

DENBIGHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

HYBRID COMMITTEE MEETINGS PROTOCOL

1. PURPOSE OF THE PROTOCOL

- 1.1 The purpose of this protocol is to provide guidance to Members and the public as to the processes to be undertaken by the Council when conducting hybrid committee meetings.
- 1.2 Hybrid meetings are a combination of face to face meetings and virtual meetings, whereby some Members, officers and the public attend the Council Chamber and some members attend remotely.
- 1.3 During Hybrid meetings, all participants will be able to see and hear each other and translation facilities will be available for all.

2. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- 2.1. The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 requires the Council to make and publish arrangements that enable persons who are not in the same place to attend meetings of the Council. This provision in effect requires hybrid meetings.
- 2.2. To continue to ensure the public and press have access to public meetings of Council and to ensure transparency of decision-making, principal meetings will be live streamed simultaneously. Recordings will be uploaded to the Council's website for public record and be available for viewing for 6 months from the date of the meeting.
- 2.3. All voting will be carried out either by affirmation of the meeting, by using the electronic voting system within the Council Chamber and on the virtual meeting platform in use, or by means of a roll-call of all Members present both remotely and in person.
- 2.4. All voting results will be announced by the Chair before moving to the next item of business.
- 2.5. Underpinning this Protocol are the fundamental principles that conduct shall be compliant with the Code of Conduct for Members and that the integrity and security of any confidential information is maintained.

- 2.6. Hybrid meetings will follow the Council's usual meetings practice in terms of publication of agendas and reports, and they will follow normal procedural rules in the Constitution where possible.
- 2.7. A fundamental principle is that the attendance of a Member or an Officer is equally valid irrespective of whether they are attending in the Council Chamber or from a remote location. It will not be appropriate for any Member to make any adverse comment or inference in respect of any other Member or Officer's chosen location for attendance.
- 2.8. No member will record the proceedings of any meeting, which, for the avoidance of doubt includes all remote and hybrid meetings whether open to the public or not, without notifying and seeking the consent of the members and officers attending the meeting.
- 2.9. Meetings which are being webcast to the public will be recorded by Democratic Services and made available on the Council's website.

3. PROTOCOL FOR HYBRID MEETINGS

- 3.1. Council will operate hybrid meetings using the video conferencing and webcasting facilities within the Council Chamber to enable both remote attendance and physical attendance at meetings.
- 3.2. Prior to the meeting, Democratic Services will ensure that all Members, relevant officers and any other relevant participating individual have been invited to join the meeting and have been informed as to how they must connect to the meeting.
- 3.3. Any Member wishing to attend in person will need to give prior notice to Democratic Services as soon as possible that s/he wishes to attend in person
- 3.4. Members attending remotely will be expected to join the meeting at least ten minutes before the proposed start time for the meeting to ensure that they are able to connect and that the translation channel may be tested.
- 3.5. If a quorum is achieved the meeting will proceed in any event, notwithstanding a Member's or Members' failure to achieve a connection. If a Member joins the meeting at a later time they must make themselves known immediately to the Chairman and comment and vote only on those complete agenda items remaining.
- 3.6. When attending remotely, Members need to use their best endeavours to remain on-line throughout debates and during voting in order to maintain the integrity of the decision-making process and to reduce the opportunity for legal challenge of any decision.

