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