

Complete Agenda



Democratic Service
Swyddfa'r Cyngor
CAERNARFON
Gwynedd
LL55 1SH

To: Members of the Standards Committee

3/11/20

Dear Member,

**STANDARDS COMMITTEE – 9 NOVEMBER, 2020
LATE REPORT**

I enclose a late report in respect of the following item:-

**6. UPDATE ON THE PROTOCOL FOR HOLDING VIRTUAL 2 - 7
MEETINGS**

To submit the report of the Monitoring Officer (attached).

Yours sincerely,

Democratic Services Officer

Agenda Item 6

MEETING	Standards Committee
DATE	9 November 2020
TITLE	Virtual Meetings Protocol
AUTHOR	Monitoring Officer

Background

1. As the result of the COVID – 19 crisis in March and the imposition of The Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (Wales) Regulations 2020 (as amended) all the Councils statutory democratic meetings had to be suspended. The technical means of holding such meetings became available quite quickly. However, the legal framework in relation to the need for physical presence in meetings as well as public and press access rights meant that a virtual meeting could not be held without breaching a number of local government laws. In addition there was a statutory limit on the proportion of members who could attend meetings remotely.
2. This situation was not sustainable in terms of the governance of the Councils. There was no means of making key decisions other than on the basis of emergency powers. There were also matters such as the holding of Annual General Meetings and appointment of the Council Chair which had to be done within a statutory timetable. As a result of co-operation between the Welsh Government and Local Government a set of Regulations were created which cleared the way for wholly virtual meetings. The Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Meetings) (Wales) Regulations 2020 came into force on the 22nd of April, It was therefore possible to commence meeting virtually.
3. The Council has managed to re-start its democratic meetings to a significant extent through a prioritising work plan although work continues to develop the arrangements. In order to facilitate this and provide guidance Protocols were prepared to provide guidance and assistance to members and officers in relation to such meetings and how to interact with the new context. A copy of the generic Protocol for meetings has been attached at Appendix 1. You are invited to consider the document from the perspective of the Standards Committee.

Recommendation

To accept the Report

Appendix 1

Virtual Meetings Protocol

PROTOCOL FOR VIRTUAL MEETINGS

1. GENERAL

As a general principle, the Council's Standing Orders arrangements will be followed when holding meetings. However, meeting "virtually" is different and requires an alternative way of working.

Neither the way the discussion works nor the environment in which contributions are made is the same as in an usual meeting. The purpose of this Protocol is to guide contributors through meetings and give guidance on best practice.

It must also be borne in mind that the information contained in reports and presentations is presented on screen. This means that anyone referring to documents or reports must consider that they are not necessarily readily or quickly available to the audience.

This Protocol provides a procedure for virtual meetings in order to ensure that the meetings are held in an appropriate and fair manner and ensures the confidence of the public in Gwynedd Council's democratic arrangements over the period of the crisis.

1. PRE-MEETING PERIOD

AGENDA

The Agenda and reports will be published and circulated to members as usual. As usual, the date and time of the meeting will be noted on the agenda. An electronic invitation to the meeting will be sent which will contain a link to facilitate access to the meeting.

Although emergency law suspends the legal requirement to allow access to the public and press to meetings, the Council will be working to develop and support this provision. This will include sharing recordings of the meetings as soon as practicably possible and as the technology develops, develop webcasts of the activities.

MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

Due to the technical requirements of virtual committees and the pressures of this in terms of officers supporting members:

- **Members of the Committee** should confirm their attendance at any Committee with the Democratic Service as soon as possible after receiving the Agenda and, ideally, no later than 12pm on the day before the committee.
- A **Local Member** who is not a member of the Committee but who wishes to contribute should inform the Democratic Service as soon as possible after receiving the Agenda and, ideally, no later than 12pm on the day before the committee.
- Every **Officer** who does not usually attend the Committee but who wishes to contribute should also inform the Democratic Service as soon as possible after receiving the Agenda and, ideally, no later than 12pm on the day before the committee.

Everyone should note a suitable alternative contact method for resolving technical issues during the meeting. Ideally, this should be a mobile phone or 4G connection which is different to the method of connecting to the meeting, or e-mail.

Make sure you have sufficient battery or access to an power supply for the whole of the meeting.

It is important for members to prepare for the Committee, considering the points they need to raise at the Committee. It is also important that members ensure that they are familiar and comfortable with the technology used - the Democratic Service can offer support in advance.

When logging in, it is important that the appropriate name / designation appears on the screen so that everyone present can be identified.

2. THE DAY OF THE COMMITTEE

2.1 TESTING THE SYSTEM AND PREPARING

- All members and officers will be expected to log-in to the system 20 minutes before the meeting in order to ensure that the connections are working. Capacity to resolve technical problems during the meeting is limited.
- A Democratic Services Officer will test connections immediately in this period to ensure:
 1. That the provision is working
 2. That all members and officers who are taking part have access to the system
 3. If there is a technical problem, to identify a solution and implement it.
 4. That the translation is working for the non-Welsh-speaking members.

Members of the public and press will not be admitted until 5 minutes before the meeting.

A member of the Democratic Team will act as Host and will manage admittance to the meeting. To facilitate arrangements also, technical support will be available to act as "Technical Manager" in order to deal with any technical issues.

