, the public participation strategy should not be viewed as a static 'document', only reviewed and revised to a pre-determined timetable. It should be viewed as an opportunity to constantly learn and develop and a process should be in place to ensure learning and good practice can be captured and harnessed in between 'formal' reviews.

## **Matters to consider**

### **Bringing together and joining up existing pathways for participation under the umbrella of the strategy**

Principal councils already have numerous ways of enabling people and communities to get involved with their policy development and service delivery and the way in which this informs the democratic processes of the council. . However, the participation strategy can add value to existing pathways by clearly identifying them, signposting them and recognising them as potential multi-use pathways that could enrich areas of the council's work which they may not previously have been designed to interact or connect with.

Examples of existing participation pathways include:

- interactions generated through engagement with the guide to the constitution published under section 37 of the Local Government Act 2000, as amended by section 45 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021
- arrangements to support the delegation of functions to individual ward

- councillors under section 56 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011
- how the publication of future meeting dates of council, committee and scrutiny meetings and their forward work programmes support the public's knowledge of council business and therefore ability to engage with and participate in it
  - how policies relating to the co-option of members to council committees can support and enhance diversity of perspective
  - how arrangements for fulfilling the statutory duty in section 62 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 to take the views of the public into account work in harmony with and support the duty in section 39 of the 2021 Act
  - how arrangements for the public to make complaints and submit complements to the council can be interactive and include feedback on changes or actions that result (this should form part of the Governance and Audit Committee's function to review and assess the effectiveness of the council's ability to handle complaints effectively)
  - how existing statutory participation pathways will be integrated within the strategy, such as those relating to equalities, future generations and planning
  - how the council's policies on the broadcasting of council meetings, including archiving, as required by section 46 of the 2021 Act support the public's awareness and therefore ability to engage with council decision making
  - ensuring the work and engagement elected members undertake in their wards is recognised and incorporated into participation strategy
  - connecting the enabling of members' annual reports under section 5 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 as a means of promoting awareness of the council's functions and the role of elected members
  - the Council's petition scheme and petitions submitted under it as required by section 42 of the 2021 Act
  - the council's duty under section 90 of the 2021 Act to consult local people on performance
  - schools' engagement programmes and work to ensure young people are registered and made aware of their voting rights
  - youth councils and youth cabinets

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- focus groups and citizens' panels

One of the functions of the role of the participation strategy is to coherently set out how these pathways contribute to and enable the public to participate in decision making. It should identify the added value of approaching participation in a holistic rather than piecemeal way. Mapping of existing pathways is also important to identify both gaps and potential connections which could strengthen the participation networks.

## Making the best use of digital

Technology has advanced significantly during the last decade and there are many tools that, if used appropriately can help bring democracy closer to the public. It offers new ways of engaging, which can address previous limitations, rather than simply recreating traditional offline participation online. The use of digital services and communication across Wales varies, however, developing and maintaining the participation strategy provides the opportunity for councils to work together and share experience and learning as to what works. A participation strategy must set out the ways in which the council and the public can exploit the use of digital to maximise opportunities for effective participation.

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in an increased awareness and use of digital, however these are technologies which present challenges in terms of training and awareness and a wide range of skills are needed to properly embrace digital participation. Councils should consider the cost benefits of investment in digital to promote engagement, including the investment in staff training and expertise required to make effective use of the opportunities digital presents. This is likely to mean taking a medium to longer term horizon for the realisation of benefits.

Participation strategies must include ways of promoting awareness amongst members of the principal council of the benefits of using social media to communicate with local people. This should be co-ordinated with the work of the Democratic Service Committees and its development of a member development strategy. Annual training reviews with individual members can be used to identify

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specific training needs but the participation strategy should set out how members will be involved in campaigns the council might run or support and how collective efforts of members can be harnessed on social media to promote and enable public participation. Separate guidance has been issued on member support, training and development and councils are reminded of their duties to ensure the well-being of their members is protected and, in particular, members are also provided with high quality training and information to deal with the challenges social media can bring in relation to threats and harm to personal well-being.

Digital is both a benefit and a barrier to diversity of participation and councils should be mindful of this when considering their approach to digital participation. Online channels can accommodate large volumes of participation thus allowing people with work, caring or other commitments to take their time to make their contribution at a time that suits them. However, it also has the potential to exclude some communities and people with protected characteristics from being able to participate in a way which is suitable or comfortable for them and so a mix of participation pathways should always be available.

This is because while digital communication offers significant benefits and opportunities to facilitate participation, the way it is implemented has the potential to exclude individuals. There are many reasons for this including physical and mental health conditions, accessibility of technology, lack of digital skills and socio-economic factors. Therefore, participation strategies must identify how the council will address these and other risks and ensure inclusivity.

Digital advances are likely to be a constant theme in society and it will be important for councils to enable staff to engage in exploration of new ways of working in a way that staff feel supported to try new ways of engaging. This will require appropriate safeguards to be put in place and the strategy should identify how any exploration will take place, how the public will be involved and how it will approach identifying and implementing safeguards.

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## Ensuring Equality and Diversity

This Welsh Government is committed to increasing diversity across all aspects of public life. This includes tackling the barriers which prevent individuals' active participation in local democracy and provision of local services.

Equality and diversity are fundamental to effective public participation. The public participation strategy must set out how the council will ensure the widest possible range of views from the public inform council business. This will require councils to go beyond what many describe as 'the usual suspects'.

Leadership and culture within councils is key to a successful partnership approach to participation. The baseline assessment councils conduct will assist in identifying existing routes to communication and engagement, while providing an opportunity to identify key communication gaps and opportunities to explore how the more hard to reach groups can be encouraged to participate. The use of representative groups, community leaders, ward councillors and charities can all provide important information about community networks. The involvement of such groups should be welcomed and form a key component of any public participation strategy.

The Equality Act 2010 provides a legal framework for protection against direct and indirect discrimination for people with protected characteristics. These include age, sex, disability and religion. Councils must ensure its strategy sets out how it will advance equality of opportunity through the establishing and maintaining relationships with individuals and groups with protected characteristics.

In respect of disability, the Welsh Government is committed to the Social Model of Disability. This is an important approach, which goes beyond the Equality Act 2010 and broadens the focus on disability by recognising that what makes someone disabled is not their medical condition, but the attitudes and structures of society which present barriers. This is a key distinction and the removal of societal and attitudinal barriers must form part of the public participation

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strategy.

There are many ways in which barriers, often not intentional, can present in normal council business. An example would be where there are time limits on contributions to be made at meetings. The conditions some people experience may not be in a position to put forward their views within that time frame and as a result feel frustrated and not heard. This is a simple example of a self-imposed council barrier to participation, there will be others which could be explored further with those effected.

## Local authority meetings

Much of a council's work is undertaken through meetings both at full council and committees. There are a number of challenges councils face when determining the arrangements for these meetings including the timing of the meetings, opportunities for the public to attend and contribute and communication of the impact on communities and individuals as a result of the decisions made. While the majority of these meetings are open to the public, it is recognised that not everyone will be able to attend in person. It is therefore important that information about the items to be considered, the evidence base which will underpin discussions and the outcome is readily available to the public. The public participation strategy should be clear about the communication arrangements around all council meetings. Separate guidance about multi-location meetings has been published.

The 2021 Act requires principal councils to broadcast meetings of the full council live as they happen. This development will allow the public to follow the proceedings of the full council in real time from wherever they are, hear the contribution of their local representatives and understand the issues raised in respect of agenda items. The council is also required to make the broadcast available electronically for a reasonable period after the meeting. This should be available for at least 6 months following the meeting. This should not be seen as a prohibition on councils to the broadcast of other meetings of the council. This is the first step in respect of broadcasting and the Welsh Government intends to

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extend this requirement to a number of other council committee meetings in the future. As part of its strategy councils should explore the views of the public about which of the council's committees they consider should be broadcast. This will require councils to ensure the public are clear about the nature and scope of each of its committees and sub committees.

## Influencing decisions

A principal council must set out in its strategy how it will support people to express their views on decisions before and after they are taken. This could include, for example:

- setting out arrangements for contacting a local councillor, or a relevant cabinet member or senior officer, to make representations directly, and how those representations will be responded to
- setting out how representations can be made at relevant meetings
- holding local meetings to discuss the issues with local people
- including mechanisms for individuals to identify issues for consideration through scrutiny (for example, through arrangements to support the public to suggest topics for scrutiny or opportunities to take part in the scrutiny process)
- opportunities to make their views known via the council's website or social media channels, these should include opportunities for individuals to speak with 'real people' where appropriate rather than simply relying on automated responses or interaction

## Ensuring impact

The expected impact of participation should be integral to design, delivery and monitoring. Councils should consider impact in terms of:

- inviting participation when thinking is still at a formative stage
- providing information that allows for informed consideration

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- giving adequate time for consideration and response
- giving 'real' consideration to the results of participation before a decision is taken
- Councils should set out how participation will influence the council's decision making, how the executive and relevant committees will be involved and what processes will be put in place

Transparency should also be a key feature of these processes as should feedback to those participating about what the impact of their involvement has been. Feedback processes are integral to this so that people can understand and trust that their views were considered seriously and appropriately even though the outcome may not reflect or entirely reflect what they may have hoped for.

The strategy should therefore set out how this feedback cycle will operate in practice.

## Approval and Review

The strategy should set out the arrangements for approval and review within the council and what the proposed review cycle will be. As noted above, it should also set out that the strategy is a living document and to that end processes for on-going review and improvement should also be set out, as well as 'formal' full review periods and processes. The strategy should also set out how it will be evaluated and how the council will incorporate learning from its self and panel assessments conducted under Part 6 of the 2021 Act into any resulting new or revised participation strategy.

# Statutory Guidance on Petitions

## Status of this Guidance

This is statutory guidance made under section 44 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 (the 2021 Act).

## Purpose of this Guidance

This guidance is to support councils in the preparation and maintenance of petition schemes aimed at enabling communities to explore support for specific issues to inform council deliberations.

## What the Act requires

Section 42 of the 2021 Act requires principal councils to make and publish a petition scheme setting out how the council intends to handle and respond to petitions including electronic petitions.

The petition scheme must as a minimum set out:

- how a petition may be submitted to the council
- how and by when the council will acknowledge receipt of a petition
- the steps the council may take in response to a petition received by it
- the circumstances (if any) in which the council may take no further action in response to a petition
- how and by when the council will make available its response to a petition to the person who submitted the petition and to the public

A principal council must review its petition scheme from time to time and, if the council considers it appropriate, revise the scheme.

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If a principal council revises or replaces a petition scheme, it must publish the revised or new scheme.

## Designing a petition scheme

A petition scheme should not be considered as the sole method of receiving public views on matters. Its design and parameters should be set in the context of the council's public participation strategy and informed by the other participation pathways available to members of the public. Therefore, as part of a suite of pathways used as part of the council's wider public participation strategy, it can be a powerful tool in gauging support for specific courses of action.

Well designed and resourced petition systems, working in conjunction and harmony with other participation pathways can have a range of benefits for the public and councils. For example, petitions enable communities to quickly highlight the issues which are of the most concern to them to the council, they can add weight to representations made by ward councillors on their behalf and provide a focus for community discussion. In turn, councils gain valuable insight into the concerns of their communities and can then support communities in addressing these issues.

Petitions should not be considered as a nuisance or threat and should be considered as a good opportunity to hear the views of the public, whether in support or not of something the council may be considering or intending to do.

Councils should, when designing petition schemes, think about the process from the point of view of petitioners, including understanding what petitioners might think "success" will look like at different stages in the process, and how the process can be made as transparent and streamlined as possible.

Councils should have regard to their statutory duties in respect of equalities, Welsh language and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 when preparing their petition scheme.

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Petition schemes should be developed not just to ensure a fair and robust process but also to provide a helpful and positive experience for those people who take the time to submit and promote petitions. This is likely to involve consideration of the following issues:

- a clear explanation of the matters about which the council will accept petitions, including the criteria for making a decision to accept or reject a petition
- how and where advice will be given to petitioners to enable them to engage productively with the process, including measures in place for disabled people and individuals with long term health conditions and neurodiversity
- a clear understanding of the different stages in the petitions scheme, with an explanation of what thresholds will be used to determine the transition from one stage to another
- how petitions fit in with other opportunities for the public to be involved and signposting to other opportunities, either as complementary to a petition or instead of it, including connecting the potential petitioner with their ward councillor
- the correct body to consider a given petition. It is right for petitions to be heard by a variety of different bodies, although the default is likely to be full Council unless it is seen as especially useful for the petition to be heard by a committee that focuses specifically on the subject matter of the petition itself
- petition schemes will need to consider where petitions are considered in scrutiny committees. These committees have no power to act on petitions but could (for example) adopt petitioners' arguments as formal recommendations
- the rights of petitioners to speak in meetings, and how this engages with wider public speaking rights, and rights to make deputations
- how and within what timeframe the council will provide feedback to the petitioner on the success or otherwise of their petition

Councils are encouraged to explore what would constitute good practice around the framework for petition schemes set out in this guidance. For example, what might be an appropriate signature threshold for the consideration of a petition and how and when this threshold would be kept under review. This would

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support a balance between local discretion based on the size of the council, the nature of the scheme and its relationship to other participation pathways in the council and consistency for the members of the public who may be engaged with multiple councils or move from one council area to another.

## **Part 4: governance and scrutiny**

### **Statutory Guidance on Constitutions**

#### **Status of this Guidance**

This is statutory guidance issued under section 38 of the Local Government Act 2000, as amended by section 45 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. A local authority (a county or county borough council in Wales), elected mayor or an executive leader must have regard to it. This guidance replaces previous guidance relating to constitutions issued under this section in 2006.

#### **Purpose of this Guidance**

This guidance is to support councils in the preparation and maintenance of their constitutions.

#### **Developing a Constitution**

Under Section 37 of the Local Government Act 2000, each council operating executive arrangements is required to prepare, keep up to date and publish electronically a document known as the council's 'constitution'. This must include a copy of their standing orders, code of conduct and other information the council considers appropriate.

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The Welsh Ministers issued separate guidance on Modular Constitutions for Welsh councils in 2001. This is regularly updated by Lawyers in Local Government and the WLGA and remains a valuable resource for local authorities.

## Content of the Constitution

Councils should ensure their constitution is easy to use and understand. It will also be supplemented by a constitution guide. Councils should in particular make sure parts of the constitution which deal with related issues are cross-referenced. In considering their constitution, councils should have regard to their statutory duties in relation to the Welsh language, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, equalities, including the public sector socio economic duty, and also that they are now required to publish their constitutions electronically.

The constitution must include:

- such information as the Welsh Ministers may direct, this currently includes information with respect to the discharge of all the council's functions as directed by the Local Government Act 2000 (Local Authority Constitution) (Wales) Direction 2023 made under section 37(1)(a) (annexed to this guidance)
- a copy of the authority's standing orders
- a copy of the authority's code of conduct for members (including co-opted members)
- such other information as the authority considers appropriate

The Local Government Act 2000 (Local Authority Constitution) (Wales) Direction 2023 provides that a constitution must specify the roles of the full council. The arrangements for the discharge of non-executive functions should be a statement of who or which body within the council is responsible for the discharge of non-executive functions, (as described in the Local Authorities Executive Arrangements (Functions and Responsibilities) (Wales) Regulations

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2007 made under Section 13(3)(a) of the Local Government Act 2000) together with a description of the role of the full council. The constitution must be clear as to how decisions are taken, who takes them, which decisions are delegated and to whom and how the decision to delegate is made. Decisions involving significant and/or controversial matters must not be delegated to officers.

There is considerable scope for local choice and diversity in the content of the constitution and the way in which it operates. Many of the matters to be included in the constitution may also be included in an authority's standing orders.

There will be other matters governing the conduct of the authority's affairs which will not be included in standing orders, executive arrangements, the arrangements for the discharge of non-executive functions, the code of conduct for members or the code of conduct for officers. Councils may, if they choose, include any of these other matters in their constitution.

For example, a council should include a description of locally developed protocols governing the relationships between the executive, other councillors and officers. The constitution should be clear these relationships must be constructive and respectful at all times. Also, as well as enabling informal routes for disagreements between members to be addressed, the constitution should provide routes for officers to seek informal resolution of difficulties in relationships with members without the need to escalate to formal processes. The code of conduct for officers should make clear that that code of conduct is incorporated into the officers' contract of employment. It should also be clear that, once informal routes have been exhausted, statutory processes must be followed in relation to any disciplinary action relating to officers falling within the remit of the Local Authorities (Wales) Standing Order Regulations 2006.

Other matters councils should consider including and/or taking into account in their constitutions include:

- the need for a "preamble" (or introduction) to the constitution, setting out the important principles that underpin the constitution's contents and recognising the council's broader obligations to local democracy and local people

- the relationship between Articles of the constitution and more detailed rules of procedure (if this is the structure that a Council chooses to use to organise its constitution)
- the way in which informal discussions between members and officers inform and influence formal decision-making at the council
- the way the council makes decisions in partnership with other councils and other bodies, in particular through public service boards, regional partnership boards, corporate joint committees, and any joint committee established under the Local Government Act 1972
- how the council will appoint members to national park authorities and fire and rescue authorities and how those members will update the council on their work;
- the working arrangements and relationship with community and town councils in the council's area
- rules of procedure which relate to high profile issues for example, the full council procedure rules, including the arrangements in place for the electronic broadcasting of those meetings and the archiving and retention of the broadcasts
- financial procedure rules
- details on arrangements relating to public participation in relation to duties included in sections 39 to 41 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021
- the arrangements for dealing with complaints including interaction with the PSOW
- the needs of equality, diversity and inclusion and the statutory duties related to these and the Welsh language. This relates not only to ensuring that constitutional documents are themselves accessible, but that rules and procedures take account of the needs of people with a wide range of needs. For example, parts of the constitution that relate to the public's right to be involved in decision-making should take account of these needs
- Councils' duties relating to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. Councils' overall legal obligations under this Act are well understood, but it also has implications, for example, through the ways of working, for how councils make formal decisions, and how scrutiny and oversight

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systems operate

- the way the council will fulfil its obligations under the UK General Data Protection Registration (UKGDPR) when dealing with personal information

Importantly, the constitution should be drafted as a flexible document. For example, it should not be necessary to produce a revised constitution every time an ad-hoc committee or sub-committee is appointed to undertake a particular task. However, this needs to be balanced against the need for a constitution to be detailed enough so that anyone who has dealings with the council can use it to determine who is responsible for the matter with which they are concerned.

## Availability of the Constitution

The Act requires that copies of the constitution are published electronically and available at the council's principal office for inspection at all reasonable times. Members of the public should be able to take away copies of the constitution for free or charge representing no more than the cost of providing the copy a reasonable fee. It is also recommended that local authorities should make copies of the constitution available more widely, for example at all their offices, libraries, community buildings etc.

## Review and Revisions to the Constitution

The council's constitution should be kept up to date at all times. Councils should review the constitution regularly to make sure it continues to be fit for purpose, with these reviews being led by councillors, and supported by the council's monitoring officer in consultation with the head of democratic services.

In considering their arrangements for the ongoing review and revision of their constitution councils should consider:

- whether the council constitution will permit the monitoring officer to make "minor" amendments and what constitutes a minor amendment, for example

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the updating of a reference to legislation. Full reviews and major amendments must be agreed at full Council. Councils may wish to systematise this process, by linking it more formally to the annual general meeting to ensure that the constitution is kept under regular review

- arrangements for councillor “ownership” (that is, a clear sense that councillors are responsible for making sure that the constitution is of a high quality). This matter of ownership is important. Ownership must be held by full council; but detailed work can be led by a named committee. Whichever formal space is designated it is important that councillors have regular opportunities to reflect on the strength of the governance framework, of which the constitution forms a central part

An individual councillor may propose additions, amendments, suspensions or withdrawals to the council’s constitution, but in doing so would have to declare any interest they have before obtaining a decision of the full council. Any proposal should also be accompanied by advice from the Monitoring Officer to full Council (or any committee or member considering potential changes).

All proposed changes, unless previously agreed as being ‘minor’ have to be debated by the full council and require a majority vote of those members voting to be accepted.

Any changes the council has resolved to make will come into immediate effect unless the decision specifies otherwise.

The published constitution should be amended within 5 working days of the making of a resolution to ensure the most up to date version of the constitution is always available.

## **The Local Government Act 2000 (Local Authority Constitution) (Wales) Direction 2023**

The Welsh Ministers, in exercise of the power given to them by sections 37(1)(a) of the Local Government Act 2000 (“the Act”), directs each county and

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county borough council (“local authority”) in Wales that the document which they must prepare and keep up to date in accordance with section 37(1) of the Act and referred to in that section as their constitution must contain the information specified in the Schedule.

This direction will have effect from to be confirmed.

The Local Government Act 2000 (Local Authority Constitution) (Wales) Direction 2001 is revoked.

.....

Minister for Finance and Local Government

## The Schedule

### Specified Information

A summary of the constitution.

The roles of members and (if applicable) of the elected mayor including:

- their election and terms of office
- the rights and duties of all members and (if applicable) of the elected Mayor, including the application of family absence for members

The roles of the full council including:

- the functions and actions which are reserved to the full council
- the different types of council meeting and the rules governing the proceedings of those meetings, including the arrangements for multi-location meetings and for their electronic broadcast where this is required on a statutory basis or undertaken voluntarily

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The roles of the chairperson or presiding member of the council, and their respective deputies.

The roles of overview and scrutiny committees including:

- the terms of reference of each of the committees
- the general and specific roles of each of the committees
- the rules governing the proceedings of the committees
- the arrangements in place for the consideration of and response to their reports by the full council and/or the executive

The roles of the standards committee and of any sub-committee of that committee including:

- the membership of the committee and any sub-committee
- the roles, functions, rights and duties of the committee and any sub-committee
- the rules governing the proceedings of the committee and any sub-committee
- the arrangements in place for the consideration of and response to their reports by the full council and/or the executive

The roles of any area committees including:

- the membership, terms of reference and functions of the committees
- the rules governing the proceedings of the committees
- the arrangements in place for the consideration of and response to their reports by the full council and/or the executive

The roles of the governance and audit committee and of any sub-committee of that committee including:

- the membership of the committee and any sub-committee
- the roles, functions, rights and duties of the committee and any sub-committee
- the rules governing the proceedings of the committee and any sub-

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committee

- the arrangements in place for the consideration of and response to their reports by the full council and/or the executive.

