



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

Multi Location Meeting Policy

MULTI LOCATION POLICY

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Overview

Background

1. Arrangements were first made to progress “remote meetings” in the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, however this required at least 30% of the attendees to be in attendance in person and was rarely used. At the outset of the coronavirus pandemic in March 2020, the Welsh Government introduced the Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Meetings) (Wales) Regulations 2020 which established a framework for Councils to convene remote meetings for all attendees throughout 2020 and part of 2021.
2. With the implementation of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 (“the 2021 Act”) the Welsh Government has provided Councils the power and freedom to convene multi-location meetings which will enable greater accessibility and public participation in local government decision making.

Local Authority Meetings

3. In accordance with the 2021 Act this Multi-locations Meeting Policy will apply to all meetings of:
 - a. The Council
 - b. Cabinet and Cabinet Boards
 - c. Scrutiny
 - d. Joint Committees
 - e. Regulatory Committees
 - f. Outside Bodies
 - g. A committee or sub-committee of b. – c. above.
4. Formal meetings of the Council or its committees are convened in accordance with the relevant legislative requirements for those meetings. These meetings are usually held to make formal decisions or recommendations and are often held in public. Notice of these meetings is published in advance on the Council’s website and includes information about the location, timing and business to be conducted. Previously these meetings would have been held with all participants being in physical attendance at a single venue.

Legal Requirements

5. Under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 ('the 2021 Act'), Part 3, Chapter 4, local authorities are required to:

a. Broadcast full Council meetings (with effect from May 2022).

b. Make and publish arrangements to ensure that all Council, Cabinet, Committee and Joint Committee meetings may be attended remotely (i.e. enabling persons who are not in the same place to attend the meeting) – 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 (although authorities may not mandate physical attendance at meetings).
- Meeting participants must be able to speak to and hear each other; and for meetings which are required to be broadcast (i.e. full Council meetings), participants must also be able to see and be seen by each other.
- These requirements took effect from May 2021, when the temporary provisions for remote attendance at meetings made under the Coronavirus Meeting Regulations 2020 ended.

c. 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.
6. 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 (gov.wales)
 7. Section 2 of 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. This sets the framework within which authorities must consider options and decide the meeting arrangements which best suit the authority and the communities it serves.
 8. The guidance also confirms that the meeting arrangements should be reflected in the procedure rules set out in the constitution.

Policy on Multi-Location Meetings

9. Alongside the legally mandated arrangements that authorities must make for multi-location meetings, the statutory guidance says that authorities should develop a wider policy setting out the detailed systems chosen by the authority for the operation of its multi-location meetings.
10. This policy is intended to clarify the arrangements of Multi-Locations meetings for:
 - a. Participants in meetings convened by this Council;

- b. Officers providing support to formal meetings
- c. Officers with adjacent responsibilities – for example, those responsible for drafting and clearing reports, attending meetings to present reports to members and officers with supervisory responsibilities on governance matters;
- d. Anyone with an interest in the way in which the business of this authority is conducted.

11. This policy will be reviewed on an as required basis.

What are Multi Location Meetings?

12. Multi-location meetings which may have been described previously as “remote” or “hybrid” meetings are meetings of the Council or its committees whose participants are not all in the same physical place. This may include:

- all participants are in the same physical location except one individual who joins from another location, with a physical public gallery being provided;
- a roughly equal number of members are present in one physical space compared with those joining through remote means;
- all members are joining through remote means but nonetheless a physical public gallery has been made available in a Council venue
- a meeting taking place wholly through remote means where no physical meeting arrangements have been made. *

13. Multi-location meetings offer this Council an opportunity to raise its profile in the community and to bring its work directly into people’s homes. Evidence from the remote meetings held during the pandemic shows that public access to multi-location meetings is likely to be significantly higher than the level of audiences of formal meetings when all meetings were held physically in a single location.

Participating at a Meeting

14. A “participant” of a multi-location meeting is defined in the statutory guidance as a person who takes an active part in that meeting. They might be an elected Member, an officer of the

Council, a person giving evidence to a committee as a witness, an appellant or claimant on a regulatory matter, someone presenting a petition, or taking part formally in another way.

Observing a Meeting

15. An “observer” of a multi-location meeting is defined in the statutory guidance as a member of an audience, or otherwise spectating, a multi-location meeting. They might be in the same room that a meeting is taking place or they might be observing by remote means.

The Meeting Environment in Neath Port Talbot

Physical Venues

16. The Council has the following locations with the ability to fully support Multi-Location Meetings.
 - a. Council Chamber – Port Talbot Civic Centre
 - b. Committee Rooms 1/2 – Port Talbot Civic Centre
 - c. Committee Rooms A/B – Neath Civic Centre

The Technological Requirements

17. The delivery of multi-location meetings requires the provision of equipment and facilities to be enable those involved to participate or observe meetings as identified below:

Control Systems

18. Any multi-location meeting will be facilitated by Democratic Services who will use the control systems to ensure that the full range of meeting facilities and functionality can be co-ordinated and integrated for all participants and observers to deliver effective meeting support. The control systems will provide and co-ordinate cameras, audio inputs and outputs, simultaneous translation at defined meetings, speaker queues, electronic voting, integration

with the Council webcasting provider and to support participants and observers.

ICT equipment required

Physical Participants and Observers

- Microphones to enable other participants and observers to hear the meeting proceedings, initiate a request to speak, support electronic voting and enable access to simultaneous translation facilities where required.
- Appropriate cameras to show other participants and observers when the individual speaking.
- Display screens to enable those physically participating/observing to see those attending remotely.
- Simultaneous translation equipment where required
- Audio enhancement and hard of hearing support without compromising the audio quality of the remote attendees.

Remote Participants

- A suitable laptop with camera and microphone facilities.
- A headset allowing participants to effectively communicate with other attendees (particularly those with hearing difficulties).
- Suitable access to the internet.
- Relevant software which is publicly available to support remote attendance at meetings.

Remote Observers

- A suitable ICT device with an audio output and ideally a visual display
- Internet access to view the Council's webcasting website. [Home – Neath Port Talbot Council Webcasting \(public-i.tv\)](#)

Determining the type of Meeting

19. The Welsh Government guidance identifies that the needs of local democracy, and the needs of the public in engaging with multi-location meetings, are a paramount consideration in deciding where and when meetings will be convened partially or wholly by remote means. The overriding intention of the 2021 Act is to help the public to be able to access and engage with local democratic

systems. The convenience of participants and the efficient operation of relevant authorities themselves is important but the needs of the public will come first and a balance has to be achieved with the physical and remote element of meetings when decisions are being made.

20. In addition to Council and Cabinet meetings the Council has in the region of 28 committees and sub-committees which support its statutory, regulatory and governance arrangements. This is inclusive of two joint committees which involve other local authorities which are administered by Neath Port Talbot Council.

Predominantly remote meetings

21. Neath Port Talbot Council administers both the Swansea Bay City Region Joint Scrutiny Committee and the South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee and its associated committees. Given the challenges of travelling significant distances across the region and the need to ensure maximum participation, these meetings have been initially identified as “predominantly remote meetings” *

Predominantly Physical Meetings

22. Experience has identified that some meetings may be better suited to having a higher level of physical attendance. However, this does not preclude some or all participants attending these meetings remotely if they wish or if there are overriding reasons for doing so. These meetings may include the following committees: Special Appointments Committees, Appeal Committees, certain Licensing Sub Committees

Multi Location Meetings

23. All Council, Cabinet and committee meetings must be able to operate as multi-location meetings and ensure that participants are able to attend remotely.

Use of camera

24. The 2021 Act requires participants of meetings that are broadcast to be able to “speak to and be heard by each other” and “to see and be seen by each other”. The ability to see and be seen predominantly applies when a participant is speaking, although for some meetings, participants attending remotely may also be required to ensure that their cameras remain on for the duration of the meeting. For other meetings the Chair may use their discretion whether participants are to keep their cameras on when not speaking.
25. There are occasions when a remote participant may need to disable their camera to stabilise their connection to the meeting due to internet issues or because they have been temporarily interrupted by events at their location. If this occurs the participant should use the chat function to inform the meeting Chair and democratic services staff.

Attendance at Meetings

Elected Member and Council Officer Participants

26. Invitations to meetings will be provided electronically using Microsoft Outlook/ Microsoft Teams or the relevant meeting software. The invitation will provide details of the meeting, its location and timings. It will also include links to enable the participants to join remotely should they wish to do so. On receipt of the invitation, participants will be requested to indicate their intentions to attend the meeting physically or remotely to enable any necessary administrative and support arrangements to be put in place by Democratic Services.

Remote Participants

27. Those participants considering attending the meeting remotely should also ensure that they have appropriate internet connectivity to join and maintain their attendance throughout the meeting.

Participants should also ensure that they have headphones and a laptop as mentioned above.

Physical

28. The technological requirements for multi-location meetings will limit the available meeting venues to the Council Chamber Port Talbot Civic Centre, Committee Rooms 1/2 Port Talbot Civic Centre, Committee Rooms A/B Neath.
29. On occasions due to physical space, technological issues or specific requirements such as socially distancing rules, the number of physical attendees who may be present at each meeting may be limited. The political groups are expected to give priority to any members who have difficulties joining a meeting remotely.
30. Member Development and other informal opportunities to facilitate physical meetings of committee members may be used to promote good practice, develop working relationships and to mitigate any adverse impact of remote attendance at formal meetings.

Attendance of Other Participants

31. Meetings are also attended by a range of participants other than committee members. These include invitees, witnesses, officers providing technical or other support for example, external experts and members of the public in accordance with the Council Procedure Rules.
32. Once the need for additional participants including members of the public (where appropriate) is identified by service area or support officers, they will inform Democratic Services of the details and contact information of the participant. The external participants will be contacted by Democratic Services to confirm their attendance, explain how they can join the meeting either as a physical or remote participant and the meeting procedures. If the external participant is joining the meeting remotely an electronic meeting invitation similar to that of other participants will be sent. They will also be offered the opportunity of a test meeting to familiarise themselves with the technology and the arrangements that are in place.

Recording and broadcasting of meetings by observers

33. Members of the public are not permitted to photograph, film or record Councillors and officers and use social media at any Council meetings that are open to the public and press.

Record of Attendance

34. The attendance of each committee member and participant will be recorded by the Democratic Services Officers supporting the committee. This will be achieved by recording attendance on a sign in sheet or using the attendance record from the remote meeting software to confirm attendance at the meeting.
35. Committee Members are to inform the relevant Democratic Services Officers if they are unable to attend a meeting and their apologies will be recorded.

Observing Meetings

Webcast Meeting

36. 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.
37. The formal meetings of Council will either be webcast by being live streamed or recorded for subsequent upload to the Council's webcasting website within 48 hours of the end of the meeting.
38. Webcasting does not replace the formal record of the meeting and the decisions taken, which are published on the Council website in the form of minutes or decision records.

Physical Attendance of Observers at Multi-location Meetings

39. Observers will also be able to attend the physical element of meetings from the public gallery in each of the primary locations.

Online Meeting Platforms

40. The Council will continue to use Microsoft Teams as its primary remote meeting platform. This platform should only be used by Elected Members from their Council provided devices to maintain the effective security of its meetings.
41. Meeting participants are required to use their laptops and headsets when participating in Council meetings remotely.
42. Other participants are able to join meetings using links contained within the meeting invitation which is circulated to all participants.
43. For facilitating dual language meetings Zoom can be used instead of Teams, however, the dual language element is currently being developed by Teams and will be the Councils preferred option when available.

Publication of Meeting

Pubic information

44. The production and publication of the Programme of Meetings, public agenda, reports, decision records and minutes are facilitated by the Council's committee administration software Civica-Modern.gov. Meeting participants are sent an email which includes links to the electronic agenda pack at least three clear working days prior to a meeting.
45. The software enables the Council to publish public information to its English and Welsh webpages for the public to view. The public are also able to subscribe to updates on the Councillors and Meetings webpages and identify any specific meetings or topics which they have an interest in. Once registered, the Modern.gov

system will automatically provide electronic updates when new information is published on the website.

46. Modern.gov is also available to download as an app from the App store, Google Play and Microsoft Store which allows participants, observers and members of the public to view the Councils' meeting information. The Modern.gov app provides a paperless facility which enables participants to annotate their meeting document during their preparation for a meeting.

47. For those participants with an identified need or to provide ease of reading for more complex documents, hard copies can be provided with prior arrangement with either Democratic Services or Cabinet Support Officers as necessary.

Non-Public Information

48. The law provides that some information may not be made publicly available and this is known as exempt or confidential information. When this type of information is considered at a formal meeting the documents are published on the Council's intranet and are only available to those entitled to view them. The publication of these documents is also supported by the Modern.gov app but participants will be required to register the device they intend to use for viewing these documents with Democratic Services. Successful registration of a device will provide access to the Councils "private" modern.gov network but will still limit the availability of the information to those entitled to view it.

Consideration of exempt or confidential information at meetings.

49. When exempt or confidential information is to be considered at a formal meeting, wherever possible, the agenda will schedule those items at the end of the meeting, so as to minimise any inconvenience to observers who will be required to leave the meeting at that point.

50. Agenda items which contain public information, and which are not fully exempt or confidential can be considered in a public

environment. Should any participant wish to refer to the exempt or confidential information the Chair must be informed, and the meeting should exclude the press and public before continuing.

51. When an exempt or confidential item is planned to be considered the Chair will request that those not entitled to consider the exempt information leave the public remote meeting or be moved whilst the exempt information is considered.
52. The meeting recording and/or webcast will be paused. In the physical part of the meeting any observers will be requested to leave the room whilst the exempt item is considered.
53. 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/or webcast will be resumed. The observers or participants attending the physical meeting will be invited to return into the meeting venue.

Access and Participation at meetings

Officers support at meetings

54. Primary support for multi-location meeting will be provided by Democratic Services Officers. This will include the:
 - “Organiser” who will circulate the meeting appointment which will include a link to enable participants to join remotely. The organiser will also monitor the remote participants and assist them to join or re-join the remote meeting.
 - “Clerk” who will support the meeting, facilitate any voting and take the minutes
 - “Recording controller” will facilitate the live streaming of the meeting or the recording and subsequent upload of the meeting to the Council’s webcasting webpage.
 - For larger or more technical meetings an additional Democratic Services Officer will support the other

Democratic Services Officers as necessary during the meeting.

- Additional support may be also provided by ICT Officers to ensure that the technology used during meetings operates effectively and that the meeting can be progressed as planned.

Conduct and Behaviour

55. Meeting preparation

56. Members should know how to join the meeting in advance

- Know how to adjust settings such as microphone sensitivity and volume levels
- Know how to announce presence
- Know how to mute/unmute equipment – this is very important

57. Fully charge equipment, long meetings can take a lot of battery.

58. Prepare thoroughly. The Chair will assume that everyone has read any reports being considered and be looking for observations and focussed debate.

59. Remember that meetings are being recorded and that all participants should be aware of their demeanour and surroundings.

60. Profile photographs should be professional and appropriate.

61. Participants should call in from a noiseless location where possible. Even if equipment can be muted everyone participating in the Meeting can hear all background noises.

62. Make sure that participants can access and view papers accordingly.

63. Ensure meetings are joined in a timely manner. Participants will know who is joining late.

64. When joining the meeting and before speaking, participants should introduce themselves with full names so participants and minute takers are in no doubt who is speaking.
65. Remember that participants should be the only person able to hear confidential and exempt items being discussed – remember that some matters could be private or exempt.
66. Report any technical issues that prevent being seen or heard to Democratic Services and IT as soon as possible.
67. Members are reminded that should adhere to the Members Code of Conduct at all times.

Voting at Meetings

68. The voting rule are set out in the relevant procedure rules in the Council's Constitution.

Chairing Meetings

69. Chairing a multi-location meeting is very different to chairing a face-to-face meeting and the Chair will be supported to carry out their role as outlined in the Officer Support at meetings section above. The role of the Chair is particularly challenging at a physical meeting with some participants joining remotely. The “balance” between individuals in a room, and those joining by remote means, will have a significant effect on how business will be transacted.
70. Chairs have a particular responsibility to prepare for a multi-location meeting, in a more planned and directed way than might be necessary for a physical meeting. This may involve the Chair consulting with officers, committee members and participants in advance of a meeting.

Chat Function use by Remote Participants

71. The Chat function must not be used to communicate in the meeting, if members wish to raise a question they must use their electronic hand and speak within the meeting.

Review of Policy

72. This policy will be reviewed on an as required basis.