



## **MULTI-LOCATION MEETINGS POLICY**

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

#### **1. BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 came into force on the 30<sup>th</sup> April 2021 and enabled Councils to operate multi-location meetings whereby Members, Officers, the public and Press are able to attend meetings physically or remotely.
- 1.2 In August 2021, Welsh Government published Interim Statutory Guidance on Multi-Location Meetings which can be found [here](#):
- 1.3 Multi-location meetings provide an opportunity for local authorities to become more efficient, raise their profile in the local community and make it easier for the public to view and participate in decision making and the democratic process.
- 1.4 Conducting meetings in this manner allows for greater flexibility and equality of access, acknowledging that some participants may have a preference for physical meetings potentially due to protected characteristics or circumstances which limits their ability to participate online. Other participants may wish to join council meetings remotely and from another location as a matter of default because, for example, they have working or caring responsibilities..
- 1.5 The provision of multi-location meetings also helps the Authority meet the requirements of the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 in terms of making the Authority more sustainable and resilient. Multi-location meetings reduce the carbon footprint of wholly physical meetings and reduce both the reliance on paper and need for travel;
- 1.6 This policy aims to produce a clear guide as to how the Authority will take forward multi-location meetings, ensuring transparency with decision making and accessibility for all, whilst also reflecting the meeting arrangements within the Council Constitution.

#### **2 LEGAL REQUIREMENTS**

- 2.1 Under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 ('the 2021 Act'), Part 3, Chapter 4, local authorities are required to:
  - i. Electronically broadcast full Council meetings (with effect from May 2022).

- ii. Make and publish arrangements to ensure that all Council, Cabinet, Committee and Joint Committee meetings may be attended remotely also referred to as 'multi-location meetings'.
    - Meetings must be capable of being held virtually, but each authority 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, also referred to as 'hybrid meetings') or as physical meetings (authorities may **not** mandate physical attendance at meetings).
    - Participants in the meetings must be able to speak to and hear each other; and for meetings which are required to be broadcast (full Council meetings), participants must also be able to see and be seen by each other.
  - iii. Publish all meeting documents on the Council's website, including notices, summonses, agendas, reports and background papers (with effect from May 2021).
    - A note of the meeting, including Members in attendance and decisions made, must be published within 7 working days of the meeting.
    - Notice of meetings is no longer required to be posted at the Council's offices. However, copies of agendas and reports must be made available for the public if meetings are held physically.
    - The Council is also required to make public access provision for members of the public who cannot access electronic documents, for example, by providing access to computers, copies of documents, or making documents available for inspection.
- 2.2 Authorities should take into consideration the statutory guidance available when taking forward multi-location meetings. The statutory guidance provides 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.

### **3. WHAT IS A MULTI-LOCATION MEETING?**

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 In respect of such meetings, the Authority has determined these meetings to be called 'hybrid' meetings and will refer to them as such on Committee Summonses / Agendas / Meeting invites.
- 3.3 When a meeting is to be convened fully remotely the Council will regard these meetings as 'virtual' meetings and will refer to them as such on Committee Summonses / Agendas / Meeting invites.
- 3.4 The Council Chamber, situated in the Council Headquarters in Clydach Vale

has multi-location meeting capability to enable participants of meetings to attend and fully participate through a hybrid setting. The Council Chamber is therefore the designated venue for physical attendees at a Council Committee meeting. The Chamber also has a designated public gallery to allow the public and press to attend in person.

- 3.5 The Council uses a secure virtual platform to conduct the remote aspect of a meeting. Details of how to access meetings through the virtual platform are provided to Members and relevant attendees in advance of the meeting.
- 3.6 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](#)).

#### **4. ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS**

- 4.1 Meetings invitations will be provided electronically and will provide details of the meeting, its location and timings. Meeting invites will include links to enable the participants to join remotely should they wish to do so. In respect of hybrid meetings, participants will need to indicate their intention to attend the meeting physically or remotely in advance to enable any necessary administrative and support arrangements to be put in place by Democratic Services. It is proposed that any apologies submitted are to be provided at the earliest opportunity whenever possible to assist with Committee set up arrangements.
- 4.2 Owing to the necessary administrative support that is required to hold hybrid meetings, a minimum number of physical attendees will be put in place for those meetings as indicated below. If the minimum number is not met, the meeting will be held as virtual only and the participants informed accordingly by Democratic Services. The Council website will also be updated to advise of the changes and notify any members of the public who may have wished to attend the meeting physically in a viewing / observer capacity.
- 4.3 The minimum physical attendance by Members and subsequent arrangements will be in place as follows:

<b>MEETING</b>	<b>DETAILS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council</li> <li>• Cabinet</li> <li>• Planning Committee</li> <li>• Licensing Committee</li> <li>• Appeals Committee</li> <li>• Standards Committee</li> </ul>	All meetings will be offered as hybrid (i.e. participants can attend either physically or remotely).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All Scrutiny Committees</li> <li>• Governance and Audit Committee</li> <li>• Democratic Services</li> </ul>	All meetings will be offered as hybrid subject to the following attendance numbers:

Committee	– $\frac{1}{4}$ of the Committee as <del>Minimum number of</del> physical attendees
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local Education Authority Governors</li> <li>• Voluntary Early Retirement Redundancy Panel</li> <li>• Pension Fund Committee</li> <li>• Executive Committees / Steering Groups</li> <li>• Joint Committees</li> <li>• Working Groups</li> </ul>	All meetings will be offered as virtual (i.e. participants can attend remotely only)

## **5 QUORUM**

- 5.1 The quorum of a meeting is one quarter of the voting Members unless specified otherwise within the Council’s Constitution. The quorum shall include those attending remotely, or physically; providing they are able to speak and be heard by each other and to see and be seen by others when participating in proceedings.
- 5.2 If the numbers present fall below the quorum required, the meeting ends immediately.

## **6 USE OF CAMERAS**

- 6.1 Remote participants of meetings must be able to “speak to and be heard by each other” and “to see and be seen by each other”.
- 6.2 For all meetings, Members are requested to leave their cameras on throughout the duration of the meeting. Any Press in attendance will be asked to keep their cameras off for the duration of the meeting. If circumstance arises where it may not be appropriate to capture your video image, permission must be sought from the Chair and the reason recorded. It is accepted that there will be occasions when a remote participant may need to disable their camera due to poor connection/internet issues or personal circumstances of their home environment.
- 6.3 Committee reports under consideration will not be displayed on screen. Only when Officers are providing a presentation, will the information be shown on screen.
- 6.4 Members and Officers should be mindful of any confidential information they may have on display when attending a hybrid meeting that could be picked up on camera.

## **7 WITHDRAWAL FROM A MEETING DUE TO A PREJUDICIAL INTEREST**

- 7.1 Should an Elected Member declare a Prejudicial Interest at a hybrid or virtual meeting, the Member must withdraw from the meeting unless they are relying on a relevant exemption set out in the Council's Member Code of Conduct and which is properly disclosed or obtained a dispensation from the Council's Standards Committee. However, where Members of the public are able to speak at a meeting, the Elected Member can also remain to make their representations but must leave after their representations are made. (For further information on declarations of interests at meetings see the [Council's Constitution](#).)
- 7.2 The Elected Member 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 CONSIDERATION OF EXEMPT OR CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION AT MEETINGS**

- 8.1 Each meeting agenda will indicate whether the information to be considered is exempt or confidential and these items are generally kept until the end of the agenda to limit any disruption to the meeting and any participants who may be required to leave the meeting at that point.
- 8.2 Agenda items which contain public information, and which are not exempt or confidential can be considered in a public forum. When an exempt or confidential item is itemised on the agenda the following steps may be used to ensure that the information is not shared with anyone other than those entitled to receive it:
- a) Request that those not entitled to consider the exempt information leave the public remote meeting or be moved to the "virtual" waiting room whilst the exempt information is considered.
  - b) Request that Members who are attending a meeting remotely ensure that the consideration (including any vote) on any confidential/exempt item cannot be overheard or seen other than by themselves
  - c) The meeting recording and webcast will be paused for the duration of the exempt item. In the physical part of the meeting any observers will be requested to leave the room whilst the exempt item is considered.
  - d) When consideration of the exempt information has been completed, if there are further public items to be considered, all remote participants will be invited to re-join the public remote meeting and the recording and webcast will be resumed. Likewise, the observers or participants attending the physical meeting will be invited to return into the meeting venue.

## **9 MEETING ETIQUETTE**

- 9.1 Participants attending meetings remotely, should use an appropriate

background setting. It is recommended that Members either blur their background or chose the corporate background feature when attending remotely.

9.2 Members should conduct themselves in a professional manner at all meetings regardless of the setting (physical or remote). Members should refrain, whenever possible, from eating **and smoking** when on camera and should consider their appearance with no offensive clothing or materials on display. Members should ensure that they show respect at all times and consideration for others and not use bullying language or behaviour towards others.

9.3 In addition it is essential to **attend meetings from a safe, confidential and secure location, ensuring that where possible the location does not cause connectivity, sound and vision issues which may detract from the content of the meeting.** ~~avoid joining a meeting virtually from a noisy or public location or from your vehicle as undoubtedly these locations will cause.~~ **Members and Officers should ensure that their location provides a** ~~Neither will they offer a safe and confidential environment when discussing exempt agenda items. If it is deemed that the location a Member has chosen to conduct the meeting is not suitable for the reasons stated above, Under such circumstances the~~ **Chair in discussion with the Proper Officer attending the meeting may** ask a member to leave the meeting and rejoin from a more suitable location.

9.4 Virtual participants should only use the chat function if there is something they need the meeting to be aware of i.e. they are having sound issues or they need to leave the meeting early. The chat facility is not to be used for discussions, as all discussions must be made verbally in the meeting for the sake of individuals observing the meeting and / or the meeting recording where appropriate. The chat is not to be used for other reasons. Be mindful that everyone in the meeting can see the chat content.

9.5 All those participating in the meeting, physically or remotely, will need to indicate when they would like to speak, via the microphone queuing system in the Chamber or virtual hands raised when attending remotely. Only when brought in by the Presiding Officer / Chair may someone speak. Those in physical attendance in the Council Chamber should wait for their microphone light to indicate red before speaking. Those attending remotely should remember to unmute their microphone when speaking and to re-mute when finished. In both settings, participants must speak clearly and into the microphone.

## **10 VOTING**

10.1 Voting will either take place electronically, via a roll call or a mixture of both. All voting results will be announced by either the Presiding Officer / Chair, the Monitoring/Legal Officer or the Head of Democratic Services before moving to the next item of business. Should a Member leave the meeting and not return, their vote will not be able to be provided by another Member.

## Appendix 1

- 10.2 Unless a recorded vote is requested in accordance with the Council's Constitution, the Chair will seek a consensus from Members. If no objections are received the recommendations will be considered as carried ("no dissent").
- 10.3 In both Hybrid or virtual meetings, where the vote will be carried out electronically the names of those voting for, against or abstaining will be automatically recorded and published on the Council's website. If a physical roll call of votes is taken this will be undertaken by the Monitoring Officer or Head of Democratic Services at Full Council and for any other meeting by the Legal/Democratic Services Officer.

### **11 WELSH SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION**

- 11.1 The Council Chamber conferencing system, which includes simultaneous interpretation and webcasting, currently promotes the use of the Welsh Language at every opportunity and this provision is in place to support those committees where the membership includes Welsh speaking Members. This will also be offered where Democratic Services has been informed in advance of any public speakers wishing to converse through the medium of Welsh (as indicated above).
- 11.2 For observers of any live webcast meeting, observers will have the option of viewing the webcast through either the English or Welsh feed provided, subject to their language choice.

### **12 RECORD OF ATTENDANCE**

- 12.1 The Democratic Services Officer will record the attendance of each Committee Member and participant at the meeting and record attendance in the relevant Decision Notice/Minutes of the meeting. An attendance record will also be displayed on each individual Members' profile on the Council webpages. Committee Members are to inform the relevant Democratic Services Officer if they are unable to attend a meeting and their apologies will be recorded at the meeting and published in the minutes of the meeting.

### **13 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

- 13.1 In order to address Committees such as the Planning & Development Committee, public participation guidance is available to assist residents when they attend both remote meetings and in person in the Council Chamber. Following confirmation of their requests to the appropriate chair, they will be contacted and supported through the processes in place to address Committee.
- 13.2 A public participant at a meeting wishing to speak in Welsh is required to contact Democratic Services at least 2 days in advance of a meeting (as directed on each Committee agenda) so that the necessary translation arrangements can be made. All meetings will be facilitated by a Democratic Services Officer.

## **14 CHAIRING MEETINGS**

- 14.1 The Statutory Guidance understands that chairing a multi-location meeting is very different to chairing a face-to-face meeting. The job of the Presiding Officer / Chair is particularly challenging at a physical meeting with some participants joining remotely. Presiding Officers / Chairs and vice-chairs are encouraged to attend meetings in person in order to benefit from the direct support of the Democratic Services officer and Legal officer supporting the Committee.
- 14.2 In general Chairs of meetings should ensure they are prepared for the meeting; ensure all participants are able to access the meeting and can see and hear each other; introduce themselves and others to members of the public who may be present; check occasionally to ensure no one has been lost due to technical difficulties and provide support to those participants experiencing challenges; and, ensure all participants are given an opportunity to speak and appropriately use the chat facility.

## **15 WEBCASTING OF MEETINGS IN RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL**

- 15.1 Local Authorities are required to webcast certain Council meetings. The main purpose of webcasting is to aid transparency, governance and accountability by giving members of the public, elected members, officers and other interested parties the opportunity to observe meetings without having to attend in person and for the Council to have an official audio and visual record of its decision-making process.
- 15.2 The following formal meetings of the Council are amongst some of the meetings that will either be webcast by being streamed live or recorded for upload to the Council's webcasting website within a reasonable period of time following the end of the meeting:

[Home – Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council \(public-i.tv\)](#)  
[Virtual Meetings | Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council](#)  
[\(rctcbc.gov.uk\)](#)

- Council
  - Cabinet
  - Planning & Development Committee
  - Licensing Committee
  - Governance and Audit Committee
  - Democratic Services Committee
  - All Scrutiny Committee meetings
  - Standards Committee
- 15.3 Webcasting enhances the formal record of the meeting and the decisions taken, which are published on the Council website in the form of minutes or decision notices.



- 15.4 A webcasting protocol is included in [Part 4 Of the Council's Constitution](#).

## **16 RECORDING OF THE MEETING**

- 16.1 At the start of each meeting, participants will be informed verbally of the intention to record the meeting. Subject to any disagreement being made verbally, all attendees consent to be filmed and to the use of those images and any sound recordings.
- 16.2 When recording the meeting the Council collects, uses and stores the following categories of personal information about participants;
- Their voice which will be recorded when they speak at the meeting;
  - Their image which will be recorded for the duration of their attendance in the meeting.
- 16.3 Details of how the local authority uses a participant's personal information for Recording and Publishing Meetings of the Council, Cabinet and Committees can be found [here](#).

## **17 PUBLICATION OF MEETING INFORMATION**

- 17.1 The Council's committee administration software [Civica-Modern.gov](#) is used to publish all meeting related agendas, reports, minutes and decision notices to its Council webpages on both the English and Welsh side of the website for the public to view. In addition, each Committee page links to its relevant webcast recording.

## **18 CALENDAR OF MEETINGS**

- 18.1 A calendar of meetings will be developed annually which identifies when Committee meetings will be taken forward throughout the Municipal Year and the timings of such meetings. This may be subject to change for operational reasons and these changes will be publicised.

## **19 TRAINING**

- 19.1 Members and officers will receive training to be able to participate at meetings which will include the use of the virtual meeting platform software utilised for joining remote meetings and the use of the microphones in the Council Chamber when meetings take place physically in the building. Other training includes access to Modern Gov Committee papers, electronic voting and external participants will also receive support from Democratic Services when accessing the meeting.
- 19.2 Training for multi-location meetings will continue to be reviewed and provided to ensure the appropriate support provision is provided at all times by the Council Business Unit.

## **20 REVIEWING THE POLICY**

20.1 The Multi Location meetings policy will be reviewed as and when appropriate to ensure it remains relevant and 'fit for purpose'.

## **21 SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS**

21.1 This guidance policy should be read in conjunction with the Council's Constitution, Privacy Notice for Recording and publishing Council, Cabinet and Committee Meetings and the Council's Corporate Privacy Notice - which can be found in the following links:

Constitution – [Council Constitution | Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council \(rctcbc.gov.uk\)](http://rctcbc.gov.uk)

Privacy Notice - [Recording and Publishing Council, Cabinet and Committee Meetings for Staff and Elected Members | Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council \(rctcbc.gov.uk\)](http://rctcbc.gov.uk)

Council's Corporate Privacy Notice – [How we use your personal information - An Overview | Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council \(rctcbc.gov.uk\)](http://rctcbc.gov.uk)

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