The roles of the Democratic Services Committee and of any sub-committee of that committee including:

- the membership of the committee and any sub-committee
- the roles, functions, rights and duties of the committee and any sub-committee
- the rules governing the proceedings of the committee and any sub-committee
- the arrangements in place for the consideration of and response to their reports by the full council and/or the executive.

In the case of a local authority which is operating executive arrangements as defined by section 10(1) of the Act the roles of the executive and of members of the executive including:

- the roles, functions, rights and duties of members of the executive and assistants to the executive, including the maximum number of assistants that may be appointed
- the roles, functions, rights and duties of any elected mayor and any deputy mayor
- the allocation of responsibility for the exercise of social services functions including responsibility for looked after children
- the process for the appointment and removal of members of the executive and assistants to the executive
- the rules governing the proceedings of the executive, including the arrangements for multi-location meetings
- the arrangements for determining and managing the job sharing of executive posts, including the executive leader in relation to managing, and the manner in which this will be considered when allocating seats on committees which include a seat for members of the executive, such as the governance and audit committee and the democratic services committee, to which the

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political balance rules apply. In the case of the executive leader, the arrangements must set out how an election for executive leader will be undertaken where one or more of the potential office holders seeking that office are seeking it on the basis of job sharing arrangements.

Particulars of any arrangements for the discharge of any functions by individual members, another local authority, including corporate joint committees, or for the exercise of any functions jointly with another local authority including:

- the nature of the arrangements and the functions to which they apply
- the membership of any joint committees and sub-committees
- the rules governing the proceedings of any joint committees and sub-committees
- details of any contracting out arrangements

The roles of officers of the local authority including:

- the management structure of the local authority
- the functions of the chief executive, the monitoring officer, the head of democratic services and the chief finance officer (section 151 officer)
- the code of conduct for officers
- the arrangements for recruitment, appointment, remuneration, dismissal and disciplinary action in relation to officers, including officers covered by the Local Authorities (Wales) Standing Order Regulations 2006 and the council's pay policy statement
- details of delegations of functions to officers
- protocols for managing constructive and respectful relationships between officers and members, including informal and formal processes for handling disputes and complaints

The principles and processes for efficient, transparent and accountable decision making within the council and access to information about decision making including rules of procedure for decision making and access to information in respect of the full council, its committees and sub-committees, the executive, overview and scrutiny committees and officers.

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The confidential reporting procedure with references to the authority's codes of conduct for members and employees respectively.

The rules and regulations governing finance, contractual and legal matters including:

- audit procedures
- contracts and procurement rules and procedures including authentication of documents
- the rules governing legal proceedings by and against the local authority

The arrangements to fulfil the duties under sections 91, 92 and 93 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 to report on the council's performance and to arrange and respond to a panel assessment.

The rules and procedures for review and revision of the constitution.

Provisions for the suspension and interpretation of the constitution and elements of it.

The statutory derivations of all of the provisions of the constitution (i.e. the powers and duties under which they are made).

## **The Constitution Guide Statutory Guidance**

### **Status of this Guidance**

This statutory guidance is issued under section 38 of the Local Government Act 2000. A local authority (a county or county borough council in Wales), elected mayor or an executive leader must have regard to it.

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## **Purpose of this Guidance**

This guidance accompanies the requirement set out in section 38 of the Local Government Act 2000, as amended by section 45 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. This section requires councils to publish electronically and keep up to date a guide which explains in ordinary language the content of their constitution.

## **What is the Guide?**

Councils must produce and publish a guide to their constitution. A guide to the constitution is not the same thing as a guide setting out how the council works, although there is likely to be some overlap, nor is it an annotated index of the constitution itself. Councils are likely to already hold material on their website explaining key aspects of their operation, which could be used to form this guide.

## **Consultation and matters to be taken into consideration when preparing the guide**

How to prepare an effective constitution guide should form part of the council's strategy on encouraging public participation in decision making by the council prepared under sections 40 and 41 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. Councils could speak to local people, and to voluntary organisations representing local people, to understand what it would be most helpful to put in the constitution guide.

Councils should also have regard to their statutory duties in respect of equalities, Welsh language and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 when preparing their constitution guide. Councils should involve and consult a wide range of people and groups from diverse backgrounds before publishing the final guide.

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An effective constitution guide will be one that understands the different interactions local people are likely to have with the council, and with local democratic systems, and which focusses in more detail on those interactions. It may bear some similarity with some of the introductory information on councils' websites describing how the council operates.

For example, a guide could provide particular detail on:

- the rights of the public to access information about the council (including the right to inspect accounts, and other formal documents)
- rights of access to meetings, and public speaking rights
- arrangements for petitions

The Welsh Local Government Association and Lawyers in Local Government have produced a model guide to the constitution which councils may find helpful.

## **The Exercise of Functions by Councillors Statutory Guidance**

### **Status of this Guidance**

This is statutory guidance made under Section 56 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 (the Measure). This replaces previous guidance issued on this matter.

### **Purpose of this Guidance**

This is statutory guidance issued in accordance with section 56(6) of the Measure to which the county or county borough council or senior executive member of the local authority must have regard in making arrangements under section 56.

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Powers under section 56 are optional in nature but those councils that decide to use them may have regard to this guidance to assist them.

By giving more autonomy to elected members in their local area, section 56 enhances councillors' ability to resolve issues and problems on behalf of their residents.

## Introduction

The Measure includes powers for councillors to help them tackle issues and resolve problems in their local ward.

Section 56 enables councils to make arrangements for functions to be exercised by individual councillors to allow them to make decisions at an electoral ward level that may result in improvements in their local areas.

Arrangements under this section provide for a non-executive member to exercise those functions in relation to the electoral ward for which the member has been elected, or to exercise functions in relation to their official membership of an outside body.

This guidance seeks to outline potential positive benefits from delegating functions to elected members both within their role as ward members and as the council's official representative on outside bodies. The aim is to support elected members in being the voice of their community within the council and the voice of the council in their community.

## What the Measure says about exercise of functions by councillors

Section 56 gives powers to local authorities to formally delegate powers to individual councillors to carry out any function of the authority. With regard to the range of functions that may be exercised by non-executive councillors, section

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56 allows local authorities flexibility to develop arrangements which may best suit their individual preferences. This includes enabling local authorities to delegate both executive functions and other council functions to non-executive councillors.

Section 56(1) provides that the senior executive member of a local authority may make arrangements for a non-executive member of the authority to exercise a function of the local authority which is the responsibility of the executive. Section 56(2) provides that a local authority may make arrangements for a non-executive member of the authority to exercise any other function of the authority.

However, councils will need to be mindful that section 56(3) stipulates that local authorities may only delegate functions to non-executive members:

- in relation to the electoral ward for which the non-executive member is elected, or
- in relation to the non-executive member's official membership of a body other than the local authority

## **Purpose and objectives of section 56**

The intent behind the provision is to provide councils with a wider range of opportunities to make effective use of elected members' representational role, this could now also be considered in conjunction with the duties placed upon councils in sections 39 to 41 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 (the 2021 Act) to encourage local people to participate in decision making.

It could also be a way of supporting elected member training and development. For example, councils may wish to use the provision as a means to create developmental 'on-the-job' learning initiatives for non-executive members in instances where they may be utilised as council representative on outside bodies such as local health boards, housing associations, voluntary organisations, trusts or agencies. Such 'learning by doing' would be a chance to further councillors' skills and knowledge in a given area and broaden the

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council's overall pool of experienced elected members.

For those outside bodies where more than one member is appointed, councils may wish to delegate functions in a way which empowers non-executive members on occasions where the executive member may be absent.

In these instances, it would be important for the council to ensure those non-executive councillors to whom functions had been delegated receive the support and developmental opportunities necessary for them to successfully fulfil their role.

As a means to provide the necessary transparency and accountability for delegated functions, section 100EA of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by section 57 of the Measure) provides the Welsh Ministers with powers to make regulations to require councils to publicly record decisions made under section 56 of the Measure. This is in order to give the public information about the work undertaken by councillors within their wards. The Welsh Ministers have not exercised this power however councils are encouraged to publish these decisions as a matter of good practice. Councils may also wish to publish delegated decisions of councillors as part of their annual review process.

Although section 56 gives broad powers to delegate any local authority function to an individual member, there are obviously some functions that will be more appropriate than others. It would not be appropriate to delegate powers which are specified as specifically not to be exercised by the executive or not to be exercised solely by the executive in the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Functions and Responsibilities) (Wales) Regulations 2007 as these functions are intended to be exercised by the membership of the council as a whole or one of its committees. Also it would not be appropriate to delegate functions requiring a council wide strategic approach such as social care. But, delegated powers could be used to allow councillors to play a more active role in a wide range of policy areas.

For example, functions that could be delegated may include:

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- powers to effect repairs or improvements to streets. This could include road calming measures or street lighting
- powers to develop and oversee youth activities within the area of an electoral ward

## Factors to consider when delegating powers

When considering whether or not to delegate functions to non-executive members, councils may wish to give thought to the following issues in relation to members:

- What value can be added by delegating powers? What specific local problems will be able to be tackled as a result?
- Would councillors need additional support such as legal advice in the discharge of delegated functions?
- How will members be supported if their decisions are challenged, for example, by judicial review?
- How will councillors publicly record decisions made using their new powers?
- Integrating the learning and participation generated through the delegation in to wider initiatives and strategies including statutory ones to strengthen them.
- How the delegations support the council in meeting statutory duties in relation to equalities, Welsh language, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the duty to encourage participation in the 2021 Act.

For officers, in supporting elected members discharge delegated functions, things to think about include:

- working more closely with councillors to develop their knowledge and skills
- providing advice and reports to ensure delegated powers are used effectively and in accordance with duties placed upon the council, including advice on statutory duties such as those contained in the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015, the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 and the Equality Act 2010

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- Will members need legal advice and support to discharge the delegated functions?
- How will members be supported if their decisions are challenged, for example, by judicial review?
- How will the decisions made by councillors with delegated functions be officially recorded?
- Implementing decisions that are made under delegated powers
- developing processes to appropriately record decisions made by a councillor under these powers

## Some practical considerations

Practically speaking, most local authorities will probably wish to amend their constitutions to put in place arrangements for delegating powers to councillors. Councils may wish to utilise existing procedures used to delegate powers to cabinet members when developing frameworks for delegating functions to non-executive members. In particular, any decisions made by non-executive members using delegated functions should be subject to the same call-in procedures as relate to executive functions more generally. Further options councils may wish to adopt include:

- establishing enabling powers in their constitution for the purpose of delegating powers to non-executive members to be used as and when needed
- using delegated powers to tackle specific area based issues in response to local challenges

It is for councils to decide the extent and means by which they wish to use the powers under section 56. It is advised that councils should develop a protocol to define when and under what conditions a function will be delegated to a non-executive member. Also, that the training, development and support the councillor might require to undertake the role is considered as part of their annual training review. When making arrangements to delegate powers, councils should take into account the need to avoid the possibility of allegations

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of favouring councillors of a particular political persuasion. In multi-member wards, local authorities should make the same arrangements for delegated functions including any associated budgetary arrangements to apply to each elected member or to none.

## **Multi-member Wards**

The powers in the Measure relate to individual councillors but local authorities may need to put arrangements in place to ensure that delegated powers are used jointly by all members representing a particular ward especially if those members are from different political parties.

If functions are delegated to councillors within the same ward, councils may wish to produce guidance and support aimed at ensuring decisions undertaken in wards are co-ordinated and complementary in improving outcomes for local people.

## **Links with Councillor Calls for Action (CCfA)**

Where councils have decided to take advantage of the powers under section 56, they will find that there are some close links with CCfA. Members exercising delegated powers may find that they have more opportunities to resolve issues locally without having recourse to CCfA. CCfAs on particular issues may encourage councils to use section 56 to delegate powers to members to resolve those issues locally.

# **Council Executives Statutory Guidance**

## **Status of this Guidance**

This guidance is statutory guidance issued under section 38 of the Local

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Government Act 2000 and a county or county borough council, elected mayor or executive leader must have regard to it. This section was amended by section 59 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 to provide for Welsh Ministers to issue guidance under section 38 which ‘may among other things, include provision designed to encourage good practice in relation to equality and diversity (within the meaning of section 8(2) of the Equality Act 2006).’

## Purpose of this Guidance

The purpose of this guidance is to require the executive leader of a council to take into account diversity when appointing their cabinet. The aim is to support and encourage decision making in the executive which understands and reflects the diversity of the communities in the council area.

This guidance also requires council executives to take a proactive, positive and constructive approach to its interactions with scrutiny in the council.

## Diversity in Cabinets

When establishing their cabinet the executive leader or elected mayor must have regard to statutory duties relating to equalities and the Welsh language. This includes consideration of the protected characteristics set out in the Equalities Act 2010, including the public sector duty to have due regard to the need to reduce the inequalities of outcome resulting from socio-economic disadvantage.

The leader or mayor must consider how their appointments to the cabinet reflect and support the diversity of the communities in the council area and as far as possible try to reflect this diversity. This is to ensure decision making in the executive is informed by a wide range of perspectives and experiences. The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 (the “2021 Act”) provides executive leaders with opportunities to increase the diversity in their cabinet

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through the use of job sharing arrangements and/or the appointment of assistants to the executive.

When appointing two or more members to a job sharing arrangement the leader must not make the cabinet role covered by the job sharing arrangement of such a size that it could not reasonably be undertaken by a single cabinet member working on their own. The workload of the role must not increase simply because two or more members will now be undertaking it. The purpose is to support diversity, including through succession planning, to enable members to genuinely share the role.

## **Job Sharing Executive Leaders and Executive Members**

Section 58 of the 2021 Act amends the Local Government Act 2000 to require councils with executive arrangements to make provision enabling two or more councillors to share office on that executive, including the office of leader of the executive. It is envisaged, that the most likely scenario in the case of the leader of an executive, is that 2 or more members would mutually make an arrangement to stand for election as executive leader on the basis of a job-sharing arrangement. The executive procedures and council procedures must provide for this.

In the case of executive members, it is for the executive leader to determine appointments to the executive based on the arrangements set out and agreed in the council's constitution. The constitution must set out the parameters for the operation of job-sharing arrangements in the executive. The number of executive posts (including that of executive leader) that can be filled on a job-sharing basis is limited to three by the 2000 Act. This is to ensure that in councils with a smaller number of members there are still sufficient members to provide proper scrutiny of the executive.

When making appointments on a job-sharing basis the executive leader should consider matters including how:

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- this could increase the diversity in the executive to best reflect the diversity in the council's area
- job-sharing members will be supported to ensure they can maintain a reasonable work life balance
- those arrangements may offer opportunities for succession planning in the executive

The terms of the job-sharing arrangements should be clear and agreed in advance. Members of the job sharing arrangement, their cabinet colleagues, other elected members and officers will need to understand how the responsibilities of the cabinet role subject to the job sharing arrangement are to be discharged. Job-sharing arrangements should not be used solely as a means of increasing the number of executive members or to create roles for job-sharing members which equate to workloads greater than if the cabinet position was held by an individual member. However, 1 member of the arrangement focusing on some aspects of the role and another member focusing on others enables skills and knowledge to be utilised to best effect.

In the case of both job-sharing executive leaders and job-sharing executive members, the two or more members in the job-sharing arrangement are to be treated as 1 member when attending a meeting in their capacity as members of the executive for voting purposes and for the purposes of determining whether a meeting is quorate. The exception is where 1 member of a job sharing arrangement makes a declaration of interest and has to recuse themselves from the meeting and voting, the other member or members of the arrangement may remain and exercise the vote ascribed to the job share arrangement.

Should 2 or more of the members in a job-sharing arrangement attend a meeting in their capacity as executive members they should both be recorded as having attended the meeting and they both may speak at the meeting. However, should the meeting require a vote to be cast, they must decide between them in advance who will cast their vote and inform the chair of the meeting. There is then a careful balance to be struck between pre-determination and proper preparation for the meeting amongst the job-sharers which should include an exploration on their position, what questions they may have on the matter and

what further information they might wish to see, in the same way that it would be expected they would manage all aspects of their job-sharing arrangements to ensure continuity and consistency of approach between themselves.

If 1 member of a job-sharing arrangement attends a meeting in their capacity as a member of the executive and the meeting requires a vote then the attending member must cast their vote taking into account preparatory discussions with their job-sharing partners.

Where a member of a job-sharing arrangement casts a vote at a meeting they have attended which is subsequently identified as contrary to any preparatory discussions between job-sharing partners, unless the contradiction is attributable to debate and discussion in the meeting, then that vote may be treated as invalid for the purpose of decision making, as the vote is allocated to the job-sharing arrangement and not to the individual member of that arrangement who has attended the meeting.

It will be for each council to determine the appropriate course of action at that point, based on the specific circumstances, to ensure integrity of decision making is maintained. Councils should explain the significance of this aspect of job-sharing clearly to any members participating in executive job-sharing arrangements in advance and it should form part of induction and training for executive members.

As noted above, councils and job-sharing members should recognise that the successful operation of job-sharing arrangements will require the establishment of effective working arrangements from the outset and high levels of trust between the job-sharing members. The working arrangements should include how disputes between job-sharers will be resolved.

Councils will need to consider how they communicate the position in respect of job -share arrangements to external organisations to which job-sharing members are appointed in their capacity as an executive member.

Councils must consider the implications for political balance requirements for

those committees which are subject to political balance requirements and on which a job-sharing member of the executive may sit i.e. the Governance and Audit Committee and the Democratic Services Committee. This will require consideration where a job-sharing arrangement consists of members from more than one political group or a political group or groups and an unaffiliated member or members (where an unaffiliated member is a member not registered with the proper officer as being a member of a political group for the purposes of sections 15 to 17 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989).

The treatment of job-sharing partners as if they were one member for the purposes of voting and quorums for meetings they attend as executive members does not extend to meetings they attend in their roles as members of the council.

## **Assistants to the Executive**

Section 57 of the 2021 Act amends the 2000 Act to provide for the appointment of assistants to the executive. The aim is to support diversity by enabling members who might not be in a position to take up a full time executive role because of personal or other circumstances to have the opportunity to learn and develop. Whilst not members of the executive, assistants can attend and speak at executive meetings or at committees of the executive and could bring valuable diversity and insight into discussions.

The Council's constitution, which must be agreed by the full council, and its executive arrangements must include provision as to the number of assistants to the executive that may be appointed, their term of office and their responsibilities. Again, there should be a clear purpose to the appointment of assistants to the executive, and these appointments should not be used solely as a means of increasing the number of members able to make a contribution to the running of the executive.

The 2000 Act (as amended) provides that neither the chair nor the vice-chair of the council nor the presiding member, or deputy presiding member can be

appointed as assistants to the executive.

Whilst assistants to the executive are not members of the executive, they are treated as if they are members of the executive for the purposes of the allocation of seats on scrutiny committees where neither members of the executive nor assistants to the executive can be members. Likewise, the committees which are able to include one member of the executive, the Governance and Audit Committee, the Democratic Services Committee and the Standards Committee, can only have a member of the executive or an assistant to the executive as part of their membership (Schedule 6, to the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 and The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 Consequential Amendments (Job-Sharing and Assistants to the Executive) Regulations 2022.

## Scrutiny and Call-ins

Cabinets should recognise the importance of effective scrutiny for the good governance of the council overall and reflect this in their constitutions. They should respond promptly and constructively to requests from scrutiny for information, attendance at meetings and other reasonable requests.

Executives should note that Section 65 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 amended section 22(10) of the Local Government Act 2000 which provides Welsh Ministers with a power to make regulations which include provision for or in connection with requiring prescribed information about prescribed decisions made in connection with the discharge of functions which are the responsibility of a local authority executive to be made available to members of the public or members of the authority to include an overview and scrutiny committee of the authority or a sub-committee of such a committee. This is intended to convey the seriousness which Welsh Ministers attach to effective co-operation and information sharing between the executive and scrutiny and its place at the heart of the good and effective governance of the council.

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Cabinets should set the tone for organisational commitment to effective scrutiny by ensuring there is parity of esteem between scrutiny and the executive and encouraging scrutiny to operate in a cross party constructive manner.

Cabinets should respond promptly and respectfully to recommendations from scrutiny explaining whether the recommendation will be accepted or rejected, the reasons for these decisions and what actions will be taken. Cabinets should publish their response electronically and the response should be available to the public except for matters exempt from publication.

Cabinets should be open to the need for appropriate use of call-ins and respond in a prompt and constructive manner to such requests. Cabinets should support the design of effective and proportionate call in rules which do not make call-ins overly difficult or impossible.

Leaders and cabinets should also be respectful and mindful of the role of statutory officers such as the chief executive, the monitoring officer and the section 151 officer and their appointment by and role in serving the council as a whole. In exercising their functions, leaders and cabinets must remain within the parameters of the statutory framework and the council's own constitution. They must respect the role council officers play in advising them of these parameters and the interaction of this role with the scrutiny process and decisions required either by statute or the council's constitution to be taken by the full council.

## **Political Assistants Non Statutory Guidance**

### **Status of the guidance**

This is non-statutory guidance on the appointment of political assistants to political groups.

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## Purpose of this guidance

The purpose of this guidance is to explain provisions in the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 relating to the appointment of political assistants and to encourage councils to be open and transparent regarding the role and activities of the political assistants they employ.

## Political Assistants

Local authority political assistants are local government employees who undertake research and provide administrative support for the main political groups within an authority.

The existence of these posts allows a separation of professional officer and political roles and can enable the provision of advice to councillors that local authority officers are prevented from providing.

**Part I of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989** sets out the framework regulating the appointment and conduct of political assistants.

