

DENBIGHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
HYBRID / VIRTUAL MEMBER 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 and virtual member-level meetings.
- 1.2 Hybrid meetings are a combination of face-to-face meetings and virtual meetings, whereby attendees may attend online or from a central meeting room.
- 1.3 During hybrid and virtual meetings, all participants will be able to see and hear each other and where used 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 for full Council and the public principal committee meetings. The Council has discretion over how it holds its internal member-level meetings.
- 2.2. To promote public and press access to public meetings of the Council and to ensure transparency of decision-making, principal committee meetings will be live streamed. 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 systems available, for example 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 and virtual 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. However, a member chairing a hybrid meeting or an officer with a prominent role at a hybrid meeting is encouraged to consider it good practice to be present in the meeting room whenever possible.
- 2.8. No member will record the proceedings of any meeting, which, for the avoidance of doubt includes all virtual 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 & VIRTUAL MEETINGS

- 3.1. Council will operate hybrid meetings using its hybrid video conferencing and webcasting facilities within the Council 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. Members attending remotely will be expected to join the meeting before the proposed start time for the meeting to ensure that they are able to connect and that the translation channel may be tested.
- 3.4. Remote participants must attend meetings from a safe location. Remote participants joining from a vehicle are required to be safely and appropriately parked if attending the meeting from a vehicle.
- 3.5. If a quorum is achieved the meeting will proceed in any event, notwithstanding any Members' failure to achieve a connection. If a Member joins the meeting at a later time they must make themselves known immediately to the Chair 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 meeting is suitable in terms of privacy and that no disturbance occurs during the course of the meeting as it is important to ensure the appropriate degree of formality is accorded to the meeting being attended. Remote attendees at meetings of full Council and the principal committee meetings are expected to conduct themselves in the same manner as they would if they were attending the meeting in the Council Chamber.
- 3.7 When attending remotely, Members must access the meeting individually via their Council issued equipment and use a suitable Denbighshire County Council video background. Members are able to make use of other Council facilities to ensure a stable internet connection.
- 3.8 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 / meeting room, they will physically leave the chamber / meeting room for the duration of the item.
- 3.9. During the meeting whilst a Member attending remotely 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 Chair. 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 should keep their cameras on at all times in order that they may be seen to be present by other participants and members of the public throughout debates and voting. At the chair's request a Member may turn their video off in order to improve the quality of their audio link when the member is speaking. It is expected that the camera will be turned back on after the member has finished speaking.
- 3.10. Members recognize 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.
- 3.11. 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 and other attendees can identify elected members.
- 3.12. 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.

- 3.13. 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 and this protocol.
- 3.14. 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.
- 3.15. 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 as all debate should be through the Chair, or to send informal messages to other attendees. Members are reminded that 'chat' messages may be inappropriately visible to viewers of the meeting.
- 3.16. 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 recognize 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. Any live webcasting 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 / meeting room and will be removed from the virtual meeting by the Democratic Services Officer.
- 3.17. If connectivity is lost for any remote attendee during the proceedings so that the quorum is not met, the Chair 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 Chair will make every effort as is reasonable to enable those Members experiencing connectivity problems to take part in the debate.
- 3.18. Public speakers will be contacted by Democratic Services in advance of the committee meeting to establish whether they wish to attend a public hybrid meeting 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. Where appropriate public speakers may be requested to provide their presentation in writing to the Chair in advance of the meeting. In the event of issues with connectivity, the Chair would then read the speaker's presentation on their behalf. Public speakers will then 'leave' the meeting following the relevant agenda item, if necessary, with support from the meeting host.