



## **RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE**

**5<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2023**

#### **MULTI-LOCATION MEETING POLICY**

#### **REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, DEMOCRATIC SERVICES & COMMUNICATION.**

#### **1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Members comments on the draft Rhondda Cynon Taf Multi-Location Meeting policy (attached at Appendix 1) following its consideration by the Democratic Services Committee and Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs.

#### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Comment and endorse to Council the draft Multi Location Meeting policy (attached as Appendix 1), following which the Council Constitution be amended to include a copy of the agreed policy.

#### **3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 The need for the Council to take forward a Multi-Location Meetings policy and for the policy to be adhered to by Members, Officers and the general public as a form of good practice when attending multi location meetings.

#### **4. BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 At the start of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020 the Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Meetings) (Wales) Regulations 2020 provided a framework for Councils to convene remote meetings for all attendees while face to face meetings were unable to take place.

- 4.2 The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 has enabled Councils to continue to meet remotely with the introduction of multi-location meetings, thereby enabling greater public participation and Councillor involvement in decision making.
- 4.3 During Covid lockdowns and throughout 2020/21 Rhondda Cynon Taf Council convened its meetings by remote means resulting in a number of benefits such as allowing decisions to be made in a transparent way; Making it easy for the public to view and participate in the democratic process and making it easier for participants to take part if they have family and/or caring commitments.
- 4.4 When considering arrangements for remote attendance or 'multi-location meetings', Authorities must have regard to the statutory guidance issued by the Welsh Ministers: Interim statutory guidance on multi-location meetings <https://gov.wales/local-authority-multi-location-meetings-interim-guidance>
- 4.5 The statutory guidance sets out a number of general principles to guide Authorities when developing their meeting arrangements, namely, transparency, accessibility, good conduct, Welsh language, local needs and future generations.
- 4.6 The statutory guidance also stipulates that Authorities should develop a policy setting out how multi-location meetings will operate and reflect the meeting arrangements in its constitution (Appendix 1 refers).

## **5. AREAS FOR CONSIDERATION**

- 5.1 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.
- 5.2 The Council Chamber has multi-location meeting capability, through its webcasting facility, which enables participants to attend both remotely and in person. The Chamber also has a designated public gallery, which allows the public to attend in person. This is in addition to the live public webcasting of some meetings; both providing additional transparency and public oversight in the decision-making process.
- 5.3 The Council has determined that all meetings must be able to operate as multi-location meetings to ensure that participants are able to attend remotely or physically should they wish to do so, subject to those meetings that were determined by Council, to be conducted as virtual only ([June 2021 Council](#)), or by the request of the Chair.
- 5.4 At the meeting of the [Democratic Services Committee](#) on the 13<sup>th</sup> February, 2023 Members considered the draft policy before them and took forward a

number of amendments, which, for ease of reference are highlighted in red within the appendix, to reflect the changes proposed.

- 5.5 The draft policy was also considered by the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs at their meeting on the 21<sup>st</sup> March 2023, who supported the amended policy.
- 5.6 The draft policy, with the incorporation of the Democratic Services Committee amendments is presented at Appendix 1 for Members comment and agreement.
- 5.7 Subject to Members agreement, the policy will be inserted within the Council Constitution. A Multi Location Meeting handbook will also look to be drafted to assist Members and other attendees for future meetings.
- 5.8 Members are reminded that support staff from within the Council Business Unit / Democratic Services are available to support Members and provide assistance with any arrangements necessary for the undertaking of a Multi Location Meeting.

## **6. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS.**

- 6.1 Equality considerations feature throughout the Council's draft multi-location meetings policy.
- 6.2 The Council Chamber conferencing system, which includes simultaneous interpretation and webcasting, currently promotes the use of the Welsh Language at every opportunity.

## **7. CONSULTATION**

- 7.1 Consultation was undertaken with the [Democratic Services Committee](#) and the Council's Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs.

## **8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 There are no financial implications aligned to this report.

## **9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS AND LEGISLATION CONSIDERED**

- 9.1 The report has been prepared in accordance with The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021

## **10. LINKS TO THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PLAN / OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES**

- 10.1 Equality considerations feature throughout Corporate and National priorities and specifically the content of this report contributes to a More Equal Wales

and a Wales of Cohesive Communities. Many of the improvements brought about by multi-location meetings, such as innovation around the transaction of meetings, reductions in the use of paper, enhanced public accessibility will serve the objective of making local democratic systems more sustainable.

- 10.2 Multi-location meetings contribute to the Councils Climate Change agenda as the meetings reduce the carbon footprint of physical meetings (although digital activity is not carbon-neutral).

## **11. CONCLUSION**

- 11.1 It is recognised that Multi-Location meetings are a vital component of good democracy in local government and help improve the Council's decision making, service provision and cost effectiveness.
- 11.2 The undertaking of Multi-Location meetings will strengthen accountability and transparency in the democratic process.
- 11.3 The Multi Location meetings policy will be reviewed as and when appropriate to ensure it remains relevant and 'fit for purpose'.

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**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 1972**

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS**

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COMMUNICATIONS**

**Background Papers**

**None.**

**APPENDIX 1**

**Multi – Location Meeting Policy**