

Carmarthenshire County Council

Democratic Services Multi-location Policy

Multi-Location Meetings (otherwise known as Hybrid meetings) came into force as part of the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021 – Section 47, with the aim of increasing accessibility and improved participation in Local Government.

Introduction

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance to Councillors, Officers and the public as to how we manage and conduct multi-location (hybrid) Committee meetings.

Multi-location meetings (sometimes known as hybrid meetings) are a combination of face to face meetings and virtual meetings, whereby some Councillors, officers and the public attend the Council Chamber or other venue, and some attend remotely.

During Multi-location meetings, it is a legal requirement that **participants of meetings that are broadcast are able to “speak to and be heard by each other” and “to see and be seen by each other”**. ~~all participants will be able to see and hear each other and.~~

Welsh to English-translation facilities will be available for all.

As a Local Authority we have a duty to make and publish arrangements for the purpose of ensuring that local authority meetings are able to be held by means of any equipment or other facility which enables persons who are not in the same place to attend the meetings.

Multi-location meetings will operate as close as possible to the Council’s usual meeting practice and all Constitution rules apply.

Broadcasting of Meetings

As a Council we will ensure that all formal meetings are broadcast live and available for Archive viewing for a period of 6 months. Any discussion in relation to exempt items will not be broadcast. Section 46 of the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021 requires us to make this provision so that members of the public not in attendance at the meeting can see and hear the proceedings. This section specifically applies to meeting which are open to the public.

Notice of a Meeting

We will ensure that each Agenda sets out how Committee Members, Officers and the Public can attend the meeting, and these will be published at least 3 clear days before the meeting is held. The Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021 requires that notices of meetings and electronic information relating to meetings must remain available in an electronic format and be available for a minimum of six years following the date of the meeting.

Agendas, Reports and minutes of formal meetings are published on the Authority's website. A ~~small number of hard copy agendas will also be available to members of the public attending physically.~~

Agendas, report and minutes can be viewed [here](#)

Physical attendance

~~Due to Covid 19, the number of persons allowed to attend in person will be determined in by the Chief Executive and takes into account the latest Covid 19 Guidance or regulations.~~

~~As of 16th June 2022 it has been agreed that there will be no limit on the number of people permitted in the Chamber, however~~ **Physical attendance of participants cannot be mandated, and there is no restriction on participants should they wish to physically attend any or all meetings.** The Authority's commitment to net Zero Carbon **however** is one of our primary corporate objectives. Multi-location (hybrid) meetings can contribute to the Council's net Zero objective, and attending remotely helps by limiting the travelling and commuting we do and is essential to achieving this .

Attend remotely if you can.


Remote attendance

- Committee members and officers can join meetings remotely via Zoom if they so wish.
- Committee Members and Officers should consider their personal appearance and background, check what people can see behind and in front of you, be careful not to allow exempt or confidential papers to be seen in the video-feed.
- When attending remotely you should remember once on camera everyone can see your surroundings, try to ensure you are in a room by yourself with no distractions (i.e. family members or pets will be seen in the background). **We ask members not to eat, move around or hold a conversation either on the phone or in person whilst on camera.** If possible, arrange for a non-descript background.
- To maintain confidentiality and ensure you abide by the Code of Conduct, **members attending remotely must be alone when exempt reports are considered.**

Preparing for a Multi-location meeting

- Join the multi-location meeting no later than 15 minutes before the start to allow the Democratic Services Officers to gain an accurate list of people in attendance and the opportunity to resolve any equipment issues for those attending remotely.
- Make sure your equipment is fully charged or plugged in to a mains socket as remote meetings can use a lot of battery. Your iPad and laptop will be needed. We recommend that you use your iPad to read the paperwork via the Modern.gov app and your laptop to connect to Zoom if attending remotely. Also make sure your mobile phone is switched off or on silent.
- Make sure you have read the paperwork before the meeting. Prepare thoroughly as the Chair will assume that everyone has read the reports, any contributions are necessary and the debate is focussed.

During the meeting

- The Democratic Services Officer will note the participants. Physical attendees should sign the attendance register.
- The Chair will welcome everyone to the meeting and outline how the meeting will work.
- To aid the meeting arrangements, if you know in advance that you wish to speak, please notify the Chair or the Democratic Services Officer before the meeting starts. If you wish to speak, please use the 'raise your hand facility' on Zoom or raise a physical hand if attending in person.
- If attending remotely and you require Welsh to English simultaneous translation, you should click on the interpreter button and select 'English'. If attending in person, headphones are available at the rear or the Chamber and should be plugged into the microphone unit. Please choose the headphone icon  and select English from the list. ~~Leave the headphone on the desk at conclusion of the meeting so that the headsets can be cleaned and isolated for 72 hours before re-use.~~
- Only speak when invited to by the Chair. Speakers should announce their name **before making a comment**. When referring to a specific report, page, or slide, mention the page number so that all members have a clear understanding of what is being discussed at all times.
- To speak remotely please switch on the microphone button and your camera on the bottom toolbar on your screen. To speak in the Chamber, press the microphone button on the device before you

For physical attendees, If the red light above the microphone button comes on, the microphone is activated and you can speak. If the green (flashing) light above the microphone button comes on, your request-to-speak is accepted and you are placed in the waiting list:

- **Green on:** In the waiting list.
 - **Green flashing:** First in the waiting list.
 - You cannot speak until the **red light** above the **microphone** button comes **on**
- Only one person may speak at any one time.
 - Multi-location meetings will operate as close as possible to the Council's usual meetings practice and normal constitution rules apply.
 - Where members of the public are exercising speaking rights at the meeting either in person or via remote attendance, the Chair will as part of their introduction explain the procedure for their participation which will reflect those relevant elements of the above. Members of the public must adhere to this procedure.
 - Remember, the meeting may be open to the public or webcast so it is important to conduct yourself as you would in any public meeting.
 - **When attending Councillors need to ensure that they remain in the meeting throughout debates and during voting in order to maintain the integrity of the decision-making process and to reduce the opportunity for legal challenge of any decision. If a Councillor needs to leave the meeting temporarily they should make sure they notify the Chair or Democratic Services Officer in person or via the chat function within Zoom. The chat function will only be available between an individual member and the host/co-host for the purposes of managing the meeting and attendance thereat.**
 - Given the nature of hybrid meetings, the Chair will use his/her absolute discretion as to the order in which Members are given the opportunity to contribute to the debate on a specific item. The Chair will ensure that every member has the opportunity to participate in the meeting.
 - **Participants of meetings that are broadcast must be able to "speak to and be heard by each other" and "to see and be seen by each other". The ability to see and be seen predominantly applies when a participant is speaking. To encourage participation and engagement all members are asked to ensure their cameras are on during meetings, this is particularly important during quasi-judicial meetings such as Planning and Licensing Committee. For other meetings the Chair may use their discretion whether participants are to keep their cameras on when not speaking, the default position however is that cameras should be on at all times. It is inevitable that there will be occasions when a remote participant may need to disable their camera due to poor connection/internet issues. If this occurs the participant should use the chat function to inform the meeting Chair and democratic services staff of the issue. Due to connectivity issues it may not be possible for all cameras to remain on during full**

council meetings, however all members are expected to switch on their cameras when speaking.

- If Members lose connection during the live meeting, they should make every effort to re-connect, however the meeting will continue as long as the meeting is quorate. If a Member joins the meeting at a later time they must make themselves known immediately to the Chair or Democratic Services Officer, and comment and vote only on those complete agenda items remaining. This can be done using the chat function within Zoom.
- If the numbers present fall below the quorum required, the meeting will end immediately.

Declarations of Interest

If a Councillor or officer declares a Prejudicial Interest at a Multi-Location meeting, that person should withdraw from the meeting unless a specific dispensation has been granted by the Standards Committee.

For remote attendees, the Councillor or Officer will be removed from the meeting by the Democratic Services Officer and placed in the 'waiting room' for the duration of the relevant item. If attendees are in the chamber, they will physically leave the chamber for the duration of the item. On conclusion of that item that person will be invited back into the meeting, once the item relating to the prejudicial item has concluded. Should that person not respond to the call to re-join, the meeting will continue without them providing it is quorate.

Voting

Voting shall be decided by a simple majority of those voting and present at the meeting. **Persons attending physically will be expected to vote with their physical hand, persons attending remotely should vote via the 'raise hand' function on Zoom, and the number of votes will be combined.** ~~This will be carried out by a show of hands via the Zoom app for large meetings, or for smaller committees a mix of physical and virtual hand. For full Council meetings, members attending in person will be asked to bring their laptops to the meeting with the camera and microphone switched off. All members will be asked to vote using the 'raise hand' function on Zoom.~~ If a recorded vote is requested, a roll-call of all Members present will be undertaken (this means that the name of each member will be called and they will be asked if they are for, against or abstaining from the vote). **Options for a combined electronic vote system are being considered and the voting method will be updated as and when necessary.**

The Chair or Democratic Services will announce whether the vote has been carried or rejected. No voting numbers will be announced unless a recorded vote has been called - (CPR 16.5) or a member has asked for their individual vote to be recorded CPR 16.6).

As is normal procedure, details of how Members voted will not be kept or minuted unless a Recorded Vote is called.

Voting on Staff Appointments will be by ballot.

Exempt Items

If a Committee agenda includes an exempt report and following any decision to move into private session the broadcast will be stopped. Individuals who are not entitled to be present during the item will physically leave the Chamber, those attending remotely will be removed from the virtual meeting by the Democratic Services Officer. No attendee is permitted to film, photograph or audio record any part of the proceedings which are exempt ('in camera').

Attendance by members of the public

The public gallery will be open as normal with a maximum capacity of 50 persons. Member of the public can also choose to **attend physical meetings from the public gallery or** view proceedings [online](#)

Members of the public who are making representations/asking questions or presenting a petition will be given the option to either attend the meeting in person or remotely. If attending remotely, the Authority's Remote attendance guidance will apply. If attending in person arrangements for physical attendance will be provided by the Democratic Services Team.

Press will be asked to **attend physically at the meeting venue or** view the [livestream](#) of the meeting.