



Report of the Head of Democratic Services

Special Democratic Services Committee – 8 November 2021

Draft Multi-Location Meetings Policy

Purpose:	To consider the Draft Multi-Location Meetings Policy and make a recommendation to Council.
Policy Framework:	Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021 & Statutory Guidance.
Consultation:	Access to Services, Finance, Legal.
Recommendation(s):	It is recommended that the Committee: 1) Considers the Draft Multi-Location Meetings Policy attached and provides any comments to assist in drafting a Policy for consideration by Council.
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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Multi-Location Meetings are permitted under S47 of the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021. Their purpose is to achieve greater accessibility and improved public participation in Local Government.
- 1.2 Multi-location meetings offer Local Authorities the potential to update and transform the way they do business. It allows Local Authorities to become more flexible and efficient and 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 attending meetings in person previously.
- 1.3 This Policy provides guidance regarding the Council processes when conducting Multi-Location Meetings.

2. The Legislation

- 2.1 Part 3 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 is about promoting access to local government. Section 47 of the Act provides where meetings are to be broadcast (electronic broadcasts) under section 46, that persons are able to speak to and be heard by each other and to see and be seen by each other. This will include meetings of Full Council, Cabinet, Committee meetings and Joint Committee meetings which are open to the public.
- 2.2 Effectively this means that those councillors joining remotely must be able to see those in actual attendance, those in actual attendance must be able to see those attending remotely, and those attending remotely must be able to see and hear any members of the public attending the meeting exercising their right to speak at the meeting.
- 2.3 The Local Authority is also under 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.

3. Multi-Location Meetings (MLMs)

- 3.1 A Multi-Location Meeting is a meeting of the relevant authority (Principal Council) whose participants are not all in the same physical place. These are often referred to as Remote or Hybrid Meetings.
- 3.2 At least one participant may be joining the meeting by remote means. For example, this includes meetings of the type described below:
 - i) 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;
 - ii) 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;
 - iii) 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;
 - iv) Meetings of a committee taking place wholly through remote means where no physical arrangements have been made.

4. The Guidance

- 4.1 The Welsh Government has issued Interim Statutory Guidance on Multi-Location Meetings. The Interim Statutory Guidance on Multi-Location Meetings (May 2021) may be viewed at <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-08/interim-statutory-guidance-on-multi-location-meetings.pdf>

4.2 The guidance states that Principal Councils must:

- i) Make arrangements for broadcasting certain meetings live, and ensuring that broadcasts are available electronically afterwards.
- ii) 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).
- iii) Publish certain information, including notices of meetings, electronically, and electronic information relating to meetings must remain available in this format for six years following the date of the meeting. Relevant authorities must also put in place facilities for the public who would otherwise not be able to do so, to access meeting documents.

4.3 The Authority must set out the details of its arrangements for Multi-Location Meetings. These arrangements must be guided by the general principles of Transparency, Accessibility, Good Conduct, Welsh Language, Local Needs and Future Generations.

5. Multi-Location Meeting Policy

5.1 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. The Policy, once adopted shall be readily available electronically.

5.2 A Draft Multi-Location Meeting Policy is set out at **Appendix A**. The Committee is asked to consider the Policy.

6. Amendments to the Council Constitution

6.1 Any consequential amendments to the Council Constitution as a result of this Policy will be carried out by the Head of Democratic Services in consultation with the Monitoring Officer. Some amendments have already been made in accordance with the legislation.

7. Integrated Assessment Implications

7.1 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.

7.2 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’.

7.3 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.

7.4 An IIA Screening Form has been completed and no adverse implications have been noted.

8. Financial Implications

8.1 The costs associated with this will be met from existing budget provision.

9. Legal Implications

9.1 There are no additional legal implications to set out in the report.

Background Papers: None

Appendices:

Appendix A Multi-Location Meeting Policy

Multi-Location Meeting Policy

1. What is a Multi-Location Meeting?

- 1.1 Multi-Location Meetings (MLMs) originate from s47 of the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021 (“the Act”). They are often referred to as Hybrid Meetings.
- 1.2 A Multi-Location Meeting is a meeting whose participants are not all in the same physical place. Some of the participants may be physically located in the meeting venue whilst others join from their home or other remote location.
- 1.3 In the case of meetings of the council which are required to be broadcast under s 46(2)(b) of the Act any Councillor attending the meeting remotely must when they are speaking, be able to be seen and heard by the Councillors who are in actual attendance. Similarly those in actual attendance must be able to be seen and heard by those attending remotely. Those attending remotely must also be able to see and hear any members of the public entitled to speak at the meeting.

2. Broadcasting of Meetings

- 2.1 The Authority shall ensure that all of its formal meetings shall be broadcast live, ensuring that the broadcasts will be made available electronically within 3 clear working days of the meeting. Post Meeting broadcasts will be available at www.swansea.gov.uk/meetingsonline

3. Notice of a Meeting

- 3.1 The Authority will ensure that the relevant information shall be included on the Notice of the Meeting (Agenda) setting out how the Committee Members, Officers and the Public may attend the meeting.
- 3.2 The Act 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.