Under section 2 of the 1989 Act, the post of political assistant in a local authority is politically restricted. This means that, like other politically restricted posts, the post-holder cannot stand for election, act as an election agent or sub-agent, be an officer of a political party, manage a party or branch of a party, and cannot canvass on behalf of a political party or candidate for election.

Political assistants are, however, permitted to speak to the public with the intention of affecting support for a political party, but their actions must not give the impression that they are acting as the representative of the political party.

Political assistants are also able to publish or cause to be published written work or other material intended to affect public support for a political party, but they must not give the impression that the publication is authorised by the political

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party.

These rules were adopted to address concerns about political impartiality, conflict of interest and the use of taxpayer funds for political purposes in councils. Further details on the restrictions in place can be found in the [Local Government Officers \(Political Restrictions\) Regulations 1990](#).

The restrictions take the form of terms and conditions that are deemed to be incorporated into those officers' terms of appointment and conditions of employment. The restrictions applicable to all holders of politically restricted posts are set out in [Part I of the Schedule](#) to the Regulations. [Part II of Schedule](#) provides for further terms and conditions for political assistants.

## Appointments

Under [section 9 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989](#), a local authority may appoint up to 3 assistants for political groups subject to stringent conditions and safeguards.

The 3 largest political groups in each authority qualify for a political assistant if the membership of the group consists of at least 10% of the membership of the authority. The exception is where only one political group accounts for at least 10% of the membership, in which case the next biggest group also qualifies.

No appointments can be made until posts have been established for all qualifying groups, however, only one post can be appointed to a political party.

Under [section 7 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989](#) employees of a local authority must be appointed on merit. Section 9 provides an exception to this principle. The appointment of each political assistant is down to the political group each post (political assistant) is to represent. The appointee can take account of the candidate's political activities during the selection process, although the posts are 'politically restricted' (as described above).



Once appointed line management responsibility for political assistants should be assigned to one of the authority's senior officers. However, in practice, political assistants' day to day work will be determined and managed by the relevant political group and its political group leader. Authorities should therefore consider how any conflicts or disputes will be resolved, perhaps through the development and agreement of a protocol.

## Remuneration and contracts

It is for the authority to determine the salary payable, however, it is expected that local authorities show restraint and allow pay increases in a proportionate manner in line with wider local government pay.

**The Local Government (Assistants for Political Groups) (Remuneration) (Wales) (Amendment) Order 2019** sets the maximum level of potential pay that political assistants can be paid.

Under **section 9(4)(b) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989** the maximum salary set by regulations is a full-time equivalent figure so it is not possible to pay an annual salary at an hourly rate for part-time hours if this would breach the maximum amount stipulated if the political assistant were to work full-time.

The contract of employment must terminate at or before the annual council meeting following the first elections after the person was appointed. However, this does not prevent the post holder being reappointed for a further term. The local authority cannot delegate any functions to an assistant, and no other authority officer can be required to work under the direction of an assistant (other than in respect of secretarial or clerical services).

## Openness and transparency

Each local authority is under a duty to draw-up and regularly update a list of

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posts which are politically restricted and political assistants are expected to comply with the officer code of conduct of their authority.

Local authorities should consider publishing the details below as best practice:

- the total number of political assistants it employs
- the political group each assistant serves
- the number of councillors in each political group
- the number of hours per week for which each political group's assistant is employed

## **Arrangements for Securing Effective Overview and Scrutiny Statutory Guidance**

### **Status of this Guidance**

This guidance is statutory guidance issued under section 38 of the Local Government Act 2000. A county or county borough council, elected mayor or an executive leader must have regard to it. It replaces previous guidance issued in 2012.

### **Purpose of this Guidance**

The purpose of this guidance is to ensure councils have effective scrutiny arrangements and that procedures are in place to regularly review and seek to improve the effectiveness of those arrangements.

### **Policy Intent**

Overview and scrutiny is an essential element of the political and general governance of the council. The council and executive culture should be open to

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and supportive of scrutiny and scrutiny should be provided with staff and resources to enable it to effectively undertake its functions, including holding the council executive to account.

It is recognised that difficult decisions will always have to be made in relation to council finances but the overriding principle should be that investment in scrutiny also contributes to better services for local people by providing another channel for people to be involved in the decisions that affect them and driving a culture of learning and improvement across the council as whole. This principle should be considered in light of sections 39 to 41 of the Local Government and Elections Act 2021 (the 2021 Act) in terms of the duty to encourage local people to participate on decision making and prepare a strategy on encouraging participation and the duty on a principal council to keep its performance under review, including the conduct of its self and panel assessments and consulting local people as part of that duty as required by sections 89 and 90 of the 2021 Act.

Effective scrutiny of collaborative arrangements with other councils such as joint committees and corporate joint committees and cross public service partnership arrangements such as public service boards must be viewed as essential in ensuring that those arrangements are democratically accountable to local people.

## **Processes and Relationships**

To achieve the policy intent scrutiny should not sit aside from other processes which form part of the council's governance system. Arrangements for overview and scrutiny should be set out clearly in the council's constitution and constitution guide required by section 37 of the Local Government Act 2000.

Scrutiny should be an integral part of the council's self-assessment under Part 6 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 (the 2021 Act) and should also be considered when the council arranges its panel assessment.

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The role scrutiny plays in involving local people to participate in decision making under section 39 of the 2021 Act should be set out in the strategy the council must prepare and consult upon in sections 40 and 41.

Scrutiny chairs should have good working relationships with each other and regularly discuss approaches to scrutiny and learn from the work of other scrutiny committees within the council and in other councils. Scrutiny chairs should also establish good working relationships with the chair of the governance and audit committee and the standards committee, as well as the chair or presiding member of the council and the chairs of other committees. They should also foster good working relationships with internal and external auditors and with regulators.

The effectiveness of scrutiny is in part dependent on mutual respect between those charged with scrutiny of the executive and the executive itself. Chairs should therefore develop constructive working relationships with the council's executive in particular, the leader, cabinet members, chief executive and senior officials. The council's executive are required to reciprocate this approach to constructive working under statutory guidance also issued under section 38 of the Local Government Act 2000.

## Effective Working

All scrutiny committees should adopt the most effective ways of working to ensure they are able to fulfil their role. This may include:

- the consideration of matters as part of a multi-item committee agenda. Here, councils should ensure the number of items on a single agenda does not make it difficult for members to consider the matter in question in depth
- the consideration of matters at a single-item committee agenda. This provides more flexibility around approach, involving panels of witnesses, and potentially some public participation. One off "challenge panels" can be a proportionate and effective way to dig into a topic
- task and finish groups. "Task and finish" groups are small, informal groups of

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members, commissioned by a committee to investigate a topic and to report back. Task and finish groups are not subject to rules about the meeting of committees, because they are informal bodies

- the convening of a short task and finish group. A group that meets only a couple of times over a few weeks will be able to tackle a narrow, defined subject. It is likely to be possible for a review to be commissioned, and then to report back to the next meeting of the same committee
- the convening of a longer task and finish group. The “traditional” task and finish group model is for a body that meets multiple times over several months, building a comprehensive evidence base

The commissioning of task and finish groups, where it happens, should involve the agreement of a scope, setting out the terms of reference of the group and the timescale for carrying out its work.

Task and finish groups can meet either in private, or in public. When they have completed their work, task and finish groups should submit a report and recommendations to the committee that has commissioned them. This should also include some record of the proceedings of the group (including information on where, and from whom, evidence has been gathered), particularly if the group has met in private. The committee can then decide to adopt the recommendations, submitting them to the council’s executive or another body for a response.

All ways of working demand careful planning. Councils should, in programming work, consider in some detail the scope of a topic and how it should be considered so as to maximise its impact. In some cases this may involve councillors’ meetings beforehand, either in private or in public, to discuss questioning strategy, or otherwise meeting to plan scrutiny work. Resourcing arrangements for scrutiny should take into account the necessity for officer support for this planning activity.

## Resourcing and Information

To be effective scrutiny must be resourced and have access to officers dedicated to supporting scrutiny committees to plan, manage and execute their work programmes. Officers not directly supporting scrutiny should be mindful that their employment is with the council and not the executive, they should therefore provide scrutiny committees with support and information in a constructive and timely manner to assist their work. This may sometimes present challenges for officers but members of scrutiny committees and members of the executive should also be mindful of these conflicts and these matters should be considered when protocols are developed governing the relationships between officers and members for inclusion in the council's constitution.

Section 65 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 amended section 22(10) of the Local Government Act 2000 which provides Welsh Ministers with a power to make regulations which include provision for or in connection with requiring prescribed information about prescribed decisions made in connection with the discharge of functions which are the responsibility of a local authority executive to be made available to members of the public or members of the authority to include an overview and scrutiny committee of the authority or a sub-committee of such a committee. This is intended to convey the seriousness which Welsh Ministers attach to effective co-operation and information sharing between the executive and scrutiny and its place at the heart of the good and effective governance of the council.

## Reviewing Scrutiny

Effective scrutiny is itself open to regular review and arrangements should be put in place for this to take place as part of the council's self-assessment processes. Peer review is also a good way to review effectiveness and learn from the experience of other scrutineers.

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# Appointment of Persons to Chair Overview and Scrutiny Committees Statutory Guidance

## Status of this Guidance

This is statutory guidance made under Section 75 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 (the Measure). This guidance replaces previous guidance issued under this section in relation to the appointment of persons to chair overview and scrutiny committees in 2012.

## Purpose of this Guidance

To provide guidance to councils on the appointment of persons to chair overview and scrutiny committees.

## Introduction

Part 6 of the Measure deals with overview and scrutiny, including, from sections 66 to 75, provisions relating to the appointment of chairs of overview and scrutiny committees (scrutiny committees). The policy intent is to ensure overview and scrutiny is not dominated by the political groups on the executive of the council, and can act independently.

## What the Measure requires

Local authorities must include within their standing orders arrangements for the appointment of the chairs of their scrutiny committees which are in line with the following:

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## **Council with no political groups declared**

Each scrutiny committee elects its own chair.

## **Council with only one declared political group**

Each scrutiny committee elects its own chair.

## **Council has 2 political groups but only 1 scrutiny committee**

The scrutiny committee elects its own chair. If, however, one of the groups (A) is represented in the council executive but the other (B) is not, that other group (B) must be left to appoint the chair.

## **Council with 2 or more political groups and multiple scrutiny committees**

If there is more than one political group on the executive they can only be allocated as many chairs as is proportionate to their combined share of the council's total membership. This should be rounded down if it does not equate a whole number. It is then for the political groups on the executive to decide on the distribution of the executive's allocation of chairs between themselves.

The rest of the scrutiny chairs are the "property" of those groups not represented in the executive. If there is only one such group, they are entitled to all the remaining chairs. If there is more than one non-executive group, each gets a share of the chairs in proportion to their membership, rounding down to the nearest whole number, including zero. For example:

- number of members of council = 60
- number in executive groups(s) = 26
- number of scrutiny chairs = 5

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- number for executive groups = 2
- number of chairs remaining = 3
- number of non-executive group(s) = 3
- size of non-executive group C = 16
- size of non-executive group D = 6
- size of non-executive group E = 2
- entitlement to scrutiny chairs of C = 2
- entitlement of scrutiny chairs of D = 1
- entitlement of scrutiny chairs of E = 0

Should there be any unallocated chairs following this calculation, then the chair is to be appointed by the members of that committee(s).

If all political groups in an authority are represented in the executive and the rounding down process results in unallocated chairs, any such chairs are also to be appointed by the members of those committees.

### **Council where political group refuses to take allocation of chairs**

Where a political group declines to take its allotment of chairs, none of those chairs can be allocated to an executive group. The vacant positions are to be offered to the other political groups in proportion to their size. In the example above, if A refused their 2 chairs, the opposition groups would be entitled to appoint the chairs of 5 committees and the allocations should be C = 3, D = 1, E = 1. If C refused their 2 chairs, the other groups would be entitled to one each. If D refused its single chair that would go to E, as group C has already had its allocation rounded up to give it 2.

In a council where there is only one non-executive group and this group is declining its chairs, or in a council where there are other non-executive groups but each of them declines to take the vacant chairs, it is left to each scrutiny committee to elect its own chair from any of its membership.

## **Political make-up of the executive changes**

If a political group leaves or joins the executive, the exercise of allocation of chairs begins again in accord with the provisions described above.

## **Filling casual vacancies**

Should a scrutiny chair be vacated for some reason, the chair should normally be allocated to the same political group as the outgoing chair. If, however, the chair has been elected by the committee itself, then the committee should appoint the new chair.

## **Council wishes to operate different allocation system**

A council may decide to abandon the processes outlined above, but only if it wishes to bring about an allocation of scrutiny chairs which is more favourable to the non-executive groups than would be produced by the prescribed procedures. For this to happen, a majority within each political group must support the alternative proposal, and the proposal must be approved by a resolution of the full council, with a majority of members of every political group voting in favour of the resolution.

## **Appointment of vice-chairs**

The allocation of any committee vice-chairs is a matter for each authority to decide upon.

Welsh Ministers may make regulations in relation to the allocation of chairs and also issue directions. At the time of issuing this guidance there are no plans to do either.

## Guidance

The provisions of sections 66 onwards provide little room for manoeuvre. Councils' standing orders should set a timetable for the appointment processes to be completed.

Where a situation arises where the allocation procedures outlined in this guidance appear inadequate to deal with a particular situation, councils should first consult their legal advisers for an opinion. Welsh Government officials may be contacted for advice by those legal advisers if necessary.

The spirit of the legislation is clear. It reflects a policy position in favour of scrutiny being, as far as possible, independent from the leadership of a council.

## Co-opted Members of Overview and Scrutiny Committees Statutory Guidance

### Status of this Guidance

This is statutory guidance made under Section 76 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 (the Measure). It relates to the co-option of persons that are not members of local authorities onto their overview and scrutiny committees in accordance with section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000. This guidance replaces previous guidance issued in 2012.

### Purpose of this Guidance

The purpose of this guidance is to provide a framework for councils to consider when appointing co-opted members to overview and scrutiny committees. In particular it requires councils to have regard to how co-option could bring a wide range of different skills and increased diversity to overview and scrutiny

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committees.

## Policy Intent

Co-option of members to overview and scrutiny committees who are not councillors is a way to build a more diverse membership. It can provide a way to support broader public participation in local democracy and should form part of the council's strategy on encouraging participation as required by section 40 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

In making arrangements for co-option, councils might:

- think about the needs of under-represented groups, and the barriers that might otherwise exist for such groups to engage with the business of the authority
- consider co-option alongside other methods of assuring public participation such as inviting people with valuable perspectives and experience to engage as witnesses or technical advisers as co-option may not always be the best way to garner the views and experience of some people

Co-opted members on committees can significantly strengthen their effectiveness by bringing different perspectives. Whilst co-option is only one method by which the views of stakeholders can help shape the work of scrutiny committees, it is considered by the Welsh Government to be an important tool in achieving 'buy-in' from representative groups and individuals that may otherwise be disengaged from local decision-making processes. Co-option can serve to strengthen Members' community leadership role through the provision of alternative perspectives and the facilitation of stronger area-based networks and contacts.

The Welsh Government considers that including a broader range of specialists, community representatives and service-users in scrutiny exercises is advantageous, and that proactively engaging co-optees in scrutiny activity, enables elected members to send powerful messages about involving people

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and partners through their own structures and practice.

In recognition of the rich impact multi-perspective scrutiny can have in driving improvement, panels have been established to scrutinise the work of Public Service Boards whose membership span sectoral, organisational and geographic boundaries. To date these panels have included co-optees from voluntary organisations, local health boards, community health councils, police and crime panels, Natural Resources Wales, and local business forums who have been working alongside elected members to improve local services. When appointing co-optees from partner public bodies, individuals should be from a non-executive function within their organisation, where possible, to avoid any conflict of interest.

Some of the important benefits accruing from these arrangements have been the cross-transference of learning and the breaking down of organisational fragmentation in addressing 'wicked issues'. These practices have indicated that partnership working and co-option may be seen as processes that increase local democratic input and integration across different parts of the public sector.

## Deciding when to co-opt

Any appointment of co-optees should be informed by scrutiny forward work plans and what outcomes elected members are seeking to achieve as the result of planned scrutiny exercises. Councils are advised to think carefully about the use of co-option as a means to develop partner relations or improved public connections that may add significant value to the work of scrutiny committees.

In all instances where co-option is being considered, care should be taken to ensure that co-option is in fact the best way for some individuals or groups of interest to be involved in the work of scrutiny committees. Groups of interest should include protected characteristics equality groups in recognition of the value these perspectives can add to the work of local authority scrutiny committees. In some circumstances it may be more appropriate for stakeholders to act as 'expert advisors' of a task and finish group or to be included as an

invitee at scrutiny committee meetings. For example, some vulnerable groups or service users may feel intimidated by the formality of full committee meetings and may wish to submit written or oral evidence in support of a scrutiny review. The nature of stakeholder involvement in scrutiny work will need to be established on a case by case basis.

Also, organisations who are financially supported by partner agencies may feel reluctant to challenge the performance of funding providers in a public arena. Steps should be taken to minimise the risk of co-optees experiencing conflicts of interest as a result of being involved in scrutiny work.

## Identifying potential co-opted members

Councils may wish to think about employing several strategies to identify co-optees that are likely to enrich scrutiny activity.

For example, councils may wish to:

- approach town and community councils in the area to nominate representatives for co-option on to committees
- advertise in the local press
- utilise social networking sites
- approach wider 'sectoral organisations' such as the voluntary sector or local business forums for co-optee nomination
- invite former co-optees with specific interest or expertise, to attend scrutiny meetings in an 'advisory capacity' when there are relevant items on the agenda

Councils may also wish to develop an application form for groups or individuals to complete to express an interest in becoming a co-optee. Such forms could be made available from the scrutiny web pages of local authorities or advertised in the local press. Again, consideration should be given to protected characteristic equality groups.

## Recruiting co-opted members

Councils will need to ensure that recruitment processes in relation to co-optees, whether this be on an individual or representational basis, are inclusive and fair so as to encourage people with a wide diversity of knowledge, skills and experience to participate in scrutiny activity.

To assist committees in recruiting co-optees it is suggested that councils consider developing outline role descriptions for co-opted members. These would help to clarify the expectations of both committees and potential co-opted members. Some councils have also found it helpful when selecting a co-opted member when more than 1 application has been received to identify competencies against which an application for a position is evaluated.

However, as a general rule it is suggested that committees should ensure co-opted members are able to:

- represent the interests of the population that receive services provided by or commissioned by public service providers
- contribute expert knowledge or skills that will lead to a rigorous and objective scrutiny of the issues under review
- live or work in the county or county borough area

Councils should have a protocol to govern co-option to scrutiny committees, to provide consistency and transparency on these issues. The protocol should form part of scrutiny's rules of procedure.

## Scrutiny Committees: number of co-opted members

In recognition of the democratic mandate of councillors it is recommended that the number of co-opted members on a scrutiny committee should not exceed a third of the total membership of the committee.

It is suggested however, that approaches to co-option be informed by an appreciation of what the co-optee will be able to contribute to the issue under consideration rather than a narrow focus on numbers of co-opted members.

Such an approach will help committees decide whether or not the participation of co-opted members remains relevant to its work priorities or whether there is need to refresh co-opted membership from time to time.

## **Sub-Committees: number of co-opted members**

In recognition of the varied ways in which sub-committees operate, it is recommended that no limit be placed on the number of co-opted members that may participate in a sub-committee.

However, it is considered that it should be the case that co-opted members should not comprise the whole membership of the sub-committee.

## **Types of appointment for co-opted Members**

As previously highlighted, scrutiny committees have a wide range of options available to them with regard to appointing co-opted members.

In their recruitment processes councils may specify that the appointment of a co-opted member is to be:

1. for the life of the committee
2. until such time as it decides to terminate the appointment
3. for the purpose of a particular review or performance monitoring exercise

It is advised that successful applicants be required to sign a statement of appointment that will include terms governing appropriate conduct. Specifically, on accepting office, co-opted members should be required to declare that they will observe the Code of Conduct for Members in the particular council's



constitution which covers, among other matters, treating others with respect, not disclosing confidential information and disclosing relevant personal interests.

To ensure that co-opted members are provided with the information and skills necessary to fully participate in scrutiny activity, it is recommended that councils take steps to provide co-optees with appropriate induction training in addition to other training and developmental opportunities.

## **Voting rights and Code of Conduct**

The Measure does not afford co-opted members of scrutiny committees with any voting rights. Consequently, they are therefore not bound by statute to comply with the Code of Conduct for Elected members as provided for by Part 3 of the Local Government Act 2000. However, co-opted members should be encouraged to abide by the principles set out in the code and conduct themselves to the highest standards of ethical behaviour. There are other statutory co-optees whose roles attract voting rights. These include: those members co-opted under the provisions of paragraph 8 to Schedule 1 to the Local Government Act 2000, the Parent Governor Representatives and Church Representatives (Wales) Regulations 2001 and the Crime and Disorder (Overview and Scrutiny) Regulations 2009. Any members co-opted under these provisions are required by law to comply with the Code of Conduct.

## **Call in' Arrangements in relation to Overview and Scrutiny Committees Statutory Guidance**

### **Status of this Guidance**

This guidance is statutory guidance issued under section 38 of the Local Government Act 2000. A county or county borough council elected mayor or an executive leader must have regard to it. This guidance replaces any previous

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guidance issued on this matter.

## Purpose of this Guidance

The purpose of this guidance is to set out matters local authorities should take in to account when making their arrangements under section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000 in relation to the powers of overview and scrutiny committees to review and scrutinise decisions made, including those not yet implemented by the executive and make recommendations for those decisions to be reconsidered. The process commonly referred to as 'call in'.

## Policy Intent

The call in process is an important part of the political governance of the council. The rules of procedure a council sets out in relation to call in should strike a balance between enabling open and transparent overview and scrutiny of decisions and preventing deliberate filibustering of the council's operation. For these reasons, councils should ensure that clear and consistent call-in rules form a part of their constitutions.