- 3.7. When attending remotely, Members and any participants must ensure that the room from which they are accessing the remote meeting is suitable in terms of privacy and that no disturbance occurs during the course of the meeting as it is important to ensure a degree of formality in the proceedings. It must be remembered that as proceedings will be live, viewers will effectively be able to view you working in your home.
- 3.9. When attending remotely, Members must access the meeting individually via their Council issued equipment and ensure a suitable background. Members are able to make use of other Council facilities to ensure a stable internet connection but they must liaise with Democratic Services in advance of the meeting giving sufficient time for such arrangements to be made.
- 3.10. If remote attendees declare a personal and prejudicial interest in a particular item, in order to continue to comply with the Code of Conduct for Members, they will be removed from the meeting by the Democratic Services Officer and placed in the 'waiting room' for the duration of the relevant item. The Democratic Services Officer as moderator can also add and remove other attendees such as public speakers. If attendees are in the chamber, they will physically leave the chamber for the duration of the item.
- 3.11. During the meeting whilst a Member is not speaking, their microphone should be set to mute and this should be clicked to un-mute (sound) when s/he is invited to speak by the Chairman. Members should avoid setting their devices to the highest volume, sit too close to the microphone, have other electronic devices operating or shuffle papers in front of the microphone as this is likely to cause feedback. Committee Members are encouraged to keep their cameras on at all times in order that they may be seen by members of the public throughout debates and voting. However, it is recognised that if a Member is experiencing poor connectivity it may be necessary to turn their video off.
- 3.12. Members recognise and accept that their microphones may be switched off remotely by Democratic Services Officers if they have been left on inadvertently when the Member is not speaking.
- 3.13. Members should ensure that the name that appears on screen in connection with their image should be their full name and include the title Councillor in order that the public can identify elected members.
- 3.14. It is accepted that the Chair plays a vital role in the orderly conduct of the committee meeting. Chairs will be fully supported by Democratic Services

Officers and the Monitoring Officer to enable the Chair to conduct the meeting in accordance with the Rules of Procedure and the principles of this Protocol

- 3.15. At the start of the meeting, the Chair will ensure that the system allows everyone to participate. The Chair will make an introduction to the meeting, and provide a reminder of the meeting arrangements.
- 3.16. Given the nature of hybrid meetings the Chair will ensure that every member has the opportunity to participate in the meeting and that members are called to speak in the order that they indicate their wish to do so wherever they are attending the meeting from. Members who are attending remotely should use the 'raise hand' function to indicate that they wish to speak. Democratic Services officers will assist the Chair in monitoring the requests to speak. The Chair must allow officers to speak if they indicate that they wish to do so.
- 3.17. Members use of the 'chat' function should be restricted to issues such as informing the meeting that they are leaving temporarily or permanently, or that they are having connectivity issues. The 'chat' function should not be used to make contributions to the debate or to send informal messages to other attendees. Members are reminded that 'chat' messages will be visible to viewers of the meeting.
- 3.18. In relation to reports that are presented that are deemed exempt from publication, Members will be reminded that the item is an exempt report and asked to vote to recognise this accordingly. If the debate then proceeds in 'Part II', Members must ensure that they are able to strictly maintain the privacy of the proceedings at their location. The live link will cease before the item commences and therefore there may be a hiatus in proceedings to ensure that no recording is taking place. Individuals who are not entitled to be present during the item will physically leave the meeting in the chamber, and will be removed from the virtual meeting by the Democratic Services Officer.
- 3.19. If connectivity is lost for any remote attendee during the proceedings so that the quorum is not met, the Chairman will require the meeting to be paused in order to allow re-establishment of connectivity if at all possible. If it proves impossible to re-establish connection for a sufficient number of Members to reach a quorum, the meeting will be adjourned to a later date. The Chairman will make every effort as is reasonable to enable those Members experiencing connectivity problems to take part in the debate.
- 3.20. Public speakers will be contacted by Democratic Services in advance of the committee meeting to establish whether they wish to attend in person or remotely. Remote attendees will be provided with a link to the meeting. All remote public speakers will be invited to join the meeting when they enter the

'waiting room' but must remain in mute mode and not speak unless invited by the Chair to do so. The Chair will invite each speaker to begin their presentation at the appropriate time. Speakers are requested to provide their presentation in writing to the Chair in advance of the meeting. In the event of issues with connectivity, the Chair will read the speaker's presentation on their behalf. Speakers will then 'leave' the meeting following the relevant agenda item, if necessary with support from the meeting host.

3.21. Members of the press will be able to view the livestream of the meeting.