



Protocol for Members of the Public attending Local Authority Meetings in person

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V1	17/09/2024	First draft
V2	02/10/2024	Second draft following advice from Health and Safety
V3	02/10/2024	Third draft following comments received from the Monitoring Officer
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Introduction - Purpose of document

The purpose of this document is to set out the provisions and arrangements for members of the public attending Council meetings that are open to the public, as well as the correlating reciprocating expectations.

1. Methods of Attendance

Ceredigion County Council has adopted a protocol for multi-locations meetings which sets out the arrangements in terms of members of the public attending meetings of the Council that are open to the public.

Meetings of the full Council, Cabinet and Development Management Committee are broadcasted during the meeting and recorded for viewing at a later date. All other Committees of the Council that are open to the public can be viewed remotely by requesting a link.

Members of the public and press can attend all Committee meetings that are open to the public in person at the Council Chamber.

2. Provision of a physical public gallery and press gallery

The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 paragraphs 15.67 guidance stipulates that:

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 provision of a physical public gallery (and press gallery);
.....

Although all meetings of the Council that are open to the public can be accessed electronically, Ceredigion County Council also provides a public area in the Council Chambers at Penmorfa, Aberaeron where the public can view the meeting.

3. Privacy for Members of the Public attending in person.

At the commencement of meetings, the Chair reminds everyone present that members of the public seated in the public area, will not be visible to those attending meetings remotely, or during live-streaming or subsequent recordings, with the exception of those that have been given prior permission to address Overview and Scrutiny Committees or the Development Management Committee.

However, in order to provide a guarantee of this assurance, members of the public must remain within the public area prior, during and after the termination of the meeting.

4. Capacity

Attendance in person may be subject to a restriction on numbers due to limited spaces, health and safety regulations, and any legislative requirements that may be in place at that time such as social distancing rules. Priority will be given to Committee Members, Officers presenting or advising on reports, facilitating officers, translators and members of the public addressing the committee.

Ceredigion County Council reserves the right to refuse entry to those not on the priority list if the Council Chamber has reached its capacity. There are no arrangements for booking a seat in the public area in advance of the meeting, therefore spaces are allocated on a first come, first served basis.

The total capacity figure for the Council Chamber as calculated by the Health and Safety Team, based upon fire exits is 100. There are 73 units with mics and camera located in the Members' area, specifically for Councillors, Officers and members of the public provided with prior permission to address committees. 2 further units are allocated within the translation booth for translators. The remaining capacity of 25 are allocated to the public area. At present, there are 9 fixed seats which are located in the public area, and an additional 16 seats are provided (or spaces if required for wheelchair access), which are located immediately in front of the public area, when required.

5. Attendance by individuals under the age of 16

Any person under the age of 16, attending a meeting in person must be accompanied by an appropriate adult, or local authority staff and must be supervised at all times. Children should not be allowed to roam through the Chamber, or roam/play in the area outside the Chamber/public toilets or unsupervised in any other internal or external areas including the car park and access road to Penmorfa.

6. Translation

A translation facility is provided to Members of the public when attending remotely (by selecting the English channel via zoom) or in person. However, there are a limited number of translation headsets available in the public gallery area, and priority will be given to those taking part in the meeting.

If a member of the public wishes to use the headsets provided, they should raise their hand to draw the attention of the translation team, who will assist them.

7. Councillor safety

Members of the public may **only** access the public area of the Council Chamber. They should not enter the Councillors' meeting area before, during or after a Council meeting or approach a Councillor or Officer during the meeting to discuss matters on the agenda. Members of the public must not sit/stand immediately behind any Councillor.

If a member of the public enters this area, they may be asked to leave the Council Chamber. Similarly, if the behaviour of a member of the public is deemed to be threatening, dangerous or if it is deemed that they are interfering with the elected Members' ability to carry out their duties, they may be asked to leave the Council Chamber.

8. Terminating filming of the Meeting

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

9. Exclusion of Public and Press

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

10. Removal of member of the public or clearance of part of the meeting room

The Ceredigion County Council Constitution stipulates that:

"20.1 REMOVAL OF MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC

If a member of the public interrupts proceedings, the Chairperson will warn the person concerned. If they continue to interrupt, the Chairperson will order their removal from the meeting room or their removal from the online platform by which they are accessing the meeting from another location.

20.2 CLEARANCE OF PART OF MEETING ROOM

If there is a general disturbance in any part of the meeting room open to the public, the Chairperson may call for that part to be cleared. If there is a general disturbance on the online meeting platform, the Chairperson may call for the online meeting platform to be muted, temporarily suspended or closed"

If a member of the public has been asked to leave the meeting, and continue to cause disruption from immediately outside the Council Chamber, they will be asked to leave the premises.

11. Conduct in, and in the vicinity of meetings

Members of the public must abide by the capacity specifications outlined above, and cannot insist that they may attend the meeting, if the total capacity for the Council Chamber has been met, or cause disruption from outside the Council Chamber, or to any other member of staff outside of the Council Chamber.

All electronic devices, such as mobile phones, laptops and pagers must be switched to silent.

The Chairperson will use his discretion when considering the type of behaviour that is unacceptable. This may include, but is not limited to:

- Disruption of the meeting either physically or verbally;
- Speaking loudly, shouting, clapping or otherwise disrupting the meeting;
- Interfering with the Council's proper conduct of its business;
- Indecent or grossly offensive comments;
- Abuse, harassment or intimidation of Councillors or Officers prior or during the meeting;
- Physical abuse of any Councillor or Officer (any such behaviour will also be reported to the Police);
- Threats of harm, threatening behaviour during or prior to the meeting;
- Distribution of misinformation including malicious communications prior or during the meeting;
- Display of graphic images that aim to cause distress or anxiety;
- Damage to council property, or private property belonging to Councillors or Officers (any such behaviour will also be reported to the Police);
- Behaviour which causes offence to other visitors,
- Bringing food or drinks into the meeting;
- Using e-cigarettes during the meeting;
- Taking photographs during the meeting;
- Behaviour that would suggest that an individual is the influence of alcohol or drugs.