## Guidance

Call-ins should not be regarded as a regular tool for scrutiny and they should not by default become a means of compensating for deficiencies elsewhere in scrutiny procedures. The more constructive approach is to put in place procedures which facilitate more, proportionate, pre-decision scrutiny.

Call-in rules should make reference to:

- the kinds of decision which will be subject to call-in. These will usually be key decisions, set out in the executive's forward plan
- the number of councillors who need to request a call-in for it to be valid

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- any other limits to call-in requests for example, a need for a decision to cover two or more electoral divisions in order to be valid
- process requirements, for example, the need to fill in a form stating reasons for the call-in, which would then be published. In general councils should ensure that call-in requests do not need to satisfy too many bureaucratic requirements, and that they ensure that call-ins can happen where politicians recognise a pressing need for a decision to be reconsidered
- the timescale, after a decision is made, within which a valid call-in request might be made and accepted
- the arrangements for organising a meeting of an overview and scrutiny committee once a valid call-in request is received
- arrangements for how such a meeting is carried out. This may include a right for a councillor or councillors requesting a call-in to set out their reasons for doing so
- the recommendations that the scrutiny committee can make. These might be to take no further action (allowing the decision to be immediately implemented) or to make recommendations to the executive that the decision should be amended, or withdrawn entirely
- arrangements for the executive to provide a response to the scrutiny committee

Call-in rules should not be designed to make call-ins essentially impossible (for example, by requiring that two members of a scrutiny committee request a call-in where political balance requires that only one member of each committee is a member of the opposition). For this reason, councils should review their call-in rules following elections to ensure that they still allow for the proportionate use of this power.

## **Councillor Calls for Action Statutory Guidance**

### **Status of this Guidance**

This is statutory guidance made under Section 21A(3) of the Local Government

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Act 2000 (the 2000 Act). This guidance replaces previous guidance on this matter issued in 2012.

## Purpose of this Guidance

This is statutory guidance issued under section 21A(3) of the 2000 Act (as amended by section 63 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 (the 2011 Measure)), to which a member of an authority must have regard in considering whether to make a call for action. Councillor calls for action (CCfAs) enable local councillors and their electors to ensure a response from their council leadership to issues of local importance. CCfAs should be regarded as one of a series of tools elected members have at their disposal to resolve local issues and make a positive difference in their community.

## Introduction

Section 63 of the 2011 Measure amends Section 21A of the Local Government Act 2000 to enable any councillor of a principal council in Wales to refer a matter to an overview and scrutiny committee which relates to the discharge of any of the functions of the council or which affects all or part of the electoral area which the councillor represents.

This provision pre-dates the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, but reflects its principles that outcomes such as improved health, educational attainment and employment should be co-produced through the joint efforts of service users, service providers and others. CCfAs can offer a valuable form of community intelligence which can contribute to developing and delivering a shared vision for the locality. The CCfA should be understood as a means of “last resort” in a broad sense, with issues being raised at a scrutiny committee after other avenues have been explored. As such, the process should make it easier for issues that would benefit from scrutiny consideration to be identified, and for those issues which are best dealt with through other means to be signposted accordingly. It might be helpful to identify research support for

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members considering a CCfA to either ensure it is the appropriate course of action or to build a well evidenced case to enable effective scrutiny and consideration.

Therefore, for CCfA to act effectively as an improvement tool, discussions about how to put CCfA procedures in place should focus less on process and more on outcomes. Since it is likely that the types of issues that would make for a CCfA would be cross-cutting and multi-agency in nature, thought should be given to the types of things that may constitute a satisfactory 'resolution' for councillors and by extension, local communities.

## **Purpose and objectives of the CCfA**

The CCfA provisions should be seen in the wider context of strengthening local democracy and widening participation in local decision making. They should be considered in the context of duties placed on the council in sections 39 to 41 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 relating to encouraging local people to participate in decision making.

As such, CCfA should not be regarded solely as a 'scrutiny' process. Instead Councils should consider it within the context of making improvements more generally to a wider range of council functions aimed at supporting participatory democratic activity. This includes support for members in their constituency roles as well as activities such as complaints, and consultation processes that capture public experience and opinion.

This guidance is not about providing authorities with a prescriptive 'instruction manual' as to how councils must set about putting CCfAs in practice. Instead, it provides a series of considerations and analysis to those authorities that recognise the value of identifying and acting upon the local knowledge that elected members can channel and who wish to use CCfA.

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## Legislative context

The purpose is to ensure that executive arrangements by a local authority enable any member of the council to refer to an overview and scrutiny committee a “local government matter” which falls within the committee’s remit. A referral in this way will ensure that the matter is included in the agenda and discussed at the committee. However, in making such a referral the member must have regard to any guidance issued by the Welsh Ministers.

If the overview and scrutiny committee receives a referral from a member who is not on the committee, it can choose to do any of the things that it might normally do with a new item. These include: reviewing and scrutinising decisions and actions, and making reports and recommendations.

In deciding whether to do any of these things, the committee may “have regard to” 2 particular points:

1. anything that the member may have already done in relation to the matter, particularly if they have been empowered to do so by the council under section 56 of the 2011 Measure
2. representations made by the elected member as to why the committee should take the matter up. If the committee decides not to take the matter up, it must explain the reasons why to the member. However, if the committee chooses to conduct some work on the issue, it must make sure that the elected member has a copy of any reports or recommendations that it makes in relation to it

Subsection (12) of section 21A of the 2000 Act defines ‘local government matter’ in relation to a member of a local authority in Wales as a matter which is not an excluded matter and which:

- relates to the discharge of any function of the authority
- affects all or part of the electoral area for which the member is elected or any person who lives or works in that area

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Subsection (13) of section 21A of the 2000 Act defines what is meant by an excluded matter in subsection (12). It is described as any matter which is:

- a local crime and disorder matter within the meaning of section 19 of the Police and Justice Act 2006 (local authority scrutiny of crime and disorder matters)
- a matter of any description specified in an order made by the Welsh Ministers for the purposes of this section

It can be seen that subsection (12)(b) allows for a broad range of issues that may be referred to an overview and scrutiny committee by a local authority member. As such, local authorities will need to ensure that implementation of CCfA is sufficiently responsive and wide ranging.

For example, it may be the case that a CCfA identifies a cross-cutting issue such as access to local dental services which could necessitate the scrutiny committee considering engagement with public service partners. In these instances CCfA can be used to develop closer links between councils and external partners.

When deciding upon whether or not to address an issue raised by CCfA at a scrutiny committee meeting, committees may find it helpful to use criteria for referral.

In considering how to respond to a CCfA, committees have a wide range of options available to them. They could, for example, call members and officers to attend a meeting and answer questions, instigate a review of policy, or, depending on the nature of the CCfA, make reports or recommendations to the decision making body of the relevant partner(s). Committees should think about the levels of formality that would be most appropriate in addressing issues in a way that helps facilitate positive outcomes.

Regarding how best to make use of the resources available to them, scrutiny committees should also assess how the problem may fit with existing programmes of work. CCfAs that can be considered as a complementary part of

a scrutiny committee's forward work programme should similarly themed or related topics already have been included. In these instances, taking into account the steps councillors will already have taken in trying to resolve a community issue CCfAs can be considered as providing an evidence base to inform the committee's next steps.

## Defining 'resolution'

The concept of resolution is arguably the issue at the centre of CCfA, i.e. ensuring that CCfA actually helps councillors to resolve intractable issues. The purpose of CCfA is to provide resolution where other techniques might not be able to do so, so the first step is to try to see if the issue has been or can be resolved through other means. This should be central to a council's procedures for raising and addressing CCfAs. As highlighted earlier, the deployment of a CCfA should be regarded as a last resort after other avenues have proved unsatisfactory. Consequently, the successful operation of CCfA will be reliant on the effectiveness of existing mechanisms in place aimed at supporting councillors in their constituency role.

Due to the potential cross-cutting and intractable nature of the social problems likely to be raised under CCfA, it is probable that there be no 'quick fix' of the issue under discussion. Therefore, in order for CCfA to make any headway in addressing local issues, it is advisable that councils should seek to make processes sufficiently adjustable so not to limit openness or exploratory discussion.

In practical terms it may help if local authority procedures specified that the councillor raising an issue articulates what they would regard as a successful outcome or resolution at the beginning of the CCfA process. Such outcomes could be revised by an appropriate scrutiny committee following initial enquiry. These initial objectives could act as the indicator of success against which the progress of a CCfA could be considered.

Before a CCfA is escalated to a full scrutiny committee meeting, councillors



should first consider the following options in resolving a community issue:

- informal discussions with officers or other councillors
- informal discussions with partner representatives
- referral of matters to other 'scrutiny bodies' or internal audit committees
- formal discussions with officers and councillors
- formal letters to Executive Members
- asking questions at Full Council
- submitting a motion to Full Council
- organising public meetings
- use of petitions
- making a complaint
- freedom of Information requests to other bodies
- communication with local MSs or MPs
- use of social media or email based campaigns

In order for the CCfA to be effective in identifying and addressing public concern, the local authority's leadership together with senior officers within partner agencies will need to support the following principles:

- appreciation of the role scrutiny can play as a driver of service improvement and its responsiveness to the needs of people in the area
- willingness to address unsatisfactory performance and a recognition of the need to resolve problems through discussion
- transparency in decision making processes and inclusion of the scrutiny process at all stages
- understanding, and a willingness to bolster the multi-faceted 'Community Leadership' role undertaken by members in their communities
- appreciation of the active part that service users and the wider community play in achieving improved outcomes

Each issue attempted to be raised as a CCfA will have to be considered on its own merits. But it must be demonstrable that each issue raised as a CCfA has been given due and appropriate consideration even if it is then determined it does not meet the criteria the council has set.

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Scrutiny committees often examine issues which are highly political in nature and this should not necessarily be viewed as a negative thing. Elected members can use the power of political debate to give proper consideration and analysis to controversial issues and in many cases a councillor's local knowledge can result in significant investigatory impact in helping identify constructive ways forward.

## **Working with partners**

Success in dealing with CCfA issues that involve partners will usually involve those partners having been a part of the initial discussions leading to CCfA being established in a local authority. If partners have been part of those discussions it follows that it is more likely that they will be willing to work with scrutiny committees to resolve local issues.

Good management of partnership relations by scrutiny committees can be beneficial for both partners and elected members. Using CCfA, Scrutiny can play an important role in linking partners up across the spectrum of local policy making. Partnership scrutiny can assist integration as well as ensuring local needs and aspirations are represented in decision making processes.

## **Links to community safety issues**

The Police and Justice Act 2006 (the 2006 Act) provides for a CCfA mechanism to deal with community safety and crime and disorder matters. The 2006 Act requires that the designated Crime and Disorder Committee consider all crime and disorder matters including community safety CCfAs. However, it may be the case that a cross-cutting issue such as substance misuse which draws upon a wide range of agencies is raised as a CCfA and it is unclear which committee is best placed to consider it.

In these instances, councils will need to bear in mind that the most important consideration is for the issue to be discussed in its entirety rather than adopt a

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rigid structural approach which further fragments enquiry. It may be the case that scrutiny chairs adopt a pragmatic approach about which committee should address a CCfA which has both crime and disorder and other subject elements. For example, it might be the case that scrutiny committees invite additional scrutiny chairs to meetings where CCfAs are being considered as linked to their relevant areas of expertise.

## **Links with section 56 of the 2011 Measure (exercise of functions by councillors)**

It might be that where councils have chosen to take advantage of the power to delegate functions under section 56, there are close links with CCfA. It could be that members exercising delegated powers will have more opportunities to resolve issues locally without having recourse to CCfA. CCfAs on particular issues may encourage councils to use section 56 to delegate powers to members to resolve those issues locally, further strengthening the council's responsiveness in improving local services.

## **Overview and Scrutiny Committees: taking into account the views of the public**

### **Status of this Guidance**

This is statutory guidance issued under section 62(4) and (5) of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 (the Measure). A local authority and an overview and scrutiny committee must have regard to this guidance in complying with their obligations under section 62 'Taking into account the views of the public'. This guidance replaces previous guidance on this matter issued in 2012.

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## Purpose of this Guidance

Overview and scrutiny committees as to how to comply with the requirements set out in section 62 of the Measure. This guidance relates to all overview and scrutiny committees and their sub-Committees, and to any joint overview and scrutiny committees and sub-Committees of joint overview and scrutiny committees (referred to in the legislation as “relevant overview and scrutiny committees”).

## Background

Effective scrutiny is integral to helping people feel they are able to influence what goes on in their locality. Scrutiny has an important role in stimulating connections between different individuals and groups, and channelling community intelligence into the improvement processes of the council and its partners. In this respect, the scrutiny function can be regarded as helping to both build and represent democratic capacity. Before this can happen however, people need to know about their options to make their views known when they want to.

Engaging the public more deeply in scrutiny activity may be regarded as a hallmark of healthy democracy. Better communication about local decision-making processes and greater representative participation will help ensure more direct experiences of community life inform strategic thinking and operational practice. It is also an important element of the council being able to demonstrate it is complying with the duty in section 39 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 (the 2021 Act) to encourage local people to participate in decision making. The arrangements for taking into account the views of the public in the scrutiny process should be set out in the strategy on encouraging participation required by section 40 of the 2021 Act.

Section 62 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 (“the Measure”) places a requirement on local authorities to make arrangements that enable all

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persons who live or work in the area to bring to the attention of the relevant overview and scrutiny committees their views on any matter under consideration by the committee.

Furthermore, section 62 provides that an overview and scrutiny committee must take into account any views brought to its attention in accordance with arrangements under this section.

## **Raising public awareness about scrutiny**

To enable the public to effectively engage with overview and scrutiny committees, the Welsh Government considers people should first be informed about their council's scrutiny function and programmes of planned work.

As such, overview and scrutiny committees are expected to make strong efforts to raise public awareness about their role and function, including how people and communities can help shape and contribute to the delivery of scrutiny committee forward work programmes (FWP). This should also be included and publicised in the council's strategy on encouraging participation required by section 40 of the 2021 Act.

Several principal councils have already developed good quality websites which inform members of the public about the way in which decisions are made by a local authority and how people may engage in the work of overview and scrutiny committees. This should also form part of the guide to the constitution required to be published electronically and kept up to date under section 37 of the Local Government Act 2000.

There should be clear reference to overview and scrutiny on the council's website with easy links to meeting schedules and documentation required by Part VA of the Local Government Act 1972. Local authorities should consider the list below which sets out some of the additional information that could be included on their scrutiny webpages:

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- an accessible guide to the local authority's decision-making processes
- an accessible guide to the local authority's scrutiny function
- overview and scrutiny committee FWPs
- copies of the annual report of overview and scrutiny committees
- a list of criteria as to what would make a good scrutiny item
- forms by which members of the public can identify issues for scrutiny
- forms by which members of the public can put themselves forward to offer comments upon any item included for discussion on a relevant overview and scrutiny committee's FWP
- forms by which members of the public may nominate themselves to attend an overview and scrutiny committee to provide evidence, information, comment or views in relation to any topic being considered by such a committee. This will include directions as to how a member of the public may submit views related to Call-Ins
- forms by which members of the public may nominate themselves to participate as a co-opted member of an overview and scrutiny committee
- details of Chairs and support staff of overview and scrutiny committees and how they may be contacted

## Public Engagement

The Welsh Government considers public engagement in scrutiny is vital in improving the design and delivery of local services from a citizen-perspective. Input from a range of stakeholders can assist in understanding the complexities that often characterise social problems and scrutiny committees can play an important role in gathering necessary intelligence.

In formulating their arrangements for taking in to account the views of the public councils must have regard to their statutory duties in relation to equalities, including the public sector socio-economic duty and the Welsh language. Arrangements must facilitate and support the ability for people and communities from all backgrounds and protected characteristics to be able to engage constructively and easily with scrutiny.

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It is recommended that local authorities develop internal mechanisms to better enable all members of the public engage in scrutiny activity. Such mechanisms should take accessibility into account and may include the following:

- request that an item be placed on an agenda for consideration by an overview and scrutiny committee (providing this is of immediate relevance to a topic included on its FWP)
- submit evidence (oral or written) to a planned or ongoing scrutiny review or investigation
- participate as a co-opted Member
- submit evidence (oral or written) relating to a Call-In of an Executive decision

Arrangements may take the form of public speaking arrangements in some cases, or developing reports summarising written submissions in others. Committees should take the preferences of the member or member of the public concerned into account. It is recognised that safeguards may need to be built into processes to protect against committees being lobbied in potentially vexatious ways. Overview and scrutiny committees may still refuse public requests to include particular items on their agendas but in doing so should produce a clear rationale to account for their decision.

This rationale could link to criteria that committees will have developed in formulating their overview and scrutiny committees' FWPs. Committees should explain why they may refuse to consider a public request for scrutiny or to exclude particular information from their investigative work.

In managing the engagement process it may help a local authority to differentiate between public contributions to scrutiny which are unsolicited, such as a councillor call for action or an external request for an item to be placed on an agenda, and those which have been actively sought by an overview and scrutiny committee in support of a planned review or investigation.

In either case, any such arrangements made by local authorities should recognise the distinct timescales that direct different forms of scrutiny activity in order that public contributions can influence committee work programmes in an

appropriate and timely manner.

It is recommended that arrangements are made to give careful consideration to ensuring the credibility and applicability of public contributions to the scrutiny process. This will ensure that the work of the relevant overview and scrutiny committees is informed by accurate and relevant evidence.

In order to manage the differing ways in which members of the public may engage with the work of scrutiny it is recommended that a series of protocols be developed to assist in the consistent application of practices. The aim of the protocols will be to manage public expectations in terms of setting out how any information submitted to relevant overview and scrutiny committees will be used and detailing how and when feedback will be provided. It is recommended that local authorities develop protocols to cover the following:

- public speaking arrangements at Scrutiny Committee / Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committees (JOSC) meetings (to include Call-In)
- public involvement in Sub-Committee and / or Task and Finish group meetings
- managing a request for scrutiny (including petitions)
- dealing with requests for public co-option

## **Publication of forward work programmes**

The timely publication and regular updating of forward work programmes of overview and scrutiny committees is essential in facilitating meaningful engagement from the public in scrutiny. This should again be included in the council's strategy on encouraging participation in decision making published under section 40 of the 2021 Act.

It is expected that scrutiny committees publish details of their annual FWP on the council's webpages in a clearly signposted section of the website dedicated to scrutiny.

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To encourage greater collaboration between local authorities in the undertaking of joint scrutiny, it is recommended that overview and scrutiny committees FWP's be published near the start of the municipal year. This will allow such committees to better co-ordinate planned activity with relevant councils and other public sector agencies.

In addition, in order to stimulate interest within existing community networks and representative groups, relevant overview and scrutiny committees should consider sending copies of their FWP to the following:

- Local voluntary sector organisations
- Police and Crime Panels
- Fire and Rescue Authorities
- Youth Councils
- National Parks
- Town and Community Councils

It is recommended that this take place at the start of the FWP period and make clear that the FWP's of overview and scrutiny committees are flexible and may change according to local priorities. In addition, local authorities may wish to consider containing information in the FWP about how members of the public may assist in developing and delivering overview and scrutiny committees' FWP's.

## **Public Engagement and Call-In**

In respect of decisions of a council's executive which have been called-in the local authority may wish to develop public speaking arrangements specifically for these occasions.

Where the subject matter under consideration is not confidential or exempt, such arrangements could recognise the time-limited nature of call-ins by giving the Chair discretion to allow public speakers to provide information and also respond to information presented during the course of discussion. The Chair may be

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given discretion to allow for multiple representations to be made at a Call-In meeting to allow for different public perspectives to inform the Committee's deliberations.

The Chair could also have the discretion to stop a speaker at any time in proceedings if in their view a speaker is making comments that are, or appear to be, defamatory, vexatious, discriminatory or offensive.

## **Engaging with the third sector**

The third sector in Wales has a wealth of specialist expertise and frontline experience in a wide range of areas and can provide means of entry for often disenfranchised people into local decision making.

For that reason the Welsh Government considers the voluntary sector has an important role to play in providing input to local government overview and scrutiny. Councils should develop protocols with County Voluntary Councils as an integral part of their arrangements in complying with section 62 of the Measure. These should include consideration of co-option, regular meetings between scrutiny chairs and voluntary sector representatives and use of voluntary sector networks as a means to inform and engage people of all ages and backgrounds in the work of scrutiny.

## **Taking the public's views into account**

An overview and scrutiny committee must take into account any views brought to its attention. In practice this will mean developing appropriate methods by which a member of the public may engage with the scrutiny process as considered above and pro-actively managing the overview and scrutiny committee's interface with written and oral submissions. Authorities will need to have in place methods to deal with requests for scrutiny and / or public oral or written submissions which are vexatious, discriminatory, inappropriate or unreasonable.

In the event a member of the public requests an issue for scrutiny, then it is recommended a report detailing their submission is considered at the next relevant overview and scrutiny committee meeting. Good practice would also suggest that the person who submitted the issue is invited to attend a meeting to present their views to elected members in person. However, attendance at formal overview and scrutiny committees may not be an attractive or appropriate proposition for some people and so arrangements could be made to ensure their views are nevertheless presented for consideration.

Regardless of whether or not an overview and scrutiny committee decides to further investigate a public request for scrutiny, it is recommended that the committee provide full feedback as to their decision to the person who submitted the original request, together with a rationale for the course of action adopted.

On those occasions where an overview and scrutiny committee receives a number of written submissions from the public in relation to a single topic under consideration, then it is recommended a summary report be presented to the relevant committees at the first appropriate opportunity.

## **Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committees Statutory Guidance**

### **Status of this Guidance**

This is statutory guidance under section 58(4) of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 (the Measure). A local authority and a joint overview & scrutiny committee must have regard to this guidance in exercising or deciding any function conferred upon it. This guidance replaces previous guidance in relation to joint overview and scrutiny committees issued under this section in 2013.

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## Purpose of this Guidance

The purpose of this guidance is to set out the key matters councils must take into consideration when establishing and operating joint overview and scrutiny committees (JOSCs).

