



# Blaenau Gwent Multi-Location Meetings Policy



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## **Background**

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.

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 (where some participants are in the same physical location, whilst others join the meeting virtually, also referred to as ‘hybrid meetings’) 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.

When considering arrangement for remote attendance or ‘multi-location meetings’, authorities must have regard to the statutory guidance under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

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.

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.

## **What is a Multi-Location Meeting?**

A Multi-Location Meeting is a meeting whose participants are not all in the same physical place. Some of the participants may be physically located in the meeting venue whilst others join from their home or other remote location.

The Welsh Government Statutory Guidance stipulates that local democracy and the needs of the public in engaging with multi-location meetings are an important consideration in deciding where and when meetings will be convened.

It is also acknowledged that some participants may prefer physical meetings due to protected characteristics or circumstances which limits their ability to participate online. Some participants however may wish to join council meetings remotely and from another location as a matter of default because they have working or caring responsibilities, protected characteristics, which make attending meetings in person difficult.

## **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.

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

There are two rooms at the General Offices, Ebbw Vale, with multi-location meeting capability to enable participants to attend and fully participate remotely or in person. The room is also able to accommodate a designated public gallery to allow the public and Press to attend in person if required. The section of the Multi Location Meeting Policy, 'Attendance at Meetings', identifies the current arrangements for holding Committee meetings.

All Committees may be viewed at: [Blaenau Gwent CBC: Democracy \(blaenau-gwent.gov.uk\)](https://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk) please select the chosen committee to view from the options provided.

This 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. Such meetings can either be held:

- Hybrid – with some participants joining through remote means (Microsoft Teams) and some attending physically in the same place as others. Hybrid Meetings will be conducted and broadcasted via the Council's hybrid meeting solution from the Council Committee Room. These meetings will be recorded and uploaded, within two days of the meeting taking place, onto the Council's website (apart from meetings which are either partly or wholly confidential in nature).
- Entirely Remote – whereby all participants are taking part via remote means (Microsoft Teams) and recorded and uploaded, within two days of the meeting taking place, onto the Council's website (apart from meetings which are either partly or wholly confidential in nature).

## **Broadcasting Meetings**

The Act requires for all Full Council meetings to be broadcast live with the broadcast being shown on the Council's website. The process for this is being sourced for future use. All other formal Committee meetings will be recorded and then uploaded to the Council's website within two days of the meetings taking place. All recordings can be found here [Blaenau Gwent CBC: Democracy \(blaenau-gwent.gov.uk\)](https://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk) please select the chosen committee to view from the options provided.

## **Recording of Meetings by Others**

In meetings which are open to the public, filming and use of social media is permitted during meetings so long as there is no disturbance to the conduct of the meeting.

## **Exempt or Confidential Items**

On occasions Committees will be required to consider exempt information in which the public and Press will be excluded from the meeting, both physically and remotely.

When this happens, the agenda will be scheduled to ensure that all exempt items are included at the end of the meeting in order to minimise any disruption to the meeting. There will also be two meeting invites sent to participants:

- Electronic meeting invite 1 will be for the open part of the agenda and will include Members, Officers, the Press and public. This section will be recorded and uploaded to the Council website within two days of the meeting taking place.

- Electronic meeting invite 2 will be for the exempt part of the agenda and will ONLY include those Members and Officers required to this part of the meeting. This section of the meeting will be recorded but WILL NOT be uploaded onto the website and will be kept in a locked electronic folder only accessible by Democratic Services Staff and CLT.

*\*note a transcript for both meetings will be available following the meeting, but ONLY those invited to the meeting of the exempt items will be able to access this.*

It is recommended that all members and officers present for an exempt item are either located alone where they cannot be overheard, or wear headphones to ensure that confidential information is not heard by anyone outside of the meeting.

### **Calendar of Meetings**

A programme of meetings will be developed annually which identifies when, where and how each of the Council’s meetings will be held. This may be subject to change during the year for operational reasons.

### **Attendance at Meetings**

Invitations to meetings will be provided electronically and will provide details of the meeting, its location and timings. Certain meetings will include links to enable the participants to join remotely should they wish to do so. On receipt of the invitation, and if requested, participants will need to indicate their intentions to attend the meeting physically or remotely to enable any necessary administrative and support arrangements to be put in place by Democratic Services.

