

CONSTITUTION & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Wednesday, 17 th November 2021
Report Subject	Developing our Multi- location and Future Meetings Policy
Report Author	Head of Democratic Services

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We will be required to broadcast all of our meetings (whether held physically, as hybrid, or remotely) from 1st May 2022. As our remote attendance meetings have been recorded and broadcast since last year, and all livestreamed and available on our website, we are already complying with this statutory requirement.

We need to develop our own multi-location meetings policy. However, we are in the last seven months of this Council's lifespan. A new Council will be elected in May. Based on the last two elections, there may be a change of 30-35% of the Members.

In 2017, we waited until the autumn to consult Members on their preference for when meetings are held– mornings, afternoons or evenings. It is also reasonable to adopt a similar approach to how meetings are held. By that time, the need to observe physical distancing because of Covid may have receded.

However, we need to adopt an **interim** policy until the new Council, to be elected in May 2022 is ready to make an informed decision. The new Council should be in a position to consider this issue in the autumn.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	That the interim Multi-meetings policy, as detailed in paragraphs 1.07 - 1.12 of the report be adopted until such time as the new Council determines its own Multi-location meetings policy.
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REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE NEED FOR A MULTI-LOCATION MEETINGS POLICY
1.01	Since July 2020, we have been holding our meetings by remote attendance, as a result of the Covid restrictions. The ability to hold remote meetings has been made permanent by section 47 of the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021. (Commencement order no 3, made 18 th March 2021)

1.02	<p>In 2020, we made some temporary changes to our rules of procedure as some rules would not be practicable at a remote attendance, rather than at a physical meeting. These were then temporary amendments, which were agreed with the Chair of Council, who by their appointment is recognised as the arbiter of rules of procedure within the Constitution. These have since been formally adopted into the Constitution, following approval by this committee at its June meeting.</p>
1.03	<p>The Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021 was given Royal Assent at the end of January. Section 47 of the Act, and part 1 of schedule 4 of that Act now provide the statutory basis for what is now being referred to as 'multi-location meetings'. Multi-location meetings are defined in the Act as a meeting of a relevant authority whose participants are not all in the same physical place. This applies to the Remote Attendance Meetings which we have been holding since last year, hybrid meetings, such as our Annual Meeting, where some people were in the Chamber, or where a greater number of people are present, but others attending via remote means.</p>
1.04	<p>The Council meeting held on 19th October, where most people were present was our first properly hybrid meeting. There were a number of constraints which we have recognised will make it very difficult and resource intensive to hold further meetings in that way in the near future. As Members will be aware, the meeting had to be held at the theatre, as our Council Chamber is not large enough to allow for a meeting to be held with appropriate social distancing. The theatre's Clwyd Room is not set up for us to hold meetings and so a technical solution, using Picturehouse was devised.</p>
1.05	<p>The Act requires that the Council should develop and publish its policy on which meetings will take place in person, remotely or as a hybrid and the rules that will apply to each. Entirely physical meetings are not permitted by the legislation: meetings must be livestreamed and capable to attending by remote means. We will need to develop our own 'multi -location meetings' policy before May 2022. That policy must recognise the benefits of holding remote meetings, as well as the benefits of holding hybrid meetings.</p>
1.06	<p>The legislative requirements were partly a response to the Coronavirus restrictions and partly an opportunity to modernise meetings. The temporary regulations meant that meetings had to be held whilst people remained in their own homes, thus protecting them and reducing the potential Covid transmission rate. However, remote/hybrid meetings also:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make meetings more accessible to people, thus promoting potentially greater diversity amongst prospective and actual Council Members; • Reduce the carbon footprint of holding meetings, because the amount of travel required is drastically reduced (We, as a Council, are currently consulting on our Climate Strategy).

1.07	<p>The decision on our Multi-location meetings policy should not be made until the autumn of 2022. However, as an interim Multi-location Meetings policy, to cover from next May, the following is suggested :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Meeting of Council, currently scheduled for 24th May 2022, to be held as a hybrid, with Members attending remotely if they wish. (We must recognise that this meeting must be held partially physically, to allow the Chair of Council’s chain of office to be passed from the current incumbent to his successor as a visible sign of the passing of the role of Chair from one person to another, (this is a clear business need). We must also recognise that it may not be possible to hold this meeting in our own Council Chamber because of on-going Covid concerns.) • Ordinary Council meetings-will be predominantly remote, unless there is a clear business need for a physical presence, in which case a hybrid meeting will be required. • Special Council meetings: will take place by remote attendance, unless there is a clear business need for a physical presence, in which case a hybrid meeting will be required. • Cabinet: remote attendance, unless there is a clear business need for a physical presence, in which case a hybrid meeting will be required. • Overview & Scrutiny Committees: remote attendance, unless there is a clear business need for a physical presence, in which case a hybrid meeting will be required. • Governance & Audit Committee: remote attendance, unless there is a clear business need for a physical presence, in which case a hybrid meeting will be required. • Constitution & Democratic Services Committee: remote attendance, unless there is a clear business need for a physical presence, in which case a hybrid meeting will be required. • Planning Committee: remote attendance, unless there is a clear business need for a physical presence, in which case a hybrid meeting will be required. • Licensing Committee: remote attendance, unless there is a clear business need for a physical presence, in which case a hybrid meeting will be required.. • Standards: remote attendance, unless there is a clear business need for a physical presence, in which case a hybrid meeting will be required. • Licensing sub-committee: remote attendance, unless there is a clear business need for a physical presence, in which case a hybrid meeting will be required.
1.08	<p>Going forward, it may also be necessary to develop rules on who is able to attend meetings physically, bearing in mind the needs:</p> <p>For the Chair and Vice-chair of the meeting to be present, to reduce any complication caused by connectivity</p> <p>For certain officers to be present (as a minimum, the officer(s) advising the Chair on the conduct of the meeting and the Democratic Services and possibly IT team staff needed to run the meeting technically.)</p>

	For political balance to be maintained – it would not be desirable for all of those physically present to belong to the same political group.
1.09	All meetings of the Council, its Cabinet and its committees remain open to the public, except when a small range of items, laid down in statute, are being considered. Where hybrid meetings take place the date, time and place of the meeting will be published and the public will be entitled to attend the meeting in person. The access code for the meeting will also be made available.
1.10	<p>Members of the Public are able to attend meetings and having given the appropriate notice, are able to speak or ask a question. These are not compromised by a change to multi;-location meetings, just altered. For example, the current arrangements for public question time, as published on our website state:</p> <p>Public Question Time will begin at 2.00pm in the Council Chamber at County Hall, Mold and will last for 30 minutes.</p> <p>Questions are restricted to matters relating to Flintshire and/or the services provided by the Council.</p> <p>A person may only submit one question for consideration at any Public Question Time, but one supplementary question will be allowed in each case.</p> <p>Questions will not be accepted which relate to:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Judicial or quasi-judicial matters; • Matters under investigation • Individual planning, licence or grant applications or appeals; • Named officer or member of the Council; • Confidential or exempt information as described in the Access to information Procedure Rules or requires its disclosure • Party political matters; • Defamatory material • Substantially the same issue as a question put within the past 6 months. Questions will not be accepted from Member and Employees of the Council <p>Questions must be submitted in writing and received no later than 12 noon on the seventh day before Question Time</p>
1.11	Meetings may be held wholly or partly in private where they consider confidential or exempt information. The meeting must resolve to move into private session, and could, when considering exempt information, decide to consider the information in public provided that do to so would not breach our legal obligations (for example under data protection legislation).
1.12	<p>Members are assured that all of the current arrangements with regard to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • giving notice of meetings,

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • production of agendas and reports and • the publication of Records of Decision. <p>will remain in place. They will, in due course, be incorporated into the final Multi-location Meetings policy when considered by the new Council.</p>
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2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	None directly from this consultation report.

3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
3.01	This report initiates consultation.

4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
4.01	Not applicable

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	None

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	<p>None, other than legislation.</p> <p>Contact Officer: Robert Robins, Head of Democratic Services Telephone: 01352 702320 Email: robert.robins@flintshire.gov.uk</p>

7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	<p>Remote attendance Meetings – RAM where all participants and observers are connected by a software platform. No one is ‘physically present at the meeting.</p> <p>Multi-location Meetings: the term now widely used to describe both RAM and hybrid meetings.</p> <p>Hybrid Meetings - where some people are physically present, but others contribute remotely</p>