## Policy Intent

The aim of section 58 of the Measure is to enable joint scrutiny of collaborative arrangements, such as corporate joint committees, and strengthen scrutiny arrangements through the promotion of collaboration and the sharing of scrutiny expertise. This could include wider public service matters. Section 66 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 amends section 58 to enable Welsh Ministers to also prescribe the circumstances when two or more principal councils must form a joint scrutiny committee.

Enabling local authorities to establish JOSCs is intended to make it easier to scrutinise the delivery of providers whose services cover more than one county, or to examine issues which cut across geographical boundaries. The provision for joint scrutiny expands the options currently available to councils in undertaking wider public service scrutiny, and provides for a more flexible way of working to secure improved outcomes. In addition, joint scrutiny can facilitate opportunities to share learning and scrutiny capacity across local authorities. The harnessing of 'collective intelligence' through JOSCs is intended to lead to more effective forms of governance, and higher standards of democratic accountability.

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# What are the benefits of Joint Scrutiny?

## For Scrutineers

Where joint scrutiny exercises have taken place in Wales, participants have reported a number of benefits in having gained insight into, and knowledge from, other councils' scrutiny arrangements.

For example, it was found that councillors have been able to view issues from a wider perspective, leading to a more thorough exploration of the topics under consideration. Furthermore, the presence of different scrutiny chairs and support from alternative scrutiny officers has provided opportunities for cross-transference of learning and exchanges of good practice. Experiences of joint scrutiny have been found to stimulate members and officers to critically review and enhance their 'home' council's internal methods and ways of working, ultimately leading to a higher standard of scrutiny.

## Benefits for Partners

From a partnership perspective, the benefits of a joint scrutiny approach are in bringing a fresh eye to developments at all stages of the decision-making process. JOSCs have the ability to bring forward new sources of information that decision-makers may not have considered in the development of plans, policies and strategies.

Non-executive members have a wealth of local intelligence and are well-placed to evaluate whether partnership priorities and methods of delivery are meaningful to local communities. Many councillors are linked in to a range of social networks and community groups and are able to feed views into decision making processes. Furthermore, JOSCs can help reduce duplication of accountability and reporting mechanisms by adopting a co-ordinated approach to the issue under enquiry.

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## Selecting the right issue for Joint Overview and Scrutiny

The effectiveness of a JOSC will be dependent on the reasons underpinning its establishment and the issue it intends to address. To secure the commitment and sustained interest of the principal councils involved, it follows that the topic chosen as the focus of a JOSC should be of relevance to all participants. The identification of a suitable topic for joint scrutiny will be dependent on effective forward work programme planning that seeks to consider issues of wider public interest, as well as those topics specific to a particular geographical area. Members and officers will need to be pro-active in exploring opportunities for joint scrutiny, checking to see whether there is compatibility in the forward work programmes of neighbouring or relevant authorities. Networking via regional and national scrutiny events, and the publication of forward work programmes will allow scrutiny practitioners to be more informed in this respect.

Some instances where a joint committee might be appropriate include:

- on-going monitoring of a joint service delivery mechanism
- on-going review of a joint statutory partnership or other collaborative arrangement such as a corporate joint committee
- investigating a topic that may require a regional response (for example, waste management or sustainable development)
- sharing scrutiny resources to investigate a similar topic of high interest or high importance to more than one authority (although not necessarily requiring a joint / multi-authority response)

## Criteria for establishing a JOSC

In deciding whether or not to establish a JOSC, the following questions should be considered:

1. Does the topic involve the work of a strategic partner or partnership body whose services cover more than one local authority area? For example, a

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JOSC may wish to focus upon the work of a transport provider, third sector organisation or a relevant social enterprise whose services cross authority boundaries.

2. Does the issue or service affect residents across more than one county area or concern a particular population's needs? A JOSC may wish to consider thematic topics such as climate change, fuel poverty, grass-fires or road safety; or it may wish to consider services connected to particular groups of interest such as young adults with physical disabilities, teenage mothers or vulnerable older people.
3. What form of JOSC could reasonably be resourced? Undertaking effective joint scrutiny is dependent on participating councils engaging in the building of relationships, and putting in place systems of working and administration. In order that JOSCs can provide significant added value, care must be taken to ensure that its objectives are proportionate to its resources.

## The importance of scoping and project management

Outline scoping should be undertaken to help determine whether or not to establish a JOSC. In identifying which partnership projects to progress and determining an appropriate methodology, practitioners should think carefully about whether examining a topic will result in added value or enhancement for each participant. In order to determine the likely success of joint work, it is strongly recommended that a project management approach be adopted to help ensure the objectives of joint scrutiny activity are delivered.

An informal feasibility study should be undertaken by likely participants in order that members and officers more specifically define areas of mutual interest, the type of scrutiny role intended to be undertaken, and the level of resource that could reasonably be dedicated to support a JOSC's effective functioning. Preliminary work should also identify the likely risks associated with the scrutiny topic, and how it is intended that these be effectively managed.

## Roles for Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committees

Local authorities can use JOSCs in a flexible way to suit their needs. For example, councils have the option to establish JOSCs on an ad hoc basis which may be more appropriate for forms of pre-decision scrutiny or consultation exercises; or councils may decide to establish 'standing' JOSCs which may be more useful in monitoring services or decisions over the medium to long term.

## Powers of Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committees

The 2011 Measure enables Welsh Ministers to make regulations which will provide for JOSCs to have equivalent powers to other overview and scrutiny committees, as set out in existing legislation, and includes reviewing and scrutinising decisions of the Council's executive which have not yet been implemented ('call-in'). These regulations [The Local Authorities \(Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committees\) \(Wales\) Regulations 2013](#).

JOSCs may make reports and recommendations about any matter, other than crime and disorder matters which are covered by separate legislation and guidance under sections 19 and 20 of the Police and Justice Act 2006. This guidance does not preclude councils from working together on crime and disorder issues.

Councils should make efforts to co-ordinate their forward work programmes to avoid duplication and help ensure scrutiny activities are complementary where appropriate. JOSCs could operate in an environment where there is scrutiny of particular issues or organisations at both a joint regional level and at a local level. Clarity of roles will be important to avoid duplication.

A JOSC is only able to exercise functions in relation to matters which are identified by the appointing authorities. It is therefore important that the local authorities participating in the joint committee are clear from the outset about its roles, responsibilities and terms of reference.

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Under section 58(3)(b) JOSCs also have the option of establishing sub-committees in the same way as single authority overview & scrutiny committees. It is important to note that any sub-committee would discharge only those functions conferred on them by the JOSC.

This provision will enable JOSCs to operate in a more streamlined and flexible manner in achieving the aims and objectives of the 'parent' JOSC.

In practice, the reporting arrangements for JOSCs will be informed by the reasons underpinning the committee's establishment and the outcomes intended to be achieved. An important factor for JOSCs to consider when determining reporting arrangements is the need to develop constructive working relationships with the executive groups of service providers who are subject to scrutiny. Consequently, it is suggested that the chairs of JOSCs should meet regularly with an appropriate executive representative to discuss priorities, approaches and planned areas of work.

## **Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Call-In**

With regard to call-in, JOSCs should be able to recommend that an executive decision made by one of the participating councils, made but not yet implemented, be reconsidered by the person(s) that made it or arrange for that decision to be exercised by the relevant Council.

However, in order to safeguard against potential abuse, councils should consider developing procedures where an executive decision of one of the participating councils of a JOSC may only be called-in by the JOSC if it is supported by an equal proportion of the participating Councils.

Whilst the above approach has been suggested to help ensure the integrity of the call-in function as it relates to JOSCs, this is ultimately a matter for councils to determine as part of their constitutional arrangements. In support of the development of such arrangements it is suggested that the number of members required to initiate a Call-In should, as a minimum, be set at half the total

membership of the JOSC.

To illustrate, a worked example is set out in the following fictional scenario. Councils A, B and C wish to work together to jointly commission services. A Joint Committee is subsequently established which is comprised of the executive members of each Council. A JOSC is also established to provide governance arrangements. The membership of the JOSC is comprised of non-executive Members from the 3 Councils.

A decision is subsequently made but not implemented by the executives of councils A, B and C. However, non-executive members from Council A consider that the decision made by the three executives may disadvantage Council A's local communities. Council A therefore wishes to call-in the decisions made by the three respective Councils.

In this instance, the JOSC could not call-in a decision made by the executive of Councils B or C unless the call-in procedure was supported by an equal number of members from Councils A, B and C.

The number of members able to call-in an executive decision of one of the participating Councils should be half of the JOSC's entire membership. That half must include equal numbers from each participating council. In the above example, should the total membership of the JOSC be 12 (4 members from each Authority) then a call-in could only be made by 2 members from each Authority which would give 6.

In the event that a JOSC would wish to call-in an executive decision made by Councils B and C, then it is advisable that each participating council undertake each call-in separately. That is not to say that 2 call-in processes could not run in parallel, only to recognise that any re-examination of an executive decision would have to take place on an individual basis within each participating council.

## Appointing a Joint Committee

In establishing a JOSC which is additional to a council's existing scrutiny committee(s), a report setting out its role, responsibilities, terms of reference and intended outcomes to be generated by the joint exercise should be considered by each of the participating authorities appropriate scrutiny committees (or sub-committees) before being endorsed by full council.

The appropriate scrutiny committees (or sub-committees) would be those whose terms of reference are most closely aligned to the issue intended to be considered by means of a JOSC. This would help to ensure that the non-executive members of each local authority are able to participate in the decision to establish a joint committee and to ensure that a JOSC would add value and would not duplicate existing work programmes.

With regard to the remit of JOSCs it should be remembered that existing legislation relating to sections 19 and 20 of the Police and Justice Act 2006, excludes any matter which could be considered by a Crime and Disorder Committee from the work programmes of all other scrutiny committees, sub-committees and JOSCs.

Local authorities will need to give careful consideration to who they appoint to sit on JOSCs. It might be helpful in some instances to appoint members who already sit on the scrutiny committee whose terms of reference most closely match the issue to be scrutinised or the terms of reference for the proposed JOSC. However, in wishing to draw on the expertise and knowledge base of a wider pool of non-executive members this might not be the most appropriate course of action, and it will be for local authorities to decide which members should be appointed to which committee.

In order to ensure JOSCs represent fairly the interests of each local authority, an equal number of committee seats must be allocated to each of the participating councils. JOSCs are not required to be politically balanced themselves but each participating council should aim to ensure that the membership of the JOSC it

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puts forward reflects, as far as possible, the political balance in the council.

The representation from an authority may include co-opted members from that authority who are either statutory or who have been accorded voting rights under the Crime and Disorder (Overview and Scrutiny) Regulations 2009.

The JOSCs may also decide to co-opt members who would be in addition to the allocations from each council. With regard to co-option as it relates to a JOSC, the following conditions may help committees determine their approach to co-option:

1. Where the parent council/committee has appointed co-opted members to sit on the JOSC, the number of co-opted members should not exceed the number of elected members that have been identified by the parent council/committee to sit on the JOSC.
2. The JOSC should have the ability to appoint co-opted members if there are none contained within the body of the committee's membership.

With regard to the size of JOSCs, good practice suggests that the maximum number of seats should be set at no more than 16 for effective functioning. However, this is ultimately a matter for local authorities to decide as it is dependent on the issue intended to be considered.

## Chairing a Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The chair of a JOSC must be elected from the membership of the JOSC, and the election of the chair should take place at the first meeting of the Committee. JOSCs that are established on a long-term basis may decide to rotate chairs annually, or at some other interval, in order for each participating authority to have equal status, and to ensure that opportunities for member development are provided.

Where joint scrutiny exercises have taken place in Wales, it was found helpful to alternate the chairs amongst the participating local authorities. As such, councils

may wish to give thought to allocating vice-chairs (if thought appropriate) to the members of those authorities who are next scheduled to hold the position of chair. This would allow for a measure of continuity within joint arrangements and broaden the experience of participating members.

## Officer Support for JOSCs

Where a JOSC is established, it is suggested participating councils should share the costs associated with the undertaking of joint scrutiny exercises. This should cover arrangements for officer support and research, as well as administrative support and provision of meeting venues.

Each council may wish to offer different types of scrutiny officer support in respect of resourcing JOSCs. For example, some councils may wish to offer administrative support, and others research and advisory expertise. Consideration should be given to how the JOSC could most effectively achieve its scrutiny objectives and how the standard of scrutiny could be raised including through the collective learning of each authority.

In recognition that officer support for scrutiny varies across local authorities, it is likely that the scrutiny support officers of participating councils will need to liaise regularly to co-ordinate and project manage the work of JOSCs, and consider how to make best use of available resources. When deciding joint support arrangements, factors to consider include the scrutiny capacity available and how well the expertise and skill sets of officers' link to the topic(s) identified for joint scrutiny.

Regular meetings may help to overcome any difficulties in aligning different cultures, methodologies and supporting mechanisms for scrutiny and will help facilitate transfer of skills and learning. Participating scrutiny officers and chairs should nominate a JOSC officer co-ordinator from amongst themselves to ensure a clear point of contact available for those engaged in joint activity.

It is recommended that those supporting JOSCs put in place opportunities for

reflection at key stages (for example, at mid-term points) within the life cycle of scrutiny reviews. This would help ensure that participating authorities are satisfied with the support arrangements and are finding them of benefit in meeting the objectives of the JOSC. Scrutiny support arrangements may include rotating meeting venues of JOSCs among the local authorities represented on the joint committee. However, it may also be the case that the committee chooses to meet at the authority which is geographically most central to minimise travel times for those involved.

## Forward planning

In order to function effectively, JOSCs should formulate a forward plan to identify what issues the JOSC intends to focus upon during the course of the year or duration for which it is established.

The forward plan should provide a clear rationale as to the purpose of considering a particular topic, and to the methods by which it will be investigated. Attempts should be made to develop an outcome-focused forward plan rather than one which is process-orientated.

As JOSCs may be either ad hoc or standing, care will need to be taken to ensure that its forward plan corresponds with the committee's original purpose. For example, in the instance where several authorities may wish to form a JOSC to investigate a cross-cutting issue such as substance misuse, its forward plan should serve to act as the investigation's project plan since the investigation should have a clearly-defined start and finish.

Where a JOSC may have been formed to consider the work of a strategic partnership, its forward plan should be driven by evidence of community need and a sound understanding of the partnership's priorities, risks and financial pressures. In addition, the forward plans of JOSCs should be agreed in consultation with partners where possible.

JOSCs must also have regard to guidance relating to section 62 of the Measure

which places a requirement on local authorities to engage with the public. The JOSC publishing its forward plan as soon as is reasonably possible in order that interested groups and individuals are able to provide comment and offer their views is integral to complying with this duty.

## **Appointing a sub-committee of a JOSC**

JOSCs are able to appoint sub-committees. This provision extends the range of options available to a JOSC in being able to effectively investigate and make recommendations for improvement as they relate to issues of public interest or concern.

As is the case with sub-committees appointed by single authority scrutiny committees, sub-committees of a JOSC can only exercise the functions conferred upon it by the 'parent' JOSC. In the interests of fairness and effective working, a sub-committee of a JOSC should, where possible, consist of equal numbers of representatives from each participating authority.

## **Ways of working**

The following section is not statutory guidance but has been included as a way of working which JOSCs may wish to consider.

## **Task and Finish Groups**

Where elected members have been involved in task and finish groups of single authority scrutiny committees, they have reported a number of benefits from working in smaller, more structured teams. For example, members with differing levels of scrutiny experience and subject knowledge are able to gain confidence and motivation by working collaboratively with more experienced councillors and co-opted members. Similarly, task and finish group working can develop positive peer relations as a result of a members working collectively towards a common

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goal.

In the event that a JOSC may wish to establish a task and finish group to consider a particular issue in more depth, it is suggested that JOSCs limit the membership of a task and finish group to include any co-opted members the JOSC may wish to appoint.

Depending on the nature of issue under consideration, JOSC task and finish group investigations can either be 'light-touch' where recommendations can be identified at a relatively early stage and strictly time-limited, or a very intensive investigation involving a range of 'Expert Witnesses', site visits and the commissioning of supporting research as is currently the practice for the majority of overview and scrutiny committees.

It is often the case that task and finish groups have significant resource implications and for this reason it is suggested that a JOSC think carefully about the number of task and finish groups that can effectively be run and supported at any one time.

As a means of ensuring that a task and finish group of a JOSC fulfils its objectives, it is recommended that a project management approach be adopted. This should include developing a project brief for the task and finish group's work, a project plan and the production of highlight reports to the parent JOSC to ensure it is kept informed of the investigation's progress.

## **Democratic Services Committees Statutory Guidance**

### **Status of this Guidance**

This statutory guidance for Democratic Services Committees made under Sections 8 (1A) and 16 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 (the Measure). This guidance replaces previous guidance issued on this matter in

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2012.

## Purpose of this Guidance

This guidance is provided to assist principal councils in the effective running of their democratic services committees.

## Introduction

The Measure contains provisions related to the strengthening of local democracy including the requirement for principal councils to have a democratic services committee. The purpose of the committee is to ensure those councillors outside the executive leadership have the support and resources to fulfil their duties and play a full role in the operation of the local authority.

This is critical to good governance and enabling the council to demonstrate it is effectively supporting and resourcing scrutiny as part of its duties in sections 89 and 90 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 (the 2021 Act) relating to keeping performance under review and consulting local people on performance. It is also critical to enable both scrutiny and elected members in their representational role to engage with the public thus contributing to meeting the duties set out in sections 39 to 41 of the 2021 Act in relation to encouraging local people to participate in decision making and participation strategies.

## Head of Democratic Services

Each county and county borough council is required to designate one of their officers as “Head of Democratic Services” (HDS) and provide that officer with sufficient support to do their job (section 8(1) of the Measure). Section 8(1A) enables the Welsh Ministers to issue statutory guidance to councils about the exercise of their function in relation to the provision of staff, accommodation and other resources which are, in the council’s opinion, sufficient to support the HDS

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in discharging their functions.

The person designated as HDS must be designated by the democratic services committee (section 11(1)(a) and must not be the council's chief executive or chief finance officer, section 8(4) as amended by section 161 of the 2021 Act which removed the prohibition on a council designating the same officer monitoring officer and head of democratic services. The same section of the 2021 Act amends section 43(2) of the Localism Act 2011 to include the head of democratic services in the definition of 'chief officer' for the purposes of pay policy statements.

The post of HDS is a politically restricted post within the meaning of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 (section 21) and the designated officer is defined as a chief officer for the purposes of the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (Wales) Regulations 2006 as amended. In these regulations, the HDS is provided the same 'statutory protection' in relation to disciplinary action as the council's chief executive, monitoring officer and chief finance officer (s151 officer). Underlining the important role they undertake in ensuring the good governance and democratic accountability of the council.

The HDS is able to delegate any of their functions to any of their staff (section 8(2)). The functions of the HDS are:

- to provide support and advice to the authority in relation to its meetings
- to committees of the authority and the members of those committees
- to any joint committee which a local authority is responsible for organising and the members of that committee
- in relation to the functions of the authority's overview and scrutiny committee(s), to members of the authority, members of the executive and officers
- to each member of the authority in carrying out the role of member of the authority
- to promote the role of the authority's overview and scrutiny committee(s)
- to make reports and recommendations in respect of the number and grades of staff required to discharge democratic services functions and the

- appointment, organisation and proper management of those staff
- any other functions prescribed by the Welsh Ministers

## Notes

1. The function of providing advice about whether or how the authority's functions should be, or should have been, exercised, only applies to advice concerning the functions of the overview and scrutiny and democratic services committees.
2. In this case, advice to a member does not include advice in connection with their role as an executive member, and does not include advice about a matter being or to be considered at a meeting (other than a meeting of an overview and scrutiny or democratic services committee).

The Measure enables Welsh Ministers to make regulations requiring local authorities to include within their standing orders provisions concerning the management of the staff provided to the HDS. For these purposes, “management of staff” does not include appointment, dismissal or disciplinary action.

## Democratic Services Committees

Each council must also establish a democratic services committee (DSC) to perform the following roles:

- carry out the local authority’s function of designating the HDS
- keep under review the provision of staff, accommodation and other resources made available to the HDS, in order to ensure that it is adequate for the responsibilities of the post
- make reports to the full council in relation to these matters

Each DSC can decide how it carries out these functions.

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The full council must appoint the members of the DSC, which must consist solely of councillors and cannot include more than one member of the executive or assistant to the executive. Any executive member must not be the council leader. The rules concerning allocation of seats to political groups apply to the DSC.

The council must also appoint the chair of the DSC, who must not be a member of any of the political groups represented in the executive. The exception to this is when a council has no opposition groups. In this case, any member of the DSC can be appointed as chair provided the member is not a member of the executive (section 14((1), (2) and (9)).

The DSC can appoint its own sub-committees and delegate functions to them (section 13). The DSC appoints the chair of any sub-committee (section 14(3)).

A DSC has the power to require the attendance of any members or officers of the council to answer questions and can invite anyone else it likes to do so also. If a member or officer is required to attend they must answer any questions unless the question is one which they would be entitled to refuse in a court (section 14(5) to (7)).

DSC meetings and sub-committees are to be open to the public as is normal in council meetings and subject to the same regime of accessibility in general (section 14(8)). The DSC must meet at least once a year (section 15(1)) and, additionally if the full council so decides or at least a third of the members of the DSC demands a meeting (section 15(2)). There is no limit on the maximum number of meetings a DSC may hold. The onus lies on the chair to ensure that meetings are held when required (section 15(3)).

The DSC must have regard to guidance from the Welsh Ministers when exercising its functions (section 16(2)).

Any report presented to the DSC by the HDS must be considered by the DSC within 3 months. Similarly, any report made by the DSC must be considered by the full council within three months (sections 18 and 19). The procedures

relating to the operation of the DSC should be included in the council's constitution.

