

MEETING	Democracy Services Committee
DATE	18 February 2021
SUBJECT	Operating framework for future meetings and committees
PURPOSE	To consult with the members of the Democracy Services Committee on a draft framework for holding meetings and committees with Members in the future
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Background.

1. It was reported at the meeting on 17 November 2020 that substantial work had been done over the past year to enable virtual meetings and that there are lessons to be learned and kept for the longer term. An initial discussion was held about the principles for holding meetings in the future during that meeting. Since then, we have also consulted with the Cabinet Members and all members of the Council were given an opportunity to give their comments to the Chair.
2. It was also noted that Council officers had already discussed some of the benefits, disadvantages and lessons of holding virtual meetings which have become clear over the past months. Officers have developed an operating framework for internal meetings in order to ensure that we do not lose any of the clear benefits and slip back to old ways without thinking. See a copy of the framework for officers in **Appendix A**.

Operating Framework for meetings.

3. The purpose of today's report is to present the work which has been achieved to date in order to consult with members of the Democracy Services Committee. Obviously, we will need to ensure that the recommendations are in accordance with the requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 before adopting the framework finally and ensure that changes can be made to the Council's constitution if required.
4. It became clear early on that some basic principles needed to be established as a basis for making decisions for each committee or meeting. The table below outlines the principles which have been proposed to date.

Operating principles

- ✓ We need to build on the success of the virtual meetings which have been held over the past months.
- ✓ We should strive to hold most meetings virtually in order to:
 - Contribute to the carbon reduction agenda by reducing travelling
 - Promote diversity in Democracy by encouraging the flexibility of remote access to virtual meetings and thereby attracting more people who work and young parents
 - Use Councillors' time more sensibly by reducing travelling requirements
 - Reduce travelling costs

What is being proposed?

5. As Councillors, you will attend many different meetings with the Council. Below is an initial attempt to identify an operating framework for:

- internal meetings,
- regional and national meetings,
- training and
- formal committees.

They are in accordance and consistent (as far as possible) with the Operating Framework for meetings which has been developed for staff.

6. Internal meetings/meetings with officers - Members often attend meetings with officers - this can vary from individual meetings with officer(s) or with a larger group. A presumption that all internal meetings can be held virtually using Microsoft Teams (or Zoom if simultaneous translation is needed) is noted.
7. We acknowledge that there are exceptions to this arrangement, with the need for face-to-face meetings occasionally. A likely exception is specific cases such as at the beginning of a new Council term when many new councillors will be joining. There are two recent examples of successful consultation meetings held virtually, consulting on the Council's budget and consulting on the Council's improvement plan.
8. Regional and national meetings - That we campaign to hold regional and national meetings virtually and that we commit to attend those meetings virtually wherever possible. This will consequently make better use of

Councillors' time. Furthermore, that we use our right and duty to contribute through the medium of Welsh and remind the organisers that they must ensure simultaneous translation provision at these meetings in order to ensure that they do not slip back to be held in English only.

9. Training for Members - A presumption of attempting to ensure that training sessions for members are held virtually is noted (especially training for information sharing purposes). There will likely be exceptions to these arrangements, but face-to-face training will be reduced wherever possible.
10. Formal Committees - A presumption once more of attempting to ensure that the Council's formal committees are held virtually is noted. However, there are some specific exceptions to this guidance as follows:
 - **The Full Council*** - an opportunity for all Council members to come together five times a year. The only meeting with the 75 councillors present, and holding virtual meetings with so many people present poses a significant challenge for the Chair. However, it must be borne in mind that virtual meetings of the full Council have been held successfully to date.
 - **Employment Appeals Committee** - the committee should be held virtually or in a chamber, depending on the appellant's wishes.
 - **Licensing Sub-committee** - the committee should be held virtually or in a chamber, depending on the applicant's wishes.
 - **Chief Officers' Appointment Committee** - dependent on the role to be fulfilled by the Committee. It is recommended that consideration should be given to holding interviews in the chamber, but that the meeting can be held virtually otherwise.
11. Half-and-half meetings (hybrid). The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 notes the need to allow remote access to committees. Many Councillors and officers have already noted that the experience of everyone taking part virtually or everyone taking part in a meeting room is completely different to a half-and-half meeting with some attending in a meeting room and others joining remotely. It is fair to note that chairing skills and technology play a key role in such meetings.
12. It will be necessary to provide training for any Members who chair meetings - with different skills identified for chairing a meeting held entirely virtually or chairing a half-and-half meeting.
13. Please see a table of the Council's main committees in **Appendix 2** - this will assist Members to see and understand what is outlined above. Please note

that any sub-committee would be held virtually with the exception of the licensing sub-committee.

14. Members of the Democracy Services Committee are asked to present

- Observations on the operating principles
- Observations on the initial attempt outlined for operating
 - Internal meetings
 - Regional and national meetings
 - Training
 - Formal committees

APPENDIX 1

OPERATING FRAMEWORK - INTERNAL MEETINGS

1. A presumption that all internal meetings can be held virtually (to include fellow officers and individual Members) using Microsoft Teams.
2. That we recognise the benefit of holding team meetings face-to-face occasionally over the course of the year as a way of maintaining social contact and introducing new faces when relevant as well as when the output of a working group needs to be established etc.
3. As a rule, that we refrain from holding meetings where some officers are in a meeting room together and others connecting virtually. However, and in exceptional circumstances only, an individual can be permitted to connect virtually when a face-to-face meeting is arranged for the rest of the attendees. It is stressed that this should only be allowed in situations where this would be the only way of ensuring the individual can attend and it should be borne in mind that connecting virtually when others are together in a room can lead to a second-rate experience for those doing so and the risk of undermining virtual meetings as a result.
4. That we campaign to hold regional and national meetings virtually and that we commit to attend those meetings virtually wherever possible and consequently make better use of time. Furthermore, that we emphasise the need to provide simultaneous translation at these meetings in order to ensure that they do not slip back to be held in English only.
5. That we accept the need to hold face-to-face meetings in situations such as a difficult conversation, employment investigations, redundancy discussions, social workers' discussions with clients etc. at times. Where face-to-face meetings must be held during the lockdown restrictions, it must be recognised that only a small number of people can be present in a meeting room at any one time and arrangements must be planned in advance.
6. That we commit to relevant training and standard guidance for those chairing virtual meetings.
7. That we develop skills with using technology (and appropriate behaviour at virtual meetings) as a way of extending current communication arrangements

APPENDIX 2

	Must be in the Chamber	Virtual only	Hybrid or ?	WHY?
COUNCIL	x		x	A networking opportunity for all Members. Poses a challenge for Chairs.
Cabinet		x		
Scrutiny Committee - Education and Economy		x		
Scrutiny Committee -		x		
Scrutiny Committee - Care Audit and Governance Committee		x		
Democracy Services Committee		x		
Planning Committee		x		
Joint Planning Policy Committee		x		
Central/General Licensing Committee		x		
Licensing Sub-Committees	x	x	x	At the individual's request
Standards Committee		x		
SACRE		x		
Language Committee		x		
Local Joint Consultative Committee		x		
Employment Appeals Committee	x	x	x	At the individual's request
Pensions Committee		X		
Chief Officers Appointment Committee				Dependent on the topic. Interviewing for posts - need to see the person
Porthmadog Harbour Consultative Committee		X		
Pwllheli Harbour Consultative Committee		X		
Aberdyfi Harbour Consultative Committee		X		
Barmouth Harbour Consultative Committee		X		