### **Process**

Democratic Services will email all those invited to attend a Committee meeting seeking confirmation of whether invitees wish to attend the meeting either via MS Teams, or in person at the General Offices. This email will be sent in advance of the meeting.

**Please note** that in order for the meeting to proceed on a hybrid basis, a minimum of 3 Members of the Committee are required to physically attend the meeting at the General Offices. If this number is not met, the meeting will proceed via Microsoft Teams. **If no response is received, then it will be assumed that invitees wish to attend via Microsoft Teams.**

A few days before the meeting, Democratic Services will inform the Committee of whether the meeting will be held as hybrid or fully remote.

**Owing to the necessary administrative and system support that is required to hold hybrid meetings a minimum number of physical attendees will be put in place for each meeting. If the minimum number is not met, the meeting will be held fully via remote methods.**

Meetings are also attended by a range of participants other than committee members. Officers and committee members should notify Democratic Services of additional participants who will be attending with details and contact information of the participant. The external participants will be contacted by Democratic Services to confirm their attendance, explain how they can join the meeting either as a physical or remote participant and the meeting procedures. If the external participant is joining the meeting remotely an electronic meeting invitation similar to that of other participants will be sent.

The minimum physical attendance number of members (excluding Officers and external participants) will be in place as follows:

Meeting	Details
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scrutiny Committees (meetings to be held at the Chair’s discretion)</li> <li>• Governance and Audit Committee</li> <li>• Democratic Services Committee</li> </ul>	All meetings will be offered as hybrid. Minimum number of physical member attendees – 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning Committee</li> <li>• Licensing Committee</li> </ul>	All meetings will be offered as fully remote.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cabinet</li> <li>• Council</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Member development sessions</li> </ul>	<p>All meetings will be offered as fully remote unless a specific request is made for the session to be hybrid.</p> <p>Minimum number of physical member attendees – 5</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other</li> </ul>	<p>All meetings will be offered as hybrid.</p> <p>Minimum number of physical member attendees – 5</p>

Members of the public will also be able to attend physical meetings at the General Offices. In the event that the number of members of the public needs to be limited then seats will be allocated on a first come first served basis. Members of the public who wish to view a meeting which is to be fully remote should make a request to the Head of Democratic Services, by noon three days before the remote meeting, to enable appropriate arrangements to be made.

### **Procedure at Meetings**

Those participants attending the meeting remotely should also ensure that they have appropriate internet connectivity to join and maintain their attendance throughout the meeting.

If attending physically and using a laptop the person should ensure that it is on mute and the sound is off **(this is imperative to stop sound feedback)**.

All those participating in the meeting, physically or remotely, will need to indicate when they would like to speak, via physical hands up in the Committee Room or hands up on Teams. Only when brought in by the Chair may someone speak. They should remember then to unmute their microphone when speaking and to re mute when finished. Participations must speak clearly and into the microphone.

For all meetings, Members are requested to leave their cameras on throughout the duration of the meeting. This is to ensure members of the Press and public are aware of who the elected representatives are in each meeting. This is also a legal requirement under Chapter 4 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, Section 47, *‘Attendance at local authority meetings - in the case of meetings of a principal council required to be broadcast under section 46 (electronic broadcasts), or any other local authority meetings required to be broadcast by regulations made under that section, Members to speak to and be heard by each other and to see and be seen by each other. Officers will only turn on their cameras if they are speaking and members of the public and Press will be asked to keep their cameras off for the duration of the meeting.*

It is inevitable that there will be occasions when a remote participant may need to disable their camera due to poor connection/internet issues. If this occurs the participant should use the chat function to inform the meeting Chair and Democratic Services staff of the issue.

Reports will not be shown on screen. Only on rare occasions, such as providing a presentation, will the information be shown on screen. Please see section above on the legal requirement for members to be seen when attending local authority meetings.

All attendees are encouraged to use their Council devices at meetings so that agendas and papers can be viewed online.

A participant at a meeting wishing to speak in Welsh is required to contact Democratic Services at least 3 days in advance of a meeting so that the necessary translation arrangements can be made.

All meetings will be facilitated by a Democratic Services Officer.

