

Equality Impact Assessment

For help to complete this form see the *How to Undertake an Equality Impact Assessment* leaflet. You are also welcome to contact Delyth Gadlys Williams, Policy and Equality Officer on ext. 32708 or DelythGadlysWilliams@gwynedd.llyw.cymru for further assistance.

The Council's is required (under the Equality Act 2010) to consider the effect any change in policy or procedure (or the creation of a new policy or procedure), has on people with protected equality characteristics. The Council also has a general duty to ensure fairness and foster good relations. A timely Equality Impact Assessment must be undertaken before making any decision on any relevant change (i.e. which has an effect on people with protected characteristics).

I Details

I.1 What is the name of the policy / service in question?

Remote attendance and Access to the Public Project.

Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 requires the Council to provide remote attendance for elected members and Access to the public to see and hear proceedings at public meetings.

I.2 What is the purpose of the policy/ Service that is being created or amended? What chances are being considered?

Originally, the project aimed to ensure that we were able to
a) hold virtual meetings (without any physical presence in a meeting room)
b) ensure that elected members could take part in committee meetings by remote attendance should they wish to do so.

By September 2020 the project moved towards ensuring that the public were able to Access virtual meetings by seeing and/or hearing proceedings in our main committee meetings as it was a Council priority.

Presently, as it is a requirement of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 we are working towards

- Ensuring that elected members are able to take part remotely when a meeting is held in a specific location (subject to covid-19 restrictions).
- Access to the public to see and hear proceedings at public meetings

1.3 Who is responsible for this assessment?

Vera Jones, Democracy Services and Language Manager - on behalf of the Remote Attendance Project Board

1.4 When did you commence the assessment? Which version is this?

The first assessment was started in June 2020 in preparation for our first virtual meetings due to the covid pandemic.
This is the second version, which includes further developments within the project. It was reviewed June 2021.

2) Action

2.1 Who are the partners you need to work with to undertake this assessment?

Councillors
IT Service
Property Department
Staff

2.2 What measures have you taken to engage with people with equality characteristics?

1. Informal discussions were undertaken with Gwynedd Councillors prior to the commencement of our first virtual meetings using Teams and prior to using Zoom – in particular non Welsh speakers.
2. Arrangements for committee meetings (and others) in the future were discussed with the Democracy Services Committee on 18/02/2021 and in addition all members were asked for comments as part of the satisfaction survey in June 2021.

2.3 What was the result of the engagement?

1. The original provision was adapted from Teams to Zoom following comments by elected members that the translation provision offered via zoom offered a fairer and simpler Service for Welsh speakers and non-Welsh speakers, with all involved attending the same meeting and directions much simpler to follow. The changes were made following assurance of the Security issues regarding the technology.
2. A number of members have noted the benefits of virtual meetings, especially with regards to
 - Contributing to the carbon reduction agenda by reducing travelling
 - Promoting diversity in Democracy by encouraging the flexibility of remote access to virtual meetings and thereby attracting more people who work and young parents
 - Using Councillors' time more sensibly by reducing travelling requirements
 - And reducing travelling costs
3. In addition, numerous comments have been made by Councillors in various meetings about meeting arrangements in the future, with most noting the need for a combination of virtual meetings and hybrid meetings.

2.4 On the basis of what other evidence are you operating?

The project was started primarily in response to the covid-19 pandemic and the requirement to continue with democratic arrangements whilst adhering to restrictions to stay at home and not attend the Office (including the Council chamber).

The restrictions with regards to “work from home where possible” remain in place. In addition, we must respond to the requirements of the Local government and Elections (Wales) 2021 Act to

- Ensure that elected members are able to take part remotely when a meeting is held in a specific location (subject to covid-19 restrictions).
- Access to the public to see and hear proceedings at public meetings

2.5 Are there any gaps in the evidence that needs to be collected?

Consultations with people with additional needs eg sight and hearing impairments to ensure that the provision is suitable for their needs.

3) Identifying the Impact

3.1 The Council has to give due regard to the effect any changes will have on people with the equality characteristics noted below. What impact will the new policy/service or the proposed changes in the policy or service have on people with these characteristics? You are welcome to any other characteristics if you wish

Characteristics	What type of impact?*	In what way? What is the evidence?
Race (including nationality)	Positive / negative / none	No impact has been identified
The Welsh language	Positive	<p>a) Virtual meetings Positive effect on the Welsh and English language by using zoom as the provision for virtual meetings as meetings continue to be held through the medium of Welsh with the simultaneous translation Service easily available to those who require it.</p> <p>b) Remote Attendance We will need to ensure that simultaneous translation service is available to anyone who attends a meeting (be it in the location or remote attendance). We are currently working on a hybrid solution.</p> <p>c) Public Access Public access is available to the public through webcasting, which is available in Welsh and English.</p>
Disability	Positive / negative / none	<p>Autism – Some may experience a positive effect due to lessening anxiety compared with being in a Chamber. On the other hand, it can be a negative experience if the time on screen is too long, however individuals are able to choose to leave.</p> <p>Mental Health conditions – it can be a positive experience for some who experience conditions such as anxiety by making it easier to take part in meetings without the camera on and not feeling additional pressure. It may effect negatively without the human contact leading to raised anxiety.</p> <p>Visual impairment – too much screen time could lead to a negative effect.</p>