## Functions of the DSC

### Designating the Head of Democratic Services

Only the DSC or a sub-committee of the DSC can designate the HDS. How this operates in practice will vary and a DSC can decide itself how it wishes to do this. However, the expectation is there would be discussion with the chief executive and relevant member(s) of the council executive, for example, to agree whether the post should be advertised externally, in which case the procedures for appointing staff described in the council's standing orders must be followed.

It would be a sensible arrangement for the DSC to be consulted on the advertising, interview and selection process, even though it would be the council, not the DSC, which would appoint as the employing body. The appointment could, however, be made subject to the DSC subsequently designating the selected person as HDS.

The person designated as HDS is not prevented from performing other roles within the authority. Just as the chief executive will have other duties to perform outside their statutory role, so too could the HDS. However, local authorities should take care to ensure that any other duties do not conflict with their HDS role and the DSC will need to be satisfied that the person designated has sufficient time to conduct his/her functions despite any other roles they may have.

## **Making recommendations on the adequacy of the provision of staff, accommodation and other resources**

It is the function of the DSC to consider, and make recommendations as to, the adequacy of the provision of staff, accommodation and other resources for the exercise of the functions which fall to the HDS. The functions known in many local authorities as members' services, committee services and overview and scrutiny support would fall within the HDS responsibilities.

The HDS must present a report to the DSC describing what they feel to be a reasonable level of support for democratic services functions. The DSC, however, cannot make the final decision on these matters. It must submit its own report to the full council, arguing the case for necessary resource. It may well be that full council will modify or reject the DSC's report, in which case it could be advisable for the DSC to consider alternative proposals, which may involve a period of negotiation involving the HDS, Chief Finance Officer and the appropriate executive member.

In considering the DSC's recommendations the council should take into account the contribution the work of the HDS and the DSC make to the good governance and effective democratic accountability of the council, including the contribution this work makes to the council meeting its duties in sections 39 to 41 of the 2021 Act relating to the duty to encourage local people to participate in decision making and its strategy on public participation and its contribution to sections 89 and 90 of the 2021 Act to keep its performance under review and consult with local people on performance. Ensuring all members are adequately supported and trained, that scrutiny is adequately resourced and committees have access to high quality analysis and information is a cost of effective democracy. It is noted councils will have competing pressures for resources, including for essential front line and statutory services, careful consideration of cumulative impacts of resourcing erosion or reductions in relation to democratic services should therefore be part of considerations on the DSC Committee's report.

The final decision on resources will rest with full council but the Measure places

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the responsibility on the authority itself to ensure that the HDS is provided with sufficient staff, accommodation and other resources as are, in the council's opinion, sufficient to allow the HDSs functions to be discharged (section 8(1)(b)) and it must therefore fully explain any decision not in keeping with the recommendations of the DSC. See guidance on Research Support and Services for Councillors Statutory Guidance (Part 2, 3.0).

# Governance and Audit Committees Statutory Guidance

## Status of this Guidance

This is statutory guidance under section 85 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 (the Measure). It replaces any previous guidance issued under this section.

## Purpose of this Guidance

The purpose of this guidance is to set out the key matters councils must take into consideration when establishing and operating governance and audit committees.

## Overview

Councils must establish a Governance and Audit Committee. The committee has the following functions (s81, Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011):

- review and scrutinise the authority's financial affairs
- make reports and recommendations in relation to the authority's financial affairs
- review and assess the risk management, internal control, performance

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- assessment and corporate governance arrangements of the authority
- make reports and recommendations to the authority on the adequacy and effectiveness of those arrangements
- review and assess the authority's ability to handle complaints effectively
- make reports and recommendations in relation to the authority's ability to handle complaints effectively
- oversee the authority's internal and external audit arrangements
- review the financial statements prepared by the authority

The Welsh Government's view is that well-functioning governance and audit committees are critical to the effective governance of councils. They should be viewed positively by all council members as part of the improvement and governance system. They also have an important role to play in improving strategic planning and facilitating both scrutiny and constructive challenge within the structures of a council.

In addition to these statutory functions, a council can confer other functions on the committee which it deems suitable for it. Each governance and audit committee can decide how it wants to carry out its functions, but in doing so it must have regard to this guidance.

Detailed guidance on the operation of governance and audit committees has been produced by Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA). In deciding how the Governance and Audit Committee will operate and how it will transact its key tasks, councils and committees themselves should consider the intersection between the formal role of this committee and the role of other bodies – in particular, the Democratic Services Committee (in respect of corporate governance) and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee(s) (in respect of financial oversight and review of strategic risks).

## Membership

The full council must have regard to this guidance when determining membership. Two thirds of the members of the committee are to be members of

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the council and one third must be a lay members. Only one member of the executive or assistant to the executive may sit on the committee, and that person must not be the leader (s82, Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011).

The chair of the committee is to be decided upon by the committee members themselves. However, the chair must be a lay member. The committee must also appoint a deputy chair who must not be a member of the council's executive or an assistant to the executive (section 81, subsections 5A, 5B and 5C of the Measure). All committee members, including lay members, have the right to vote on any issue considered by the committee. Lay members are therefore required by statute to comply with the council's code of conduct made under Part 3 of the Local Government Act 2000 and uphold the highest standards of ethical conduct.

The rules within section 15 et seq of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 apply to governance and audit committees. The authority must however decide how many non-councillors should be appointed to the committee, and all members of the committee should display independence of thinking and unbiased attitudes, and must recognise and understand the value of the governance and audit function.

All new members will need to be provided with induction training. Although it is to be hoped that appointed councillors would have some relevant expertise, this cannot be guaranteed. What will be important, though, is to try and ensure that members do not have any other responsibilities which might conflict with their role on the governance and audit committee. That might be particularly the case in the choice of any executive member or assistant to the executive on the committee.

It may also mean that the members should not have too many other commitments, in general such as membership of other committees because of the significant commitment which being a member of the governance and audit committee implies. All members should receive adequate training and development.

The governance and audit committee should try and ensure it appoints a member as chair who will be strong and experienced enough to lead the questioning which the committee will have to perform.

Whatever recruitment method is employed, lay members should be independent from the council and have no business connection with it, although knowledge of how local government functions would be a definite advantage. In appointing lay members whose political allegiances are well known, local authorities should consider if this compromises the independence and perception of independence from the council a lay member should demonstrate. Councils should follow a public recruitment exercise, similar to that used to appoint members of standards committees, to recruit their lay members. It is recommended that a lay member should not be appointed for more than 2 full terms of a local authority.

## Meetings and proceedings

As a committee of the council, the governance and audit committee is subject to normal arrangements of openness. Meetings should be held in public, agendas and reports should be published and available for inspection. The exception to this is where “exempt items” are being considered, which are chiefly matters which involve discussions concerning named individuals or commercial in confidence matters.

Any officer or member called to attend the governance and audit committee meeting must do so. They must answer any questions asked of them save ones which they could refuse to answer if they were in court. The committee can invite other persons to attend before it, but anyone else so invited to attend is under no compulsion to do so.

The committee must meet at least once a year and must also meet if the full council so decides, or if at least a third of the committee’s members require that a meeting be held. Beyond these stipulations, the committee can meet whenever it determines.

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The Welsh Government suggests councils consider appropriate publications by relevant professional bodies such as CIPFA when establishing and reviewing their procedures for governance and audit committees.

## **Functions of a Governance and Audit committee**

### **Reviewing the authority's financial affairs**

Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 requires local authorities to make arrangements for the proper administration of its financial affairs. Putting in place the governance and audit committee and providing it with the duty to keep the authority's financial affairs under review must be viewed as assisting in the fulfilment of this requirement.

This is an area which is given close attention by the authority's external auditors and ties in with the duty of the governance and audit committee to oversee the arrangements for internal and external audit, and also the need to monitor the internal control and risk management arrangements made by the authority.

Local authorities should make their own arrangements, in their constitution, to provide for clear demarcation between the role of the governance and audit committee and that of a relevant scrutiny committee. The governance and audit committee role should be more to seek assurance that the budgetary control systems (as an internal control) of the council are working, rather than the actual scrutiny of spend. This may serve as acceptable demarcation between the role of the governance and audit committee and that of an overview and scrutiny committee.

### **Risk management, internal control, performance assessment and corporate governance arrangements of the authority**

The attention to this matter should raise the profile of risk management as a

necessary control tool within the authority as a whole. By providing regular review, the governance and audit committee forms a significant part of the authority's corporate governance system.

The authority should have a clear 'Statement of Purpose' for its governance and audit committee, ensuring the committee has a prime role in ensuring effective corporate governance is central to the organisation's procedures. As such, the governance and audit committee should review the Annual Governance Statement and Corporate Governance Strategy.

An Annual Governance Statement is a document which sets out a council's arrangements for decision-making and governance. The AGS is the product of a review of council governance carried out by senior officers. There is no obligation on Welsh councils to prepare an Annual Governance Statement. As there is no legal obligation to produce an Annual Governance Statement, Welsh Government is not providing statutory guidance on this matter. However, councils will note the presence of the local government accounting standards. Councils could consider how the AGS can be used as a tool for broader corporate improvement; it can be used to evaluate strengths and weaknesses in the governance framework and, as part of an annual action plan, take forward agreed changes accordingly.

An effective and high profile governance and audit committee is critical to engendering public confidence that the authority has a solid approach to its financial and organisational propriety.

The governance and audit committee will need to report on the adequacy of the authority's risk management and internal control arrangements, and comment on their effectiveness. It will also follow up on risks identified by internal and external auditors and require reports as to action taken in response. This means the council must ensure the governance and audit committee is briefed on the contents and recommendations contained in auditor's reports and has access to them. It should also have access to reports from regulators where these have identified risks, failures in internal control or the corporate governance systems of the council. It would be good practice for all reports from auditors and

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regulators to be shared with the governance and audit committee as a matter of course.

In addition to these existing duties, the 2021 Act added a new duty to this group of duties which requires the governance and audit committee to review and assess and make reports of the effectiveness of the arrangements the council has put in place for the performance assessments it is required to complete under section 91 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 in order to fulfil its duty to keep performance under review in section 89 of the 2021 Act. This is not intended to be a repeat of the performance assessment itself but consideration, for example, of the rigour and comprehensive nature of the process. Neither is it intended to duplicate the role of overview and scrutiny committees in holding the council's executive to account in relation to the performance management of the council's services.

The council must make a draft of its self-assessment report (and panel assessment report when published) available to its governance and audit committee. The committee must review the draft reports and may make recommendations for changes to the conclusions or action the council intends to take. If the council does not make a change recommended by the governance and audit committee, it must set out in the final self-assessment report (or response to a panel assessment report) the recommendation and the reasons why the council did not make the change.

## **Review and assess the authority's ability to handle complaints effectively**

The way in which an organisation manages its internal and external complaints process for service and organisational complaints (consideration of the complaints process for complaints made under the members' code of conduct is not a function of the Governance and Audit Committee) is an integral part of its corporate governance systems. It is vital that people, communities and other stakeholders have trust and confidence their complaints will be treated with due respect and gravity. It is also important that staff and others internal to the

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organisation have trust and confidence internal complaints are treated with similar respect.

The role of the governance and audit committee is not to consider whether individual complaints have been dealt with appropriately but to consider the effectiveness of the complaints process. For example, is the process accessible to everybody in the community, is the council giving proper consideration to its statutory duties in relation to equalities and Welsh language when handling complaints, is there internal learning built into the complaints process to improve systems and services going forward. The Welsh Government expectation is that councils provide the PSOW with an assessment of the arrangements in place for handling complaints and the effectiveness of its approach as part of its regular communication with the PSOW.

## Internal and external auditors

An effective governance and audit committee should provide the authority's chief finance officer with advice which can serve to bolster the work of internal and external auditors. The committee can ensure that audit reports are kept in the authority's mind, so timing of meetings might be planned so as to effectively follow-up auditors' recommendations.

The governance and audit committee will expect to input into the planning of internal audit priorities, approving the annual programme of audits and ensuring the internal auditors have the necessary resources to conduct their work effectively. They will want to meet with the Head of Internal Audit and receive their annual report.

The governance and audit committee should also receive the reports from the external auditors and follow up their recommendations during the year. The committee should have a role in agreeing the authority's response to the auditor's letters or reports as well as being able to meet with the external auditor.

In addition, the governance and audit committee should receive and consider

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reports from any regulators or inspectors. In respect of these, the authority will need to ensure there is no unnecessary duplication between the governance and audit committee and any overview and scrutiny committee in considering such reports.

## **Financial statements**

Before their approval by the authority, the governance and audit committee should consider and comment on the authority's certified draft financial statements. They will want to see to what extent the statements take cognisance of audit reports during the year, and changes in accounting policy and internal control mechanisms. The Committee should also review the external audit statement and also seek assurance on the management of the council's financial affairs. Any concerns should be reported to the Council.

Governance and audit committees may approve the financial statements themselves where local authorities have delegated that power to them under regulation 10 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations (Wales) 2014 (as amended).

## **Governance and Audit Committee reports and recommendations**

Reports and recommendations by the governance and audit committee should be considered by full council in particular, as well as the executive. The processes for these considerations should be set out in the council's constitution.

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# Guidance on multi-location meetings

## Status of this guidance

This is statutory guidance issued under section 47 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 (the 2021 Act).

## Purpose

The overall purpose of the Welsh Government in amending the law to give relevant authorities powers and freedoms to convene meetings in this way is to achieve greater accessibility and improved public participation in local government. These powers are closely connected with the new requirement for principal councils to broadcast (by audio and/or video) certain meetings.

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, attendance levels during the pandemic bear this out. This heightened public awareness and involvement is to be welcomed, and further encouraged. In particular, authorities will need to think directly about the needs of the public as they design their arrangements and policies for multi-location meetings. While these meetings are still "meetings in public" rather than "public meetings" by and large the public will be able to observe but not participate they provide a crucial opportunity for accountability and transparency, and an accessible shop window for many public bodies.

This guidance is for principal councils, National Park Authorities, Fire and Rescue Authorities, and Port Health Authorities. This guidance does not cover the arrangement by other public bodies of their own formal meetings, or the organisation by public bodies (including councils) of public meetings or any other

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gathering. It also does not include the convening of formal meetings by corporate joint committees (CJCs) or community councils, which are covered in separate guidance.

This guidance is intended for:

- participants in meetings convened by the authorities listed above
- officers providing support to formal meetings in these authorities
- officers with adjacent responsibilities for example, those responsible for drafting and clearing reports, attending meetings to present reports to members and officers with supervisory responsibilities on governance matters
- anyone with an interest in the way in which the business of these authorities is conducted

Generally speaking the requirements for all relevant authorities is similar, although differences do exist especially relating to the convening of **multi-location meetings** of local authority executives.

Relevant authorities are required to “have regard to” the guidance. Where authorities are under an existing statutory obligation to carry out an act the guidance says that they “must” do something; where there is no such obligation but the guidance presents a suggestion on a possible course of action, the guidance says that a council “can” or “may” do something.

## How this guidance was developed

This guidance was developed between February and April 2021. It was drafted by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, Cardiff University and Public Governance Wales, who were commissioned by Welsh Government to speak to people with a stake and interest in this area and to develop the text as a result of these conversations.

This guidance will be reviewed periodically.

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## Definitions of words used in this guidance

Generally, the words used in this guidance have the same meaning as they do in the 2021 Act.

A “relevant authority” is an organisation which is required to put in place arrangements for multi-location meetings. This covers principal councils, Fire and Rescue Authorities, National Parks Authorities and Port Health Authorities. It also includes joint committees of these bodies. The obligations of corporate joint committees (CJCs) and of community and town councils are covered in separate guidance.

A “meeting” is a formal meeting of a relevant authority convened in accordance with whatever the legal requirements are for such meetings. Formal meetings are usually those where formal decisions can be made; these meetings may need to be held in public and that notice is published beforehand that they are being held. This is not always the case as some meetings, or parts of meetings, are held in private due to confidentiality or exempt issues being discussed. When we talk about these meetings being “convened”, we mean the process involved in organising the meeting and setting and distributing an agenda and reports.

A “multi-location meeting” is a meeting of a relevant authority whose participants are not all in the same physical place. In some places these are colloquially described as “remote” meetings. The 2021 Act does not refer to these meetings as “remote”, but that they are attended by “persons who are not in the same place”.

At least 1 participant may be joining the meeting by remote means. For example, this includes meetings of the type described below:

- meetings of a committee where all participants are in the same physical location except one individual who joins from another location, with a physical public gallery being provided

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- meetings of a committee where a roughly equal number of members are present in a physical space and joining through remote means; those joining through remote means may include the Chair
- meetings of a committee where all members are joining through remote means but nonetheless a physical public gallery has been made available in authority premises
- meetings of a committee taking place wholly through remote means where no physical arrangements have been made

Some have described the kinds of meetings described above as “hybrid meetings”. This guidance and Section 47 of the 2021 Act makes no distinction between meetings where some participants join by remote means and those where all participants do so, but meeting arrangements will need to account for the practical differences that different forms of meetings will take, and make plans accordingly.

The definition of “Joining a meeting by remote means” is being in a different physical location to that of other participants, and participating through an online meeting platform. Where participants are present in a committee room or other physical space which is publicised (through a formal notice) as being the location of the meeting, those participants are present physically.

A “participant” of a multi-location meeting is a person who takes an active part in that meeting. They might be a member, a person giving evidence to a committee as a witness, an appellant or claimant on a regulatory matter, someone presenting a petition, or taking part formally in another way.

An “observer” of a multi-location meeting is a member of an audience, or otherwise spectating, a multi-location meeting. They might be in the same room that a meeting is taking place or they might be observing by remote means.

“Meeting arrangements” are the rules and procedures that relevant authorities adopt to act on their statutory requirements relating to multi-location meetings, and to act on the recommendations in this guidance. This guidance suggests that these arrangements will form part of relevant authorities’ constitutions,

where they are required.

## Background to multi-location meetings

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. Experience operating meetings under these Regulations has provided relevant authorities with significant expertise in understanding and managing multi-location meetings, now they have been placed on a new statutory footing. The provisions in the 2021 Act can be seen as an evolution of these prior arrangements.

## The benefits of multi-location meetings

Councils, and other relevant authorities, convened meetings by remote means throughout much of 2020 and 2021. While meeting this way proved challenging in the context of the global coronavirus pandemic, it has also resulted in a number of benefits.

- Enhancing and supporting local democracy. Having the flexibility to convene meetings in this way will reduce the barriers that might previously have been in place for explaining and demonstrating how relevant authorities do business.
- Working more productively. When participants come together by remote means, they have often been able to get more done. Multi-location meetings have also resulted in a dramatic reduction in the amount of paper needed and produced. The move to an approach which sees the production of formal notices and other material as being “online by default” will make it

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- easier for councils to innovate around the use of formal meeting material.
- Making it easier for the public to attend meetings. Although experiences have been mixed, public attendance has been higher for multi-location meetings than for meetings in person. Some relevant authorities, in particular, found both before and during the pandemic that multi-location meetings have made it possible to include external participants actively, ensuring that committees can benefit from a greater range of views. Relevant authorities have reported that members of the public think that multi-location meetings are much less intimidating than those held in person, and that they have the potential to encourage more people to stand for public office. For some though, multi-location meetings will also present challenges for example, those with poor broadband connections or disabled people, or those unable to access meetings over the internet for other reasons.
  - Making relevant authorities more resilient and sustainable in how they carry out their work. The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 requires relevant authorities to think about, and act on, long term needs in the way that policy is developed and made. Multi-location meetings reduce the carbon footprint of physical meetings (although digital activity is not of course carbon-neutral). They can also help relevant authorities to reduce the risk of future unexpected events such as extreme weather which could in future present a challenge to in-person meetings. Issues of sustainability are explored in more detail below.
  - Making the use of the Welsh language easier. Relevant authorities' experience during 2020 has been that the simultaneous translation on platforms such as Zoom has reduced some of the practical difficulties which some authorities have experienced around facilitating bilingualism in public meetings.
  - Reducing the need for travel. For more rural relevant authorities and for relevant authorities covering large geographical areas and for joint bodies, significant time and cost savings for councillors, officers and other participants have arisen. In turn, this makes it easier for participants to take part if they have professional and caring commitments potentially removing some significant barriers to standing for public office.

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- 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. Of course, this raises broader issues around the way that relevant authorities work generally, and the extent to which they welcome participation and involvement from a wide range of people. These are not matters which will be resolved through multi-location meetings alone, but such meetings could be a tool that will, in due course, help a wider range of people to take an active role in local democracy.
- Better behaviours. Although experiences have been mixed, on the whole meeting management and the behaviours of participants have both improved. It has been easier for Chairs of meetings to understand who wants to make a contribution, although it is harder to read body language. Disruption of meetings by political argument (for example) seems to have been less of a theme as well.

Physical meetings should not be seen as representing the “gold standard” with multi-location meetings being second best. Physical meetings may be convenient and effective for those most familiar with and comfortable with how they work but they may also be inaccessible and impractical to many. All meetings that meet the required communication and quorate arrangements have equal status under the law.

For some, there have been drawbacks to multi-location meetings. In particular, people have had worries about the need for more council officers to support them. In time, ongoing experience is likely to improve this and reduce the amount of resource required to support them.

## What this guidance covers

This guidance focuses particularly on arrangements for the convening of formal

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meetings held by relevant authorities under the 2021 Act , and the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Decisions, Documents and Meetings) (Wales) Regulations 2001 as amended by the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Decisions, Documents and Meetings) (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2021.

Guidance for principal councils on broadcasting these meetings, where required in law, is being provided separately.

Together, this legislation updates arrangements for the management of these meetings and enhances transparency and public access.

This guidance also engages with other enactments relating to this issue, as well as with the wider local democratic context within which the Act sits.