The legal officer or other lead officer will confirm that the meeting can start and inform the chair

2.2 CHAIR OPENING THE MEETING

The Chair will open the meeting by explaining the procedure and how everything will work in a virtual meeting (noting the procedure for allowing local members and third parties to speak, proposals, requests to speak from committee members and voting). Specifically, the following must be explained:

- That requests to speak will be made by "raising" the virtual hand and waiting to be invited to speak by the Chair.

- That microphones must be on mute at all times unless a contributor has been invited to speak by the Chair. The microphone should be muted immediately afterwards.
- Explain the procedure in terms of loss of connection etc. (explain below) and that the rules about being present to listen to the addresses apply.
- The 'chat' function will not be available during a meeting

2.3 APOLOGIES

- Democratic Services Officer to report on the apologies.

2.4 DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST AND PROTOCOL MATTERS

- Chair to ask if anyone is declaring an interest. Members to note by using the Raise Hand icon, their intention to declare so that the Chair can ask them to address the Committee.
- Members to note the item and the reason for expressing an interest (members should contact the Legal Officer beforehand for advice in order to facilitate the process).
- If the member declares a prejudicial interest in any item. When the item begins, they must "leave" the meeting. A Democratic Services Officer will ensure that this happens by 'moving' the member to a 'waiting room'. A Democratic Services Officer will ensure that the member re-joins at the end of the item by inviting them back to the main meeting from the 'waiting room'.

2.5 MINUTES

- For meetings held after 22 April 2020 and in accordance with the regulations for the emergency period, a decision notice will be published within five working days of the meeting. The draft minutes will be published as soon as reasonably practicable afterwards. The Minutes will be presented to the next meeting for confirmation.

2.6 PRESENTING AND PROPOSING THE REPORT

- The Report will be presented by the Member and/or Officer as usual.
- Screen Share may be used to guide the meeting through the report but this should be used sparingly as it means that the committee itself is not visible during this process. The use of Screen Share is subject to the Council's Language Standards and Policies.
- At the end of the presentation, the recommendation should be repeated formally to facilitate the discussion. Screen Share should be closed if it has not already been closed.
- If a proposal is needed, the member presenting the item will make the proposal. The Chair will ask for a seconder.
- Those wishing to second the proposal should "raise" their electronic hand and will be invited by the Chair to confirm this orally.

2.7 LOCAL AND OTHER MEMBERS

If there are further contributors, such as a local member, they are invited to contribute as usual.

2.8 PROPOSAL OR AMENDMENTS FROM THE FLOOR

- Anyone who has made a proposal or who has proposed an amendment will have to make a request to speak by using the Raise Hand icon. They will be invited by the Chair to make their proposal and if more than one member has indicated they will be chosen in the order they raised their hand.
- The Chair will ask the proposer to confirm their proposal in full and clearly. Those wishing to second the proposal should "raise" their electronic hand and will be invited by the Chair to confirm this orally.
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2.9 DISCUSSION

- Members will note their wish to speak by using the Raise Hand icon. Members should not unmute their microphone until the Chair has invited them to speak. So as to maintain order and assist the Chair, after speaking, every member will need to lower their hand by clicking on the Lower Hand icon and remember to mute their microphone immediately.
- The Chair will go through these in turn. So as to maintain order, members should restrict their contribution to one address. The Chair will maintain discretion to allow additional questions.
- At a Scrutiny Committee where there are more open discussions and questioning, the discussion and contributions will be managed via the raise hand procedure.
- As ever, please remember to avoid repeating a point another member has already made.
- The Chair will bring Officers into the discussion to respond to points as required.

2.10 PROPRIETY OFFICERS

The Chair must be aware of any requests by a Statutory Officer to draw the Chair's attention to either a matter of order or propriety which needs to be drawn to the meeting's attention. Therefore, if the Propriety Officer makes a request to speak **they should confirm whether the officer wishes to speak immediately** in relation to a

point of order or whether they would be willing to wait their turn. If the Chair does not see the Statutory Officer's request to speak, the officer will need to interrupt the meeting to sort the matter out.

2.11 VOTE

- The vote will be taken by asking every member with the right to vote to express orally how they are voting, i.e. in favour of the proposal, against the proposal or abstaining their vote.
- At a meeting of 12 or fewer voting members, the electronic hand method may be used for voting if it is available to members and that it is possible to see their vote.
- The Legal Officer, or in their absence the Officer leading the meeting, will ask every member in turn and record their vote. The Officer will then report the outcome of the vote and the Chair will formally announce the result of the vote, noting whether the application has been approved, refused or deferred.
- If the vote is tied, the Chair will use his/her casting vote by expressing this orally at the Committee and formally announcing the result.

2.12 TECHNICAL ISSUES

- If, at any time during the Committee, that technical issues mean that an audio and/or video connection is lost with members or officers, the Chair will adjourn the meeting in an attempt to rectify the problem and allow the member to continue to take part whether with video and audio or on an audio only basis.
- The Technical Manager will contact anybody having difficulties. As far as is possible, members and officers must have an alternative method for contacting them e.g. phone, e-mail or other means.
- If technical issues remain to the extent that members who wish to participate are unable to do so, and that this has a significant effect on an item or items or the propriety of continuing, the Chair will consider whether an item or the rest of the meeting should be deferred until a later date and/or time.