		<p>Hearing impairment – a positive impact as remote attendance allows for the individual to adjust sound levels or use earphones to eliminate background noise. .</p> <p>Physical impairment – positive effect as the need for a specific location and the need to travel are eliminated.</p>
Sex	Positive / negative / none	No impact has been identified
Age	Positive / negative / none	It is probable that some may feel a positive effect of remote attendance without having to leave their homes.
Sexual orientation	Positive / negative / none	No impact has been identified
Religion or belief (or non-belief)	Positive / negative / none	No impact has been identified
Gender reassignment	Positive / negative / none	No impact has been identified
Pregnancy and maternity	Positive / negative / none	<p>Positive effect for pregnant women and breast feeding mothers with remote attendance should they wish, without having to travel to a specific location.</p> <p>Positive effect on parents by reducing the time taken to travel to meetings by ensuring parents are able to access remotely.</p>
Marriage and civil partnership	Positive / negative / none	No impact has been identified

3.2 The Council has a duty under the 2010 Equality Act to contribute positively to a fairer society by promoting equality and good relations in its activities regarding the following characteristics – age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, race, gender reassignment, disability and pregnancy and maternity. The Council must give due attention to the way any change affects these duties.

General Duties of the Equality Act	Does it have an impact?*	In what way? What is the evidence?
Abolishing illegal discrimination, harassment and victimisation	No	
Promoting equal opportunities	Yes	<p>Virtual Meetings. Positive effect as there is more discipline in virtual meetings with equal opportunity for all to speak. Individuals can also choose to take part with their cameras off.</p> <p>Remote attendance. Yes, positive effect as above. However, until hybrid solution is in place we will not know if there are equal opportunities for all or will those attending remotely feel ignored.</p> <p>Access to the public – the new arrangements will lead to improved and simpler access to the public to hear and view committee meetings ensuring transparency in our democratic arrangements. Individuals will not be required to travel to specific locations at a specific time.</p> <p>On the other hand, there may be a negative effect as the provision available is dependent on access to a computer and the web. Individuals without the provisions are able to use the computers at their local library (subject to covid restrictions).</p>
Encouraging good relationships	Yes and no	<p>Virtual meetings and remote attendance could be positive in encouraging good relationships as it enables some to participate in meetings who would not be able to do so otherwise.</p> <p>On the other hand, there is a conception that forming good and new relations through virtual means could be more challenging due to the lack of informal networking.</p>

4) **Analysing the results**

4.1 **Is the policy therefore likely to have a significant, positive impact on any of the equality characteristics or the General Duty and what is the reason for this?**

As noted above, the changes outlined above have enabled the Council's democratic arrangements, including holding committees who make key decisions, to continue during the pandemic.

The changes to enable meetings to be held virtually or hybrid, ensuring elected members are able to Access remotely is likely to have a positive impact on a number of the equality characteristics as noted in 3.1 – mainly for pregnant females, breastfeeding mothers and individuals with a physical impairment or mental health condition.

In addition, arrangements for ensuring Access to the public through webcasting or other means enable more of Gwynedd residence to Access democratic proceedings leading to improved transparency.

4.2 **Is the policy therefore likely to have a significant, negative impact on any of the equality characteristics or the General Duty and what is the reason for this?**

We acknowledge that there are two sides to every story, with the possible negative effects outlined in 3.1 above.

However, the Equality Impact Assessment has not identified impacts which would lead to a change in the recommendation.

4.3 **What should be done?**

Choose one of the following:

Continue with the policy / service as it is robust	✓
Adapt the policy to delete any barriers	
Suspend and delete the policy as the detrimental impacts are too big	

Continue with the policy as any detrimental impact can be justified	
---	--

4.4 What steps will you take to reduce or mitigate any negative impacts?

Possible negative effects have been outlined in 3.1 above and will receive due consideration as the developments proceed.

The work will be reviewed often with updates reported to the Full Council.

4.5 If you are not taking any further action to delete or reduce the negative impacts, explain why here.

5) Monitoring

5.1 What steps will you take to monitor the impact and effectiveness of the policy or service (action plan)?

The Local Government and Elections (Wales) 2021 Act clearly states the requirement for the Council to publish our arrangements for committee meetings and access to the public. Interim arrangements will be presented to the Full Council in July 2021, with a review of the arrangements to be presented in October 2021.