



Report of the Monitoring Officer

Democratic Services Committee – 19 July 2021

Councillor Questionnaire

Purpose:	To consider a councillor questionnaire to be sent to all councillors seeking feedback on remote attendance at committee meetings during the pandemic.
Policy Framework:	None
Consultation:	Access to Services, Finance, Legal.
Recommendation(s):	It is recommended that the Committee: 1) Approves the Councillor Questionnaire attached at appendix 1 to be circulated to all councillors; 2) Request that a report is brought back to Committee outlining the responses.
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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Last year Welsh Ministers issued The Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Meetings) (Wales) Regulations 2020 (the Regs). The Regs temporarily relaxed the rules for local authority meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic in order that council business could continue with councillors meeting remotely ensuring adherence to public health restrictions.
- 1.2 Meetings of Council, Cabinet and Committees have been held remotely, using Microsoft Teams video conferencing software, since May 2020 to date.
- 1.3 The provisions contained within the above Regs ended on 30th April 2021 and have been replaced by new provisions for local authority meetings made under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

Councillors will no doubt be aware that no similar provision has been introduced in English authorities.

2. The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021

2.1 The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 (the Act) provides that:

- (1) Full Council meetings must be electronically broadcast from 5 May 2022. Full Council meetings are already webcast and available to view live on the Council's website.
- (2) The requirement to broadcast other meetings may be extended by further Regulations issued by Welsh Ministers.
- (3) Local authorities are required to make and publish arrangements to ensure their meetings may be attended remotely (i.e. enabling persons who are not in the same place to attend the meeting).
- (4) Meetings have to be capable of being held virtually. Individual authorities must decide whether their meetings will be held fully virtually, partially virtually (where some participants are in the same physical location, whilst others join the meeting virtually -hybrid meetings or as physical meetings with all councillors in attendance.
- (5) Councillors must be able to speak to and hear each other. Those meetings which must be broadcast (full Council meetings) councillors must also be able to see and be seen by each other.
- (6) Notices of meetings must now be published electronically, summonses to attend meetings may be served electronically and copies of meeting documents which are to be made available for public inspection (agendas, reports, minutes etc.) may be provided electronically.

2.2 Councillors will recall that some amendments to the Council Constitution have already been made to put into effect those parts of the Act already in force.

3. Questionnaire

3.1 Councillors will be aware that work is already underway to enable both the Chamber and the Gloucester Room to accommodate virtual meetings following a successful bid to the Digital Democracy Fund.

3.2 Statutory guidance is awaited from Welsh Government on multi location meetings. The spirit and intention of the Act is to achieve greater accessibility and improved public participation in local government. Work undertaken has demonstrated that multi location meetings during the pandemic generally:

- increased productivity
- lessened the need for papers
- reduced carbon footprint
- increased sustainability
- facilitated use of the welsh medium

- increased meetings being more visible and accessible to members of the public
- reduced travel
- improved behaviour
- allowed those with protected characteristics to engage on an equal footing

3.3 In order to gauge the views of Councillors, so that their views can be considered when developing future policy and amendments to the constitution regarding how the council will conduct its business going forward. The a questionnaire has been devised to send out to all Councillors so that their views can be considered when considering a future policy/amendments to the Constitution in terms of how the council will conduct its business going forward. The questionnaire is attached at appendix 1.

3.4 The Committee is asked to consider the questionnaire prior to sending to all councillors.

4. Integrated Assessment Implications

4.1 The Council is subject to the Equality Act (Public Sector Equality Duty and the socio-economic duty), the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure, and must in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Acts.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Deliver better outcomes for those people who experience socio-economic disadvantage
- Consider opportunities for people to use the Welsh language
- Treat the Welsh language no less favourably than English.
- Ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

4.2 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2005 mandates that public bodies in Wales must carry out sustainable development. Sustainable development means the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the 'well-being goals'.

4.3 Our Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) process ensures we have paid due regard to the above. It also takes into account other key issues and priorities, such as poverty and social exclusion, community cohesion,

carers, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and Welsh language.

- 4.4 An IIA Screening Form has been completed with the agreed outcome that a full IIA report was not required as this report is seeking views as to the benefits of multi location meetings for councillors with a view to aiding councillors attend meetings.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report.

6. Legal Implications

- 6.1 There are no legal implications associated with this report.

Background Papers: None

Appendices:

Appendix A Questionnaire