This guidance focuses particularly on arrangements for the convening and broadcast of formal local authority meetings. Provisions relating to local authority meetings are included in various pieces of legislation, including but not limited to:

- The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021
- The Local Government Act 2000
- The Local Government Act 1972
- The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Decisions, Documents and Meetings) (Wales) Regulations 2001 as amended by the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Decisions, Documents and Meetings) (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2021.
- The National Park Authorities (Wales) Order 1995
- The **North Wales Fire Services (Combination Scheme) Order 1995**
- The **Mid and West Wales Fire Services (Combination Scheme) Order 1995**
- The **South Wales Fire Services (Combination Scheme) Order 1995**

Chapter 4 of Part 3 of the 2021 Act covers meetings convened by relevant authorities, as well as by certain other bodies and organisations. In respect of

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principal councils, community and town councils, National Parks Authorities, Fire and Rescue Authorities and Port Health Authorities, it covers:

- electronic broadcasts of meetings: Principal councils must make arrangements for broadcasting certain meetings live, and ensuring that broadcasts are available electronically afterwards. A failure to comply with this requirement does not necessarily make proceedings invalid (s46). Separate Regulations and guidance are being prepared on this matter
- attendance at meetings: relevant authorities must make arrangements for “multi-location” meetings, at which participants can speak to and be heard by each other. Where meetings must be broadcast participants must also be able to see each other (s47)
- notice of meetings, and publication of agendas: relevant authorities must publish certain information, including notices of meetings, electronically, and electronic information relating to meetings must remain available in this format for 6 years following the date of the meeting (Part 1 of Schedule 4 to the 2021 Act, amending the Local Government Act 1972). Relevant authorities must also put in place facilities for the public who would otherwise not be able to do so, to access meeting documents

Arrangements for the broadcast of meetings (physical or multi-location) held by relevant authorities is explored in separate Regulations and came into force in May 2022 and separate guidance will apply. However, relevant authorities are likely to need to consider the requirement to broadcast alongside the need to make provision for multi-location meetings. This is the reason for suggesting that meeting arrangements take account of both requirements.

## General principles

Relevant authorities will need to think about and agree independently the details of their own arrangements for multi-location meetings. In doing so, they should be guided by the following general principles.

All of the below relate to legal obligations. In developing meeting arrangements,

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relevant authorities will need to explicitly assure themselves that these principles are understood, taken into account and acted on, possibly through being the subject of specific discussion at meetings to ensure standing orders are amended by Democratic Services Committees or other bodies in relevant authorities.

Of paramount importance are the needs of local democracy. Local people need to have confidence that relevant authorities have systems in place that meet their needs this might be about observing meetings, participating in them, and using this to hold to account a meeting's participants for what they see and do. Relevant authorities' approach to multi-location meetings has to be seen as part of the wider support and commitment to local democracy. The other principles described below need to be considered in light of this.

## Transparency

Formal meetings of relevant authorities will be spaces in which democratic debate and decision-making happen. It is fundamental that these meetings are held in public (subject to the specific exceptions available), and that the public are able to access and engage with them. Relevant authorities will need to think about wider legal requirements around transparency, and accessibility, and what that means for the way that they carry out meetings. These meetings allow public and media involvement as observers whether they are held in person or virtually.

(Local Government Act 1972, s100 et seq., Schedule 12 and 12A and related legislation).

## Accessibility

Democratic systems need to be organised and arranged to account for barriers that members of the public might experience. Multi-location meetings have the potential to enhance and improve access for participants. This will not happen

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automatically however, and meeting arrangements will need to be specifically designed to help this to happen.

Relevant authorities' meeting arrangements will need to have regard for the protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, including ensuring that accessibility is considered in the context of the social model of disability, and for ensuring that the impact of its decisions on democratic arrangements are understood from these perspectives.

([Equality Act 2010](#)).

## Good conduct

In line with the Nolan Principles, multi-location meetings, as with any other public meeting, should demonstrate high standards of conduct.

Multi-location meetings have in many places led to changes in conduct, and an improvement in behaviours. Meeting arrangements can account for the need to entrench more positive behaviours particularly where these meetings involve a number of people together in a single physical location, where different dynamics may arise.

Relevant authorities will also need to have regard to the Model Code of Conduct (and to local codes of conduct, and standards arrangements) in how they develop their meeting arrangements.

(The [Local Authorities \(Model Code of Conduct\) \(Wales\) Order 2008](#)).

## Use of English and Welsh Languages

Adherence to legal requirements relating to the use of the English and Welsh languages is a legal requirement. It is a fundamental element of the obligations attached to public bodies in Wales separate legislation and guidance exists. In

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order to maximise accessibility relevant authorities may wish to consider subtitling in English and/or Welsh, and translation into other languages depending on need for example, BSL.

Arrangements must ensure that English and Welsh are treated equally and support and promote the Welsh Language. The use of the Welsh language can be provided for in multi-location meetings and normalised in a wide range of settings in ways which might historically have proven challenging for physical meetings. Relevant authorities will also need to take account of their individual Welsh language standards.

**(Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011).**

## **Local needs**

Local authorities are democratic institutions. Decisions about local democracy and the best approaches to promote and encourage engagement in local democratic systems are best made at a local level. Relevant authorities' approaches to meeting arrangements should therefore be aligned with the way that they approach public participation in particular, their plans for ensuring that they meet their public participation obligations which came into force in May 2022. An understanding of the specific needs of a wide range of local people is a part of this.

**(Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, on public participation).**

## **Future generations**

In agreeing arrangements for meetings, relevant authorities must give regard to the well-being goals and ways of working set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. Many of the improvements which could be brought about by multi-location meetings innovation around the transaction or

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meetings, reductions in the use of paper, enhanced public accessibility and so on will serve the objective of making local democratic systems more sustainable.

However, relevant authorities will still need to ensure that the 2015 Act's principles are actively embedded in arrangements for meetings. Digitisation has the potential to significantly reduce the carbon footprint of local democratic systems, but only where cloud services and server storage is procured from carbon neutral providers. Digital services are not carbon neutral by default. The reduction in travel will also add to the reduction in the carbon footprint.

## Core requirements

This section sets out the things that relevant authorities must do in relation to multi-location meetings.

These provisions are set out to help ensure legal compliance. In all respects it will be for a relevant authority's Monitoring Officer to determine exactly how the authority will ensure this compliance. The expectation is that relevant authorities will want to use these requirements as a starting point from which to innovate and experiment with different arrangements for facilitating multi-location meetings, in the context of the wider needs of local democracy.

The 2021 Act requires that "arrangements" be made by principal councils for both the broadcasting of meetings, and the convening of meetings involving participants in multiple locations. These "meeting arrangements" will need to be written in such a way that integrates a relevant authority's approach to multi-location arrangements to its wider compliance with the legislative framework for formal meetings, including the new requirements for the audio and (in certain circumstances) video broadcasting of such meetings.

Although, there is a requirement for principal councils to broadcast certain meetings which was commenced in May 2022, many principal councils were already broadcasting a number of their meetings, we therefore suggest these arrangements form an integrated part of an authority's Constitution. For principal

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councils such arrangements might be subject to oversight from the Democratic Services Committee.

The reason for integrating these arrangements into a constitutional document is that they set out how the authority is run, and will need to be integrated in some form into the rules of procedure of committees and other formal bodies.

Relevant authorities will need to develop these arrangements for themselves, there is no single set of rules setting out what arrangements should look like in detail. This guidance sets out a framework within which relevant authorities can explore their options and decide what is right for them and the communities they serve.

## Practical considerations

This section sets out things to which relevant authorities must give regard, but which do not form part of the legislative framework.

Welsh Government considers these considerations to be matters of good practice. Some specific solutions are suggested but relevant authorities should consider local circumstances in deciding what approaches are ultimately adopted, in a process which should be led by those involved in participating in meetings, and supporting those meetings' operation always informed by the needs and expectations of the public. While meeting arrangements should fit local preferences and circumstances, there should be a clear process for considering the issues highlighted below. For local authorities the Democratic Services Committee is expected to lead this process.

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** while setting out more detailed procedures to ensure that multi-location meetings work efficiently, effectively and accountably. Keeping such a policy distinct from the legal “meeting arrangements” is

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important because it 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.

Relevant authorities can take whatever process they choose in designing and adopting this policy, but those responsible for leadership on governance matters, and participants in multi-location meetings, will need to be satisfied that these arrangements take into account the **general principles**. In particular, the meetings policy will be the document to refer to the role of the public in the operation of formal meetings, and to ensure their needs and expectations are understood and treated as paramount.

Because of the public-facing nature of this work relevant authorities may consider it necessary to adopt a provisional policy, and for those within that authority and outside it (in particular, the public) to develop and refine it over time. Reviewing the policy (and of the meeting arrangements themselves) as they operate will offer the best opportunity to reflect and refine.

Where a relevant authority determines that they wish to draft such a policy it should be led by a committee of the authority with a responsibility for governance, supported by a relevant officer. This might be that authority's Monitoring Officer. Where the authority is a principal council, the decision would be made by the cabinet and the officer taking leadership might properly be the Head of Democratic Services.

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, taking different **taking different approaches for meetings**
- which online meeting platform or platforms which will be used, **multi-location meeting platforms**
- how formal notices will be issued, and the publication of agendas and minutes, **notices, agendas, reports and providing for exempt matters**

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- how **exempt matters** will be dealt with
- **meeting attendance**, including deciding where a member is “present”
- how participants who sit as part of committees or bodies subject to the 2021 Act will be able to access and participate in the meeting (including support and advice on technology, behavioural and conduct issues), **support during meetings**
- how observers (including the public and the press) will be able to access the meeting, and how they may actively participate in the meeting where needed, **supporting observers**
- facilitating broadcast by members of the public, **supporting broadcast by members of the public**. Broadcast by the authority itself may also be required, and is covered by separate guidance
- **chairing of meetings**
- **the taking of votes**
- **training and peer support** to ensure that participants are able to take part

It is important to ensure that participants and observers have access to easy to understand information which explains how they can and should engage in multi-location meetings this documentation can be part of the multi-location meetings policy but should also be available separately, and may constitute a simple explanation of some of those arrangements for the casual reader. It is particularly important the relevant authorities highlight and publicise their multi-location meeting arrangements and policy to make it as easy as possible for the public to engage.

## Taking different approaches for different meetings

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.

## In general

A multi-location meetings policy may make provision that different kinds of meeting be convened, by default, with all participants joining through remote means, or with some arrangement being made for people to attend and participate and observe in person. Policies should recognise that the 2021 Act requires participants to be able to join meetings through remote means for all formal meetings. It will not be permitted for relevant authorities to decide that all meetings will be held entirely physically.

The needs of local democracy, and the needs of the public in engaging with multi-location meetings, are a paramount consideration in deciding where and when meetings will be convened partially or wholly by remote means. The overriding intention of the 2021 Act on this issue is to help the public to be able to access and engage with local democratic systems. The convenience of participants and the efficient operation of relevant authorities themselves is important but the needs of the public will come first when these decisions are being made.

Relevant authorities may want to make particular plans for multi-location meetings where a number of participants are in the same physical space, while others join through remote means. Similarly, provisions might need to be made for allowing people to observe in person, or through remote means, or both.

There is no requirement for each meeting to be held in the same way every time it meets. For example, a council could decide to hold some full council meetings entirely remotely and others as multi-location meetings with a number of councillors (or most councillors) present in a chamber. In determining which meetings may be held wholly through remote meetings and for which physical arrangements might be made available, relevant authorities might consider:

- the general circumstances of participants. Participants' needs and preferences may change over time, and policies should have the flexibility to allow for arrangements to change where this happens. For example,

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councillors in a local authority may decide that full Council should take place predominantly physically or predominantly through remote means but in doing so they might ensure that the policy remains flexible enough to change this approach if participants' views change

- the subject matter, and number of participants attending, certain meetings. This may relate to the general matters usually under discussion at a given committee (or other body) rather than the specific agenda for an individual meeting
- the need to ensure that meetings are fully accessible to both active participants and to observers. Accessibility may under certain circumstances require physical provision
- connected to this, consideration of whether physical provision for a public gallery, or for the attendance of certain participants, is necessary if the majority of a meeting's participants are joining through remote means. This is discussed in more detail in [supporting observers \(including the public\) to access and participate in the meeting](#)

The overriding requirement is to consider the needs of the public, both as observers and participants.

Relevant authorities may have concerns about equality of access and participation in multi-location meetings where some participants are in the same physical space. On considering the risks and other circumstances they may determine that, by default, meetings can take place either wholly by remote means, or that, where a number of participants express a preference for a meeting being held physically, that support should be given to all participants to attend physically. However it is worth reiterating that relevant authorities will not be able to require that all participants attend physically under these circumstances.

Where a relevant authority decides that physical arrangements will be made for certain meetings or classes of meetings, a multi-location meetings policy will need to determine what those arrangements will be. They may include:

- the availability of a meeting room which is publicly accessible, along with the

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- provision of a physical public gallery (and press gallery)
- making arrangements for participants who attend physically to be seen by those joining from other locations (a requirement under the Act), which will require planning where multiple participants wish to attend physically and where camera facilities in a room may be less than ideal for this purpose
  - the availability of professional support in the room, or through remote means. This may be IT support or governance/clerking support
  - the streaming of broadcast footage from the meeting to those present through the use of one or more display screens (and the use of audio equipment)

Even where all participants join a meeting from another location a relevant authority may still wish to provide a physical space for members of the public to watch proceedings and to participate. This is covered in [supporting observers \(including the public\) to access and participate in the meeting](#).

## Accessibility and involvement

Some participants may wish to join meetings from another location regularly – because they have working or caring responsibilities which make attending meetings in person difficult. Some participants may have a preference for physical meetings. Participants may have personal protected characteristics, or circumstances, which limit their ability to participate online, and/or which requires that certain accommodations be made for physical presence. The same needs are likely to apply to observers. Particular care will be needed to be taken to take account of the needs of one-off participants, especially if they are members of the public rather than employed officers of the authority or regular meeting participants who are (for example) elected councillors.

Multi-location meetings where some or most participants are present in a single location can pose challenges around accessibility and involvement. Those present in a committee room will need to be able to participate on the same footing as those participating in other locations. This may be difficult where certain participants may be able to hear, but not see, other participants. For

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these kinds of meetings, there is a risk that those not physically present in a room play less of a part in discussion. These people may end up being “forgotten” by those who are physically present. For a Chair, following the visual cues of those in the same room, and those joining from other locations, is likely to be a challenge. This will need to be thought about, particularly where the Chair themselves is joining a meeting from another location.

## Multi-location meeting platforms

Multi-location meetings require additional technology and this has implications for an authority's capacity to procure and use this technology effectively. Finding and using the right platform is an important part of making meetings accessible and transparent, and the business of relevant authorities more accountable to the public.

This guidance does not recommend any specific product. Relevant authorities have made, and will make, their own arrangements in line with their IT and procurement policies. It may be, for example, that relevant authorities wish to explore joint procurement opportunities. It will be useful for relevant authorities procuring to understand how the market for these products evolved, and the need to keep in touch with other relevant authorities to exchange experiences.

Specifically, any product, or combination of products, should provide:

- the ability for participants to be able to see and hear each other, and the facility for outbound and inbound video and audio to be switched on and off either by a participant themselves or potentially also for a meeting organiser
- the ability for participants to be named / labelled so that others can easily identify them
- the ability for participants and observers to be able to join via mobile, or tablet, without losing significant functionality
- the ability to provide for simultaneous translation. Relevant authorities should ensure that they use a meeting platform which provides for simultaneous translation and that members are comfortable with its use. Principal councils

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will need to decide whether to broadcast a feed in English, in Welsh, or in both

- the ability to both record and broadcast the meeting and for participants and observers to know when recording and broadcasting is taking place
- the ability to caption or subtitle, either live (which may be partially or fully automated) or through editing after the meeting has taken place;
- a “chat” facility (the use of which we discuss in [support during meetings](#), visible only to meeting participants, and which can be turned off by the meeting organiser if necessary
- sufficient security measures to ensure that the meeting cannot be accessed by unauthorised persons, and to ensure that unauthorised persons can be ejected from the meeting where necessary
- a user interface which is intuitive and easily understood

Other factors will include:

- where and how meetings will be broadcast for example, on the council’s own website or on Facebook Live or YouTube, or in some other way (covered in separate guidance). It is not recommended that principal councils effect the broadcast requirement by granting public access to online meeting platforms themselves. Broadcast arrangements are dealt with in separate guidance, but again, the needs of the public as observers will be especially important
- arrangements where joint meetings are held between relevant authorities which, by default, use different platforms
- arrangements for when difficulties with technology emerge, or other circumstances might make it impossible to broadcast a meeting (set out in [supporting participants to be able to take an active part in the meeting](#))
- provision for electronic voting

Relevant authorities may wish to consult participants and observers to ensure that IT arrangements work for them, and that the technology means that multi-location meetings are as accessible as they could be.

## Notices, agendas, reports and providing for exempt

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## matters

Alongside multi-location meetings, relevant authorities will need to continue to issue notice of the convening of meetings, and make arrangements for the publication of agendas and reports, online. There are both issues and opportunities associated with this.

Transparency around the work programmes of bodies covered by these rules. Agendas and papers are usually expected to be published 3 clear working days in advance of meetings (and the detail of notice requirements are covered in more detail in the section below), but relevant authorities may wish to consider how the interests of transparency and accessibility can be served by earlier notification of proposed agenda items through more accessible and visible work programmes and through attention being given to the visibility and accuracy of a schedule of forthcoming decisions (which in the case of a principal council executive will be the Forward Plan)

Arrangements to ensure that those viewing a broadcast can be easily signposted to the agenda, reports and (in the case of recorded meetings) the minutes, and to any relevant background documentation.

Full detail of notice requirements for meetings (and other formal requirements for the publication of agendas, reports and minutes) can now be found:

- for local authority executives, at the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Decisions, Documents and Meetings) (Wales) Regulations 2001 as amended by the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Decisions, Documents and Meetings) (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2021
- for other meetings of relevant authorities, amendments made to Part 5A and schedule 12 of the Local Government Act 1972

The principal object of these amendments to the existing legal framework is to remove the requirement for the production of hard copy paperwork relating to

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formal meetings (except for a couple of specific purposes), and to require relevant authorities to make formal information available electronically, on their website.

The new arrangements can be summarised as follows.

## Notice of meetings

Public notice of all meetings must be published on the relevant authority's website at least three clear days before the meeting (at the time it is convened, if it is convened at shorter notice)

Notice must include details of how to access the meeting if it is being held by remote means only, and the place in which the meeting is held if it is partly or wholly taking place physically.

Notice requirements also apply where a formal meeting is taking place which is not open to the public. Here, notification is required of the time of the meeting, the fact that it is being held by remote means, and that it is not open to the public

Usually notice of meetings would be provided on an authority's website; relevant authorities may also make arrangements for notifications to be sent to members, and interested people via subscription, automatically on the uploading of agenda papers. Authorities may also make use of social media to highlight the publication of notice (although notification on social media will not constitute notice for the purposes of the Regulations).

## Agendas and reports

The agenda and reports for public meetings (including late reports) must be published on the website of the authority.

Paper agendas do need to be made available to members of the public

attending meetings held partly physically.

For principal councils only; recording of decisions by the executive collectively or individually, as well as the recording of business carried out in other meetings of principal councils. This requires that the names of who attended the meeting be recorded alongside apologies, declarations of interest and decisions made. This must be published within 7 working days of the meeting taking place. In the interests of clarity this does not require that a member's or members' signatures are required to be recorded (as has been the case previously). The information referred to above must be published on relevant authorities' websites.

Background papers relating to meetings of relevant authorities must now be proactively published on a website, not merely be available (although, exceptionally, if it is impractical to do this, they must be open for public inspection). This is an important change; it involves the automatic placement in the public domain of specified documents which may previously have only been, in practice, published on application. Councils will therefore need to think carefully about how background papers are identified, produced and prepared for publication.

The transaction of paperless business generally. Multi-location meetings are likely to be paperless. Regulations now specify that formal information relating to meetings be published on an authority's website, with the requirement of hard copy material being on public deposit having been removed.

There may be people who cannot access the information published electronically; principal councils must put in place facilities for members of the public who would not otherwise be able to do so, to access the documents.

## **Exempt matters**

Bodies covered by the legislation will need to be able to consider exempt matters in private. Exempt matters are things which a relevant authority is allowed not to publish because they are confidential. This may be for a range of

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reasons, which are set out in schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. Agendas with exempt items on the agenda are often divided into a Part I held in public and a Part II held in private.

A separate call on the online platform, separate from the call used for broadcast, should be set up for those participating in a meeting by remote means. This reduces the risk that exempt material may be inadvertently made public through being broadcast. The original, public, call can be left open and can continue to broadcast (with an appropriate slide to notify viewers that the committee or body is in private session), so the Chair and other participants can return to formally close the meeting, or further business. This will allow relevant authorities to make clear to observers what is happening, and why.

Information provided to participants covering exempt matters should be dealt with in the same way as it would be for physical meetings. Bearing in mind that information will now be managed electronically by default under the notice and agenda arrangements highlighted above, relevant authorities may want to ensure that more prominent warnings be placed on exempt material, or whether a different colour can be applied to the background of such material to reflect the fact that, in hard copy, exempt material is usually printed on different colour paper for this reason. In doing so, relevant authorities will need to think about the accessibility needs of participants (around colour contrasts, for example).

## **Innovation in how agendas and paperwork are produced and presented**

The removal of the general requirement to provide information in hard copy by default invites the possibility for more innovation and creativity. This is not innovation for its own sake, but innovation designed to better engage the public in the work of relevant authorities. Local people will be able to follow and track the way that discussions are had, and decisions made, entirely online. The removal of hard copy notices will allow relevant authorities to experiment with the use of technology to make navigating the decision-making process, in particular, easier.

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Relevant authorities may wish to consider how information might be made more accessible through creative use of committee content management systems to present information differently for example, by moving away from the production of “agenda report packs” as a single PDF and towards the use of more accessible files, and file formats, which help both councillors, other meeting participants and members of the public to engage in formal business. This may include thinking about the way that minutes are drafted and presented, providing links to the substantive reports discussed, and also with the relevant section of the recording or broadcast of the meeting.

## Hard copy archiving

Relevant authorities should however consider the needs of archiving. It is common practice that councils (and other relevant authorities) retain and bind, or otherwise store for historical purposes, hard copies of the records of formal proceedings of the authority. There is an obligation that formal information be retained for a period of 6 years although it is considered good practice to do so in perpetuity.

Archiving is likely to be possible and necessary for electronic documentation agendas, reports, minutes, background papers and other information important for researchers, historians or others to understand how decisions have come to be made. Relevant authorities will need to think about how they build systems to make sure that material produced predominantly, or entirely, electronically will be archived.

## Meeting attendance

Multi-location meetings provide additional challenges in terms of meeting attendance. It is important for the integrity of voting procedures and attendance records that expectations and procedures are clear.

Meeting arrangements and/or the meetings policy should make clear when a

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participant is considered to be “present”. There are a variety of circumstances in which this might become an issue for example, in the taking of votes. Meeting arrangements may not engage with the detail of these issues (and others) because not all circumstances can be anticipated in advance. Local determination is important here.

Instead, the Monitoring Officer and/or governance officer in attendance at a meeting should be able to use agreed principles to provide a Chair with consistent advice over whether a participant should or should not be regarded as “present”.

This is particularly important for the taking of votes but is also relevant for participation in meetings more generally. It is likely also to have salience if the need to determine if a member has been present at a meeting is relevant for the purpose of determining whether they have attended a council meeting in the past six months (s85, Local Government Act 1972).

Particular circumstances might include:

- connection problems: the connection may drop, making it difficult for some participants to follow debate and discussion. It may also disrupt a broadcast feed. A loss of connection may not be immediately apparent to others present. Certain committees or bodies may resolve matters through a general expression of consent rather than a roll call vote, meaning that some participants may lose the opportunity to express disagreement under these circumstances
- participants in meetings joining by remote means by video may seek to disable video to stabilise their connection or because they have been temporarily interrupted by events at their location it may be unclear whether some participants are present or not. Relevant authorities will need to think about whether the requirement to be both seen and heard, for most meetings, allows for brief, temporary interruption like this
- where a participant is in the “waiting room” on an online platform. Here, participants will probably not be considered “present” as they cannot be seen and heard by others, cannot see and hear others (other than through a

broadcast stream) and can play no active part in the meeting. The same may apply to participants who are only watching the broadcast feed as an observer

This list is provided as an illustration; individual authorities will need to make the decisions on these points that are right for them, and which they are confident both meet the needs of the law and the needs and expectations of local people in how local democracy is transacted.

Relevant authorities may decide that an officer could check to ensure ongoing presence at a meeting by requiring members to confirm their presence in the meeting chat at the beginning of each substantive item, as we suggested in [support during meetings](#). This could also provide a way to check presence in advance of a vote, as we suggest in [the taking of votes](#).

## **The withdrawal of members with a prejudicial interest**

Where a participant has declared a prejudicial interest in an item they will be required to leave the meeting for the duration of the relevant item. The nature of an interest and whether or not it is prejudicial will be for an authority and its Monitoring Officer to decide.

For a physical meeting it is usual practice for a participant declaring such an interest to leave the room entirely while discussion is underway, as the mere act of ongoing presence of that individual could be seen as influencing the authority's action.

Where a participant is joining by remote means, and has declared a prejudicial interest, they should leave or be removed for the duration of consideration of that item. Other participants should however be aware that the participant will be able to observe the broadcast of the meeting while outside. Relevant authorities may seek to include in their policies and meeting arrangements a requirement that participants with prejudicial interests undertake not to observe a broadcast for the reasons set out above, although we note that there is no definitive way to

police this requirement and it may be seen as overly restrictive.

Once the matter has been concluded the clerk or support officer to the committee should immediately notify the relevant participant so that they can re-join the meeting, and the meeting should not continue until they have re-joined (otherwise they should be marked as not present for any further items).

## Support during meetings

Support and advice will usually need to be provided to the participants of multi-location meetings, usually relating to matters of procedure. Participants (especially the Chair of the meeting) will need to find an appropriate way to seek and obtain this advice to ensure the smooth running of the meeting.

Online platforms used by relevant authorities to convene multi-location meetings will usually have a chat function. The chat function will provide a useful way for advice to be shared and the business of the meeting to be managed, but its use can be open to misunderstanding.

Meeting policies should explain how this function will be used and the status in terms of meeting records. Some relevant authorities may think it sensible to ban use of the chat function outright, either in all meetings or in some, specified, meetings.

## Pros of chat functions

Allows advice to be given by governance officers without disrupting the meeting.

Allows the Chair to “cue up” and acknowledge requests by committee members to contribute without disrupting the flow of questioning.

Allows members to generally express assent or agreement with another participant, or with a proposal to resolve a given issue, in a manner which gives

the Chair confidence to proceed (although the fact that consent has been given in this way would need to be verbally acknowledged by the Chair in the interests of transparency).

Allows the Chair or clerk to check whether a particular member is still “present”, as we outline in [the taking of votes](#).

## Cons of chat functions

Can be seen as undermining the transparency of the meeting.

Can risk participants becoming distracted.

Risk that participants use the chat for personal communication, and that this communication becomes inadvertently visible to other participants and to the public.

Risk that chat will involve conversation about the matters under discussion without that discussion being visible to others, or recorded properly. Multi-location meetings policies may need to decide on the status of material recorded in the chat, and whether it can be used by the clerk to assist in the preparation of minutes.

Risk that the chat becomes a place for general chit-chat

The chat function will usually need to be limited to participants and the governance officer but participants should treat conversations in chat as if they are happening in public.

Participants may decide to use WhatsApp or other messaging platforms to communicate over the course of the meeting. These platforms are not in the control of the authority; care should be taken in how they are used. For example, in the case of principal councils, if used within a political group, certain uses of WhatsApp could be seen as coming into conflict with the ban on the use of political management (whipping) at scrutiny committees.

## Officer support arrangements

Different meetings will require different kinds of support from governance officers, and others. In the short term, as relevant authorities adapt to multi-location meetings (and, in particular, adapt to meetings where some may join through remote means and some physically) it may be necessary to think about the need for additional support. In due course, familiarity and confidence with new systems (and training and development for both officers and participants) will reduce this need.

Multi-location meeting policies will need to specify the kind, and level, of support necessary for specific meetings, and the circumstances where support can be provided by remote means and where officers might need to be physically present.

## Supporting participants to be able to take an active part in the meeting

Meetings viewed live and available to view later maybe watched by a large audience and carefully scrutinised by the public including via social media. It is important that these meetings demonstrate good governance and high standards of conduct.

Meeting policies will need to take account of the need for good conduct and high standards of behaviour. These policies will need to be drafted to closely align with other constitutional provisions on these matters, such as the Code of Conduct.

Principles of good conduct apply to meetings of any kind. However, there will be some issues that are especially relevant for multi-location meetings.

The issues below are especially important:

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- people being clear about their roles and the roles that others are playing, either as participants or observers. We cover more on this in the section below;
- recognising that meeting remotely (and where some, but not all, participants are remote attendees) requires a different approach to the agenda and to behaviour than a meeting in person
- the need to think carefully about and plan for how everyone involved in the meeting will be able to actively contribute
- having a clear focus on the actual outcome of the meeting

Participants are likely to understand that formal meetings can often be “performative” people in a formal meeting behave differently from the way that they would otherwise behave, even if there is no audience. People’s physical presence in the same space has a significant impact on behaviour. Behaviour which might seem normal when everyone is in the council chamber, heckling, applause, the raising of points of order and so on, may feel odd and unusual when all or most people are joining through remote means. Participants in multi-location meetings during 2020 have talked about the “atmosphere” of multi-location meetings being different.

Behaviours in different types of meetings are likely to differ. Decision-making committees will look and feel different to audit or oversight committees, which will feel different from a principal council’s planning and licensing committees. Understanding these differing behaviours will help to inform how multi-location meeting policies are developed, and how they connect to policies around conduct and standards.

This is not just about conduct and behaviour in the narrow sense of the word, but about a shift in mindset about how much work it is possible to do in a multi-location meeting, and how multi-location meetings might help us to plan and carry out work differently.

Research carried out by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny in 2020, and further evidence carried out in preparation for the production of this guidance, highlights the need for a shift in mindset associated with meetings where people

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join from multiple locations.

- It may be necessary to plan to do less. Meetings where some or all participants join through remote means can run as smoothly as in-person meetings, but not everyone is equally familiar with and comfortable with what remains a new way of working. Planning work programmes accordingly will be important.
- Invest in preparation. Later in this guidance we highlight how Chairs may need to carry out planning to understand better what other participants might want to get out of a meeting. This is probably a good habit for all meetings, but will be especially relevant for multi-location ones.

Behaviour, and expectations, around meetings and how business is carried out in those meetings are crucially important in making those meetings effective. Participants in multi-location meetings and others involved in managing and supporting these meetings will have become adept at organising such meetings during the pandemic. The drafting of meeting arrangements and policies provides an opportunity to reflect on how an understanding of behavioural factors needs to be woven into these systems as they reach maturity.

Positive behaviours are also about confidence, which will come from participants being properly supported to play an active and productive role in the meetings in which they are due to take part. Relevant authorities will already have a sense of the support needs of meeting participants, but establishing permanent arrangements for multi-location meetings provides an opportunity to revisit those existing assumptions.

Some of the relevant issues are listed below. These are reproduced, in an amended form, from WLGA guidance issued in early 2020.

- Ensuring that participants have access to appropriate equipment. As a default a desktop PC or laptop with access to a stable broadband connection will be the best way to engage. Participants will need a camera (if they don't have a laptop with an integrated camera) and ideally should use headphones to avoid background noise. Relevant authorities should provide

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participants who are members of the authority with appropriate equipment if they do not have access to it;

- ensuring that participants can troubleshoot basic technical problems before or during a meeting, ensuring that they know how to mute and unmute themselves, to activate and disable video, to check their internet connection and so on. There may also be a need to ensure that ICT staff or others are on hand to deal with more serious technical issues
- ensuring that participants know how to use the raise, and lower, hand feature, as well as etiquette around muting and unmuting when speaking the “raise hand” feature may not be usable for those joining on mobile or on a tablet and alternatives may therefore need to be available
- use of the chat function, WhatsApp or other messaging platforms. This is covered in more detail in [support during meetings](#)
- ensuring that names displayed are consistent and accurate, with the role of the individual clearly identified: e.g. “Cllr John Williams Committee Member” instead of “John’s iPhone” or “jw10881”
- ensuring that equipment being used has enough charge or is plugged into the mains
- ensuring that participants can view papers easily (we discussed the preparation and presentation of paperwork in more detail in [notices, agendas, reports and providing for exempt matters](#); this may include (for example) advice being given to participants on the window snapping function on a [Windows device](#)
- the need for participants to check the environment around them before joining a meeting checking lighting (recognising the daytime lighting conditions may change over the course of a meeting), background (ensuring that backgrounds are relatively neutral and do not involve the inadvertent display of personal information, the council may provide a corporate background or participants may choose to blur their background) and any visual distractions or noise, with mobiles and onscreen notifications set to silent
- the need to check personal appearance, formal attire is probably not required but members should probably wear the kind of clothing they would wear if physically present at a meeting

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- arrangements for preparation, joining the meeting 15 minutes before it is due to start and checking audio and video arrangements
- participants assuming that, for a meeting that is planned to be broadcast, the meeting is being recorded and broadcast for the total time they are on the call

## **Supporting observers (including the public) to access and participate in the meeting**

While the potential for bigger audiences provides new opportunities for participation, multi-location meetings must ensure arrangements are made for the public to participate via questions and presentations, for example. The presentation of multi-location meetings should also take into account public presence as an audience in new ways.

The broadcast of meetings will make them more accessible generally but councils will still need to think of the needs of both observers and participants. This may include:

- the physical layout of rooms, which will be affected by the requirements around visibility of those joining through remote means
- how participants joining through remote means will be displayed on a screen or screens in a physical location

## **Ensuring that observers (including the public) feel welcome**

Councils have found over the course of 2020 that the universal use of multi-location meetings has resulted in a significant increase in the number of people viewing meetings.

Generally speaking meetings of relevant authorities will be meetings taking place in public rather than “public meetings”. Members of the public will not have

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an automatic right to address committees or other bodies although provision may be made in the constitution for them to do so, in which case observers can become participants.

There will be instances where those people who would otherwise be observers will need to join a meeting as an active participant. This may include:

- those presenting petitions or deputations
- those asking public questions
- people giving evidence (for example, to scrutiny committees)
- applicants on regulatory matters (planning and licensing)
- parties to quasi-judicial matters

Where individuals are members of the public the Chair or an officer will need to make arrangements to ensure that they can join to participate and that they are supported in doing so.

Meeting policies may need to make particular provision for this.

## **Making sure that members of the public feel supported when participating through remote means**

At a physical meeting, an officer might have an opportunity to speak quietly to a person beforehand to allay any nerves, and to ensure that a person is satisfied with the experience after they have contributed. In a multi-location meeting these “soft” opportunities for conversation and reassurance may not naturally exist. Individuals may find themselves, joining from their own home, on a public call with 50 strangers, being expected to contribute coherently, and then removed from the call without ceremony when the item reaches its conclusion. Clearly, this is not ideal. Relevant authorities may wish to explore how members of the public joining meetings in this way can be best supported.

## Formal meetings which are also public meetings

It is common for some types of authorities to convene formal meetings which are designed to actively involve the public in proceedings.

These meetings might legally be formal meetings but they may have a different character and atmosphere. Relevant authorities should not avoid holding these kinds of meetings because they think that managing them as multi-location meetings will be complex. This also goes for meetings held in places in the community other than an authority's normal premises, where the presence of technology for broadcast and display may not be immediately present.

Meeting arrangements may make particular reference to and provision for these kinds of meetings.

## Providing for protest and dissent

Relevant authorities may also need to consider how opportunities for public protest and dissent might be provided for in multi-location meetings.

Protest can be inconvenient (and disruptive), but it also reflects a vital public right. Where relevant authorities propose to carry out business by way of multi-location meetings as the norm, and particularly where little to no business for certain bodies may be carried out in person, this feature of the local democratic landscape could be at risk; meeting arrangements should take account of this factor. It will not be appropriate for an authority to decide that it will convene a meeting entirely remotely (with no business being carried out in person) if the principal reason for doing so is because it will eliminate the risk of embarrassment to the authority of a visible, public protest in the vicinity of the meeting.

It is, however, proper for a council to decide that it will convene all meetings so that they can only be accessed through remote means, as long as the

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accessibility and equality implications of this decision are understood, and as long as the discretion of the authority to make exceptions to these arrangements in particular cases is not fettered.

We noted in [taking different approaches for meetings](#) the need to make physical arrangements for certain meetings, even those where most participants may be joining through remote means. This may also provide the opportunity for public protest, which could take place in a public gallery, and made visible to those participating through remote means.

This would allow for a protest to be streamed into a meeting otherwise taking place in multiple locations, and could ensure that people protesting in this way feel that their voice has been heard.

## Supporting broadcast by members of the public

Members of the public or the press may wish to film for immediate or future broadcast some or all of a meeting.

In the case of multi-location meetings where most or all participants are in the same location, this may involve the separate recording of a broadcast stream for editing and broadcast later.

For meetings where some or all participants attend physically, with physical arrangements made for observers, members of the public and members of the press may wish to use their own equipment for recording and broadcast.

Relevant authorities may wish to engage with the local press, and to invite views from the public, as to how their meeting arrangements and policies should take account of the requirement to provide access for this purpose. The way that this works is likely to be different from how councils may have supported this activity when meetings were “all-physical”. This may involve:

- ensuring that the layout of a room is designed to support video recording (by

providing a space from which people might film proceedings without visual obstruction, for example)

- ensuring that amplification arrangements in a committee room allow proceedings to be adequately recorded by an external microphone, or providing a way for members of the public carrying out recording to take the broadcast audio feed, where relevant
- arrangements for shots of the room which include members of the public and others in the audience. Committee meetings occur in public and those attending do not have an automatic expectation of privacy or the right to object to recording, but there may be circumstances in which councils want to think about how they will ensure that those carrying out recording are focusing on the formal proceedings
- authorities will have to comply with UK data protection legislation and their own data protection policies in relation to the processing of any recording of meetings that are made. Data protection can be a complex area of law, and it is recommended that the authority consults its data protection officer to ensure compliance
- arrangements for video and audio recording of the recorder's own narrative and of two-way interviews with participants within the committee room; members of the press in particular may want to film interviews, pieces to camera and establishing shots of the space in which the meeting takes place, and arrangements should be in place to support this before and after the meeting, and to ensure that those attending are aware that this may be happening

This is not an exhaustive list.

## Chairing meetings

Chairing a multi-location meeting is very different to chairing a face-to-face meeting. Chairs will need to be supported to carry out their role in specific ways. The job of the Chair will be a particular challenge where a meeting is being carried out in a physical space with only some participants joining through remote means.

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The following general principles for chairing meetings in this context are reproduced and amended, from WLGA guidance issued in spring 2020, and incorporate guidance produced by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny for both English and Welsh councils at the same time.

Chairs have a particular responsibility to prepare for the meeting, probably in a more planned and directed way than might be necessary for a physical meeting. This may involve the Chair consulting with officers, and other committee members, to determine:

- what the meeting is about, and the possible purpose and outcomes for every item on that meeting's agenda
- what information and paperwork will need to be made available in order for these outcomes to be delivered
- where councillors or other meeting participants will want to contribute and where and how public participation might need to be facilitated
- where these people might need particular support in order to participate in the way that they want

Chairs will also need to engage with all participants (which may include external witnesses and members of the public or others with a role to play) to ensure that their role and means of involvement are well understood. This is covered in more detail in [supporting observers \(including the public\) to access and participate in the meeting](#).

Chairs should:

- think about the accessibility of the meeting to the public, and whether there are any things they can do that will ensure that public observers are welcomed and that business is explained in a way that is understandable, including the operation of the multi-location meeting itself
- ensure that they are prepared for the meeting in a logistical sense by being aware of which members and other participants may be joining by remote means. If the Chair themselves is joining by remote means while some other participants are present in a committee room particular steps will need to be

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taken to prepare, which are set out **in taking different approaches for meetings**

- ensure before the start of the meeting that everyone is able to access the meeting, and that everyone is able to both see and hear each other (where the law requires it for specific meetings) or hear each other (for other formal meetings)
- provide a reminder of meeting arrangements and policies, particularly relating to conduct and behaviour, including some of the material set out in **supporting participants to be able to take an active part in the meeting**. This may (depending on the meeting) involve advice on voting arrangements
- at the beginning of the meeting, introduce themselves, the committee, officers present and other participants to ensure that those watching or listening to a broadcast are aware who is who
- to avoid people speaking over each other or long silences, ask each member in turn for their contribution to an item, based on an understanding of what members wish to contribute (as we explore further in **supporting participants to be able to take an active part in the meeting**)
- check occasionally through the meeting that no one has been ‘lost’ due to technical issues, and provide support to councillors experiencing challenges in this Chairs may need the support of support officers
- pay more attention than usual to framing the meeting with reminders of the purpose of each agenda item and summarising decisions and actions for each item and again at the end of the meeting
- check at the end of each agenda item that all members are content that they have been able to contribute, and ensure that agreed voting arrangements are followed where relevant

The “balance” between individuals in a room, and those joining by remote means, will have a significant effect on how business will be transacted. This links back to the points we made in the earlier section on conduct and behaviour. Chairs and their support officers are likely to need to know ahead of time which members to attend physically and which may join by remote means. For meetings with a mix of arrangements, particularly if the Chair themselves will be joining by remote means, planning is likely to be necessary. This may include:

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- understanding the motivations and objectives of individual participants on specific agendas items, and having a sense of what they may want to say and ask
- identifying how a support officer or other member may bring their attention to a member wishing to make a comment through remote means or in the committee room (it will otherwise be challenging for a Chair to maintain awareness of those in the room as well as those joining remotely)
- planning debate to be themed or otherwise structured rather than inviting comments generally, to ensure that all participants have an opportunity to contribute
- briefing witnesses on expectations
- ensuring that reports reflect the above sets of circumstances

This kind of planning will benefit any meeting, not just those with a mix of in-person and remote attendance.

## The taking of votes

Multi-location meetings provide additional challenges in terms of capturing votes. Chosen options will depend on the chosen platform and local preferences.

Participants in a formal meeting may decide to do something through general consent, or through a recorded vote. Immediately before the vote the Chair will need to determine that all members of the body continue to be “present”, as we set out in [meeting attendance](#).

There are a number of different options when it comes to recording votes:

- a verbal roll call of those participants entitled to vote (“voters”). Particularly for full Councils, this process has been found to be the most rigorous but can be very time consuming, especially if amendments to motions are put to the vote
- using the ‘raise hand’ function, although this is subject to misinterpretation and human error

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- responses via the chat
- dedicated voting software incorporated into the platform

The authority will want to ensure that:

- all voters have the same opportunity to vote
- all voters vote through the same process. In some council chambers, facilities for the taking and recording of votes may be present, but those joining through remote means may not be able to participate in the use of this in-situ technology. Relevant authorities with this technology will need to think carefully about whether, and how, such facilities might extend into the remote space, or how systems used for remote voting might extend into the physical space
- a suitable record of the vote is captured by the appropriate officer and is confirmed in a way that is understandable to those observing the meeting

## **Bodies reaching resolutions without a vote**

It is common that committees or other bodies may resolve to take certain action without a vote being recorded. In person, the Chair is able to get a sense of whether consensus exists by looking around the room. Those present have the opportunity to object and to press for a vote, depending on the authority's standing orders.

Where participants are joining through remote means (and particularly where some members join through remote means and some are present physically) the Chair will need to take special care to ensure that consent is present to move on without a vote.

## **Training, peer support and good practice sharing**

The arrangements for multi-location meetings will continue to evolve. This makes it particularly important to ensure that councillors and officers have

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access to good quality training, peer support and good practice sharing.

Those participating in multi-location meetings and those expecting to participate should be offered initial, and top-up, training, development and support to ensure an understanding of these issues. This is not the same as training to support the technical use of ICT equipment.

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