### **Attendance at Meetings Whilst out of the Country**

Members wishing to attend meetings whilst out of the Country and using their own personal or Council devices will be able to do so by accessing free Wi-Fi facilities as the Council will not be able to reimburse costs. However, to enable access to Council meetings abroad the Information Security Policy states that approval must be sought from SRS, the SIRO and Data Protection Governance Officer before taking equipment abroad. Information will be sought to understand, where the device will be securely stored/locked, what Wi-Fi will be accessed and is it secure, international data transfer and the risk of the device being lost/stolen.

Should Members wish to access meetings using mobile phones (Council or Personal) or other personal devices such as laptops, iPads etc the Council will not be able to reimburse call or data costs. This access would therefore be a matter for the Member and subject to the Council's existing BYOD (bring your own device) policy. Please note, no documentation or personal information should be downloaded to a personal device.

Technical support on any Council supported devices whilst abroad will not be provided by the Council's ICT provider SRS, or Democratic Services Officers.

<http://intranet/media/186101/Blaenau-Gwent-BYOD-Policy-v032- FINAL.docx>

### **Record of Attendance**

The Democratic Services Officer will record attendance of each committee member and participant at the meeting and record attendance in the minutes of the meeting. Committee Members are to inform the relevant Democratic Services if they are unable to attend a meeting and their apologies will be recorded at the meeting and published in the minutes of the meeting.

### **Quorum**

The quorum of a meeting is one quarter of the voting Members unless specified otherwise within the Council's Constitution. The quorum shall include those attending remotely and physically; providing they are able to speak and be heard by each other and to see and be seen by others when actively participating in proceedings.

If the numbers present fall below the quorum required, the meeting ends immediately.

### **Voting**

It is acknowledged that technical issues may dictate the method of voting but voting will comply with the voting rules set out in the Council Procedure Rules. Methods of voting include electronic voting, a roll call vote and show of hands (either physical or virtual). Committee members should ensure that they have been present for the discussion and debate on agenda items so as to be able to exercise their vote.

The result of any vote will be announced immediately following the vote by either the Chair or the Democratic Services Officer.

### **Chairing Meetings**

It is understood that chairing a multi-location meeting is very different to chairing a face-to-face only meeting and the job of the Chair is particularly challenging. As hybrid meeting arrangements have been operational for some time, Chairs and vice-chairs are encouraged to manage meetings how they feel most comfortable whether that be in person or remotely. Support and advice from advisors and Democratic Services are provided in either scenario, when required.

In general Chairs of meetings should:

- Ensure they are prepared for the meeting.
- Ensure all participants are able to access the meeting and can see and hear each other.
- Introduce themselves and others to members of the public who may be present.
- Check occasionally to ensure no one has been lost due to technical difficulties and provide support to those participants experiencing challenges.
- Remember that all participants may want to participate whether attending physically or remotely. If attending physically, ensure those attending remotely are able to contribute and if attending remotely ensure that you ask if anyone attending physically from the Committee Room would like to contribute.

- Ask all those attending, whether physically or remotely, to mute their microphones and to only take them off mute when brought in by the Chair. All will then need to re mute once they have spoken.

When opening the meeting inform everyone that the meeting will be recorded and will be uploaded onto the Council's website (for Council meetings the recording will be live broadcast).

If any public or Press are in attendance physically at the General Offices inform them that the public seating area is not generally filmed, however, by entering the meeting room and using the seating area they are consenting to being filmed and the possible use of these images being used on the website and/or for training purposes.

As identified above also note that filming is allowed to be undertaken by those seated in public gallery and again, by sitting in the seating area, they consent to being filmed.

Disruptive Behaviour – If a member of the public interrupt's proceedings, the Chair will warn the person concerned. If they continue to interrupt, the Chair will order their removal from the meeting. With regards to Elected Members, the procedure outlined within the Council's Constitution will apply.

### **Chat Function Use**

Participants should only use the chat function if there is something they need the meeting to be aware of i.e. are having sound issues, or need to leave the meeting early etc.

The chat facility **is not** to be used for discussions, as all discussions must be made verbally in the meeting for the sake of individuals observing the meeting and / or the meeting recording if a recording is being made.

The chat is not to be used for other reasons. Be mindful that everyone in the meeting can see the chat content.

### **Supporting Documents**

This guidance Policy should be read in conjunction with the Councils Constitution, Hybrid Meeting Protocol and Information Security Policy.

Constitution – [The Council Constitution | Blaenau Gwent CBC \(blaