

Report

Council



Part 1

Date: 17 May 2022

Subject Council Standing Orders and Arrangements for Multi-location meetings

Purpose For Council to formally approve and adopt amended Standing Orders and Arrangements for multi-location meeting.

Author Head of Law & Standards

Ward City wide

Summary Sections 46 and 47 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 (“the 2021 Act”) impose a statutory duty on all Welsh local authorities to make and publish arrangements for “hybrid” or multi-location meetings and for the broadcasting of these meetings.

The proposed arrangements and policy for the conduct multi-location meetings are attached to this report, together with updated Standing Orders to reflect the legislative changes and the new arrangements for the appointment of a Presiding Member.

Council are requested to approve and adopt the amended Standing Orders and Arrangements for multi-location meeting

Proposal To approve and adopt amended Standing Orders and Arrangements for multi-location meeting.

Action by Head of Law & Standards and Democratic and Electoral Services Manager

Timetable In line with legislative requirements

This report was prepared after consultation with:

Democratic Services Committee
Head of Finance
Head of People Policy & Transformation
Strategic Director (Transformation & Corporate)

Background

1. Section 4 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 enabled local authorities in Wales to introduce voluntary arrangements for remote meetings. The Local Government (Coronavirus) (Wales) Regulations 2020 (“the Regulations”) were then introduced on 22nd April 2020 and they enabled Welsh local authorities to hold remote meetings to overcome Covid 19 social distancing restrictions during the pandemic lock-down. All Council meetings have been held remotely since June 2020 using Microsoft Teams and Microsoft Live Event applications, to enable live broadcasts of remote meetings.
2. The Regulations continued in force until 1st May 2021, when they were superseded and replaced by the provisions of sections 46 and 47 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 (“the 2021 Act”). The 2021 Act imposes a statutory duty on all Welsh local authorities to make and publish arrangements for “hybrid” or multi-location meetings and for the broadcasting of these meetings.
3. Since May 2021, the Council has continued to operate fully remote meetings under the 2021 Act, to comply with Covid restrictions and social distancing requirements. However, the removal of all Covid restrictions means that the Council can now introduce arrangements for hybrid or multi-location meetings where participants have a choice about joining remotely or attending in person
4. As part of the Council's Strategic Covid-Recovery Aims, a New Working Model has been agreed for both elected members and Council staff, based on flexible working arrangements. An integral part of this New Working Model is the use of technology and the freedom to participate remotely in Council meetings.
5. Therefore, the technology and the protocols for the conduct of multi-location meetings will provide the freedom and flexibility for all Councillors (and any other participants) to either attend in person or remotely. The Council Chamber will be designated as the physical location for the meeting and any elected member, participant or member of the public will be entitled to attend in person. Elected members (and other participants) will also be able to attend remotely from multiple locations using MS Teams and the screens in the meeting room will ensure that they are capable of being seen and heard at all times by other Councillors, participants and members of the public attending in person. Members of the public will also be able to view proceedings remotely via the live-stream broadcast of the meeting on the Public-i system, which can be accessed through the agenda hyper-link on Council's web site. The meeting arrangements will enable one or all of the participants to join remotely or in-person, or any combination of numbers. If all members elected to join remotely, facilities will still be provided in the meeting room for members of the public or other participants to attend in person and view the broadcast proceedings on the screens from the public gallery or seating areas. In the event that no suitable meeting room is available, with the necessary equipment or facility for remote attendance and electronic broadcasting then, by agreement with the Chair of the meeting, the multi-location meeting can take place wholly by remote means.
6. The attached protocol set out how the Council intends to discharge its statutory duties under sections 46 and 47 of the 2021 Act in relation to the broadcasting of meetings, and the convening of meetings involving participants in multiple locations. The rules and procedures set out in Section 3 of the document will constitute the mandatory, core requirements for compliance with the legislative framework. As such, they will form part of the Council's published Constitution and will need to be read in conjunction with the Council's Standing Orders relating to the conduct of meetings. Council is, therefore, asked to consider and adopt the Arrangements for Multi-location meetings and to publish this as part of the Constitution.

7. Section 4 sets out the Council's wider multi-location meetings policy, which reflects the general legislative principles in section 3, while setting out more detailed practices and procedures to ensure that multi-location meetings work efficiently, effectively and accountably. This non-statutory policy will be subject to periodic oversight and review by Democratic Services Committee and should also be considered in conjunction with the Council's wider Public Participation and Engagement Strategy.
8. Council Standing Orders have also been updated and amended to reflect the legislation and the new arrangements for the appointment of a Presiding Member to chair Council meetings, instead of the Mayor. Council is asked to approve and adopt the attached Standing Orders.

Financial Summary

9. There are no specific financial implications, as the multi-location meetings will be delivered within existing resources. The upgrade to the technical infrastructure in the Council Chamber to facilitate multi-location meetings and their live web-casting has been undertaken using Welsh Government grant funding

Risks

Risk	Impact of Risk if it occurs* (H/M/L)	Probability of risk occurring (H/M/L)	What is the Council doing or what has it done to avoid the risk or reduce its effect	Who is responsible for dealing with the risk?
Failure to adopt and publish arrangements for multi-location remote meetings will have a reputational impact on the openness and transparency of the governance processes	Medium	Low	The proposed arrangements will meet legislative requirements and will ensure that members have the flexibility to participate in meetings remotely, with equal status as those attending in person.	Head of Law & Standards.
The processes and procedures for multi-location meetings do not operate effectively due to technology problems of lack of member training	High	Medium	Democratic Services and IT staff will support the systems and deliver appropriate training to members, to meet their needs.	Head of Law & Regulation/Head of People Policy & Transformation

*Taking account of proposed mitigation measures.

Links to Council Policies and Priorities

The proposed arrangements are consistent with the Council's Strategic Recovery aims and support the Council's Corporate Plan 2017-22. The principles of open and transparent governance are also enshrined in the well-being plan and objectives under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act.

Options Available and considered

The options available to Cabinet:

1. To approve and endorse the amended Standing Orders and Arrangements for multi-location meeting
2. To not approve and endorse the amended Standing Orders and Arrangements for multi-location meeting

Preferred Option and Why

Option 1 is preferred, as this will enable the Council to comply with the legislative requirements.

Comments of Chief Financial Officer

There are no financial implications and any costs associated with multi-location meetings will be met from existing budgets.

Comments of Monitoring Officer

Set out in the Report.

Comments of Head of People Policy & Transformation

There are no HR implications arising directly arising from this proposal. The proposals support remote working and greater flexibility through providing opportunities for Councillors and staff to attend meetings physically or remotely.

As highlighted under Equalities Impact Assessment and the Equalities Act 2010, the increased flexibility of multi-location meetings provides opportunities for those who have difficulty in attending physical meetings and/or who have specific equipment available off site to enable participation. The amended Standing Orders and Arrangements for multi-location meetings also consider welsh language requirements.

Local Issues

Not applicable.

Equalities Impact Assessment and the Equalities Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 contains a Public Sector Equality Duty which came into force on 06 April 2011. The Act identifies a number of 'protected characteristics', namely age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation; marriage and civil partnership. The new single duty aims to integrate consideration of equality and good relations into the regular business of public authorities. Compliance with the duty is a legal obligation and is intended to result in better informed decision-making and policy development and services that are more effective for users.

The new governance arrangements for multi-location meetings should not unfairly disadvantage any of the protected groups, both in relation to Councillor participation and the general public. The ability to attend and observe meetings remotely provides greater flexibility for those individuals who, because of their particular protected characteristic, have difficulty in physically attending meetings and should promote greater accessibility for these groups. In the longer term, consideration can be given to further enhance the remote access arrangements to provide an improved service for the hearing impaired, with the provision of subtitles and/or BSL interpreters. We will consult and engage with disability groups to monitor and review the impact of these governance arrangements and any further adjustments required

Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

The arrangements for multi-location meetings will support the development of A More Equal Wales; achieving more diversity and transparency.

The Strategy supports the Equality Plan 2020-2024 objectives;

1. Leadership, Governance and Involvement.
2. Community Cohesion

Background Papers

Welsh Government Interim Guidance on Multi-location meetings

Dated 11 May 2022