4. Agendas, Reports, Minutes & Background Papers

- 4.1 Agenda & Reports of formal meetings are published on the Authority’s website. A small number of hard copies shall be available to members of the public physically attending. Availability of Agenda: Council & Cabinet normally five clear working days prior to a meeting & all other Committees three clear working days prior to the meeting.

- 4.2 Minutes of the Meeting shall show decisions made; names of those present; apologies and declarations of interest. They shall be published on the Authority's website within 7 working days of the meeting taking place.
- 4.3 Background papers shall be published on the Authority's website.
- 4.4 There is an obligation that formal information be retained for a period of six years although it is considered good practice to do so in perpetuity.

5. Can I attend a Physical or Multi-Location Meeting?

5.1 Covid has had an impact on physical numbers permitted in venues. The number permitted in a Meeting Room is reduced and will be reviewed regularly in line with Welsh Government regulations and in line with risk assessments and safety measures put in place to support safe access and use.

5.2 The Head of Democratic Services in consultation with Facilities Management shall ensure that the maximum physical number permitted are clear and the following system will be in place:

i) Councillors

The Head of Democratic Services shall inform each Political Group Leader of the number of their Political Group Councillors allowed into the Meeting Room. The calculation will be based on the proportional representation of that Council Body.

ii) Officers

The Head of Democratic Services shall liaise with the Chief Executive, Chief Legal Officer and Chief Finance Officer to ensure that the relevant Officers are physically present where appropriate.

iii) Members of the Public

Agendas for meetings will inform the public of the need to advise the Democratic Services / Scrutiny Team by noon of the previous working day should they wish to attend.

The relevant Team shall consider the number of members of the public that wish to be physically present and draw lots if the numbers wishing to be present exceed the maximum number permitted. The public will be informed of the outcome of the draw prior to 6pm on the previous working day before the Meeting.

5.3 Councillors should bring their devices to physical meetings, so that they can view the agenda online and participate in eVoting.

6. Quorum

- 6.1 The quorum of a meeting is one quarter of the voting Members unless specified otherwise. The quorum shall include those attending Remotely, at a Multi-Location or Physically; providing they are able to speak and be heard by each other and to see and be seen by others.
- 6.2 If the numbers present, fall below the quorum required, the meeting ends immediately.

7. Withdrawal from Meeting due to Prejudicial Interest

- 7.1 Should an attendee declare a Prejudicial Interest at a Multi-Location or Remote meeting, that person must withdraw from the meeting.
- 7.2 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.

8. Voting

- 8.1 Voting shall be electronic, via a roll call or a mixture of both.
- 8.2 All voting results will be announced by the Head of Democratic Services / Chair / Presiding Member before moving to the next item of business.

9. How exempt matters will be dealt with?

- 9.1 The Chair of the Meeting shall inform the public when the Meeting is moving into private session. The recording must cease before any discussion on the item commences.

10. Multi-Location / Remote Attendance – Is a member “present”?

- 10.1 Multi-Location & Remote meetings provide additional challenges in terms of meeting attendance. There are a variety of circumstances in which this might become an issue e.g. Taking of Votes, Loss of Connection (WiFi or Mobile).
- 10.2 To be considered present, the Member must be able to speak and be heard and to see and be seen by others. The Monitoring Officer shall provide the local determination and will consider issues such as temporary interruptions associated with connection issues.
- 10.3 Any failure in technology / connectivity which results in members loss of contact during the meeting shall not invalidate any part of the deliberations or any vote taken. The Presiding Member may adjourn the meeting if they consider appropriate whilst any technical issues are resolved.

11. Public Questions at Remote / Multi-Location Meetings

- 11.1 Should a member of the public wish to ask a question, they must give notice to democracy@swansea.gov.uk by noon the clear working day prior to the meeting.
- 11.2 The member of the public will be sent the meeting link and will be invited in shortly prior to the meeting commencing. Once Public Question Time ends, the questioner will be removed from the meeting. They can continue to view the meeting via the Authority's Live Event feed.

12. Formality and Privacy at Meetings

- 12.1 When attending remotely or Multi-Location, Councillors and any participants must ensure that the room from which they are accessing the meeting is secure and must ensure that the door of the room is closed so that no disturbance occurs during the course of the meeting as it is important to ensure a degree of formality in the proceedings.
- 12.2 Participants are encouraged to use a suitable 'corporate' background. Remember that as proceedings will be live, viewers will effectively be able to view you working in your home.
- 12.3 Councillors are reminded of their responsibilities under the Code of Conduct when considering exempt items during a meeting. Councillors should ensure that they cannot be overheard during discussions around confidential information. Councillors should consider the use of headphones for such meetings and make sure that they plan ahead.

13. Etiquette at Remote / Multi-Location Meetings

- 13.1 Participants should:
- i) Dress appropriately for the Meeting.
 - ii) Ensure that their microphone is muted if not speaking.
 - iii) Respect the Chair and others present.
 - iv) Behave appropriately and be mindful of the Code of Conduct.
 - v) Use the chat facility appropriately.

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