

Committee: **Council**

Date of Meeting: **29th September, 2022**

Report Subject: **Multi Location Meeting Policy**

Portfolio Holder: **Councillor S. Thomas - Leader of the Council/Executive Member Corporate Overview & Performance**

Report Submitted by: **Gemma Wasley, Service Manager Performance and Democratic**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance & Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
	01/09/20	20/09/22					29/09/22	

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 For Council to approve the Multi Location Meeting Policy which will be used to inform Members, Officers and the public how multi-location meeting arrangements and the electronic broadcasting of meetings will take place in future.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 Since April 2021, the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 has come into force and enables Councils to operate multi-location meetings whereby Members, Officers, the public and Press are able to attend meetings physically or remotely.

- 2.2 The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 provides that Councils are required to:

a) Electronically broadcast meetings (with effect from May 2022).

b) Make and publish arrangements to ensure that all Council, Cabinet, Committee, Sub-Committee and Joint Committee meetings may be attended remotely (i.e. enabling persons who are not in the same place to attend the meeting) – also referred to as ‘multi-location meetings’.

- Meetings must be capable of being held virtually, but each authority must decide whether their meetings will be held fully virtually, partially virtually or as physical meetings (authorities may not mandate physical attendance at meetings).
- Participants in the meetings must be able to speak to and hear each other; and for meetings which are required to be broadcast

(full Council meetings), participants must also be able to see and be seen by each other.

- c) Publish all meeting documents on the Council's website, including notices, summonses, agendas, reports and background papers.
- A note of the meeting, including Members in attendance and decisions made, must be published within 7 working days of the meeting.
 - Notice of meetings is no longer required to be posted at the Council's offices. However, copies of agendas and reports must be made available for the public if meetings are held physically.
 - The Council is also required to make public access provision for members of the public who cannot access electronic documents, for example, by providing access to computers, copies of documents, or making documents available for inspection.
- 2.3 When considering arrangements for remote attendance or 'multi-location meetings', authorities must have regard to the statutory guidance issued by the Welsh Ministers: <https://gov.wales/local-authority-multi-location-meetings-interim-guidance>
- 2.4 The statutory guidance sets out a number of general principles to guide authorities when developing their meeting arrangements, namely, transparency, accessibility, good conduct, Welsh language, local needs and future generations. The guidance confirms the meeting arrangements should be reflected in the procedure rules set out in the constitution.
- 2.5 The statutory guidance also stipulates that authorities should develop a policy setting out how the multi-location meetings will operate and reflect the meeting arrangements in the constitution.
- 2.6 **The Purpose of a Multi-Location Meeting**
The establishment of multi-location meetings has a number of benefits which the Council is looking to promote. Multi Location Meetings:
- Provide greater participation in meetings by the public and external participants;
 - Make it easy for the public to view and participate in decision making and the democratic process observing discussions, recommendations and decisions are made in a transparent way;
 - Ensure compliance with the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 in terms of making the authority more sustainable and resilient. Multi-location meetings reduce the carbon footprint of physical meetings. They also reduce both the reliance on paper and reduce the need for travel;
 - Provide significant time and cost savings for councillors and officers particularly in relation to regional arrangements; and
 - Make it easier for participants to take part in meetings when they have employment, family, caring or other commitments.

2.7 **Blaenau Gwent Council Multi-Location Meetings**

The Committee Room (Abraham Derby Room), at the General Offices, Ebbw Vale, has multi-location meeting capability to enable participants to attend and fully participate remotely or in person.

2.7.1 The Multi-Location Meeting Policy is to be used to support all meetings of the Council, its Committees and member development sessions, whose participants are not all in the same physical place.

2.7.2 The Multi-Location Meeting Policy includes detail of:

- Legislative requirements;
- Detail of what a Multi Location Meeting is;
- The process in Blaenau Gwent;
- Broadcasting of Meetings;
- Recording of Meetings by Others;
- Exempt and Confidential items;
- Calendar of Meetings;
- Attendance;
- Meeting Procedures; and
- Chairing.

2.7.3 The Multi Location Meeting Policy is supported by a number of other documents that should be considered when either conducting or participating in a multi location meeting, including:

- The Council's Constitution;
- Hybrid Meeting Protocol; and
- Information Security Policy.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

To include Recommendation(s) / Endorsement by other groups, e.g. CMT/Committees/Other groups)

3.1 **Option 1**

Approve the Multi Location Meeting Policy and for it to be used to support all future democratic meetings and member sessions.

3.2 **Option 2**

Make amendments to the content of the Multi Location Meeting Policy, noting the legislative requirements, before adopting the Policy and for it to be used to support all future democratic meetings and member sessions.

4. **Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

4.1 The Multi Location Meeting Policy is a requirement of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

- 4.2 The statutory guidance also stipulates that authorities should develop a policy setting out how the multi-location meetings will operate and reflect the meeting arrangements in the constitution.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

5.1 ***Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)***

The resources required to support multi location meetings have already been established. No further investment is required at this time.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

There is a risk to the Council if the Multi Location Meeting Policy is not adopted in line with Legislation.

The Council is required to offer for democratic meetings to be held on a hybrid or remote basis. Authorities may not mandate physical attendance at meetings.

5.3 ***Legal***

The Multi Location Policy has been developed following Welsh Government guidance and the requirements as part of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

There is a requirement for all meetings of Council to be broadcast live. This will be a future development for the Council.

5.4 ***Human Resources***

Democratic Services staff are trained in use of the hybrid meeting system and in operating multi location meetings.

Further training is being sought on the broadcasting of live meetings as there is a statutory requirement for all Council meetings to be broadcast live (the current arrangements for recording meetings and uploading the recordings onto the website are suitable for all other democratic meetings).

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***

As part of the Council's performance management information the number of attendees at committees and those attending virtually or physically is recorded and included as part of the Joint Performance and Finance Report. The information can also be presented to the Democratic Services Committee.

6.2 ***Expected outcome for the public***

Multi Location Meetings provide greater participation in meetings by the public and external participants.

6.3 ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***

Multi Location Meetings:

- Make it easy for the public to view and participate in decision making and the democratic process observing discussions, recommendations and decisions are made in a transparent way; and
- Make it easier for participants to take part in meetings when they have employment, family, caring or other commitments.

6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***

The hybrid meeting system and Multi Location Meeting Policy supports long term thinking for the Council and provides future proofing for democratic meetings that support digital infrastructure.

6.5 ***Preventative focus***

The Multi Location Meeting Policy and Information Security Policy have been developed to prevent issues arising from the inappropriate use of the Council's ICT.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

Arrangements can be made in future for partner organisations to utilise the hybrid meeting system at the General Offices.

6.7 ***Integration (across service areas)***

Training and support for managing the hybrid system will be provided across Council Services, such as Business Support, so that meetings, outside of the democratic arrangements, can operate on a hybrid basis.

6.8 ***Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions***

Multi Location Meetings:

- Ensure compliance with the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 in terms of making the authority more sustainable and resilient. Multi-location meetings reduce the carbon footprint of physical meetings. They also reduce both the reliance on paper and reduce the need for travel; and
- Provide significant time and cost savings for councillors and officers particularly in relation to regional arrangements.

6.9a ***Socio Economic Duty Impact Assessment (complete an impact assessment to consider how the decision might help to reduce the inequalities of outcome associated with socio-economic disadvantage).***

A socio economic impact assessment is not required for this report.

6.9b. ***Equality Impact Assessment (screening and identifying if full impact assessment is needed)***

The Multi Location Meeting Policy provides alternative options for attendance at meetings, supporting those with caring or work needs as well as those who may not be able to attend meetings physically. Reasonable adjustments can be considered, on a case by case basis, to support the engagement and participation in meetings by members, officers and the public.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 *State how the work will be monitored e.g. through scrutiny or directorate performance management arrangements*

The Democratic Services Committee will have responsibility for the reviewing of the Multi Location Meeting Policy.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- Multi Location Meeting Policy



DRAFT MLM
Policy.docx

- Constitution - [The Council Constitution | Blaenau Gwent CBC \(blaenau-gwent.gov.uk\)](http://blaenau-gwent.gov.uk)

Note – the Constitution will be undertaking a review. The arrangements outlined in this report will be reflected in a future Constitution

- Hybrid Meeting Protocol



Hybrid Meetings
Protocol.docx

- [Blaenau Gwent CBC: Democracy \(blaenau-gwent.gov.uk\)](http://blaenau-gwent.gov.uk)

- Information Security Policy



Information-Security-Policy-v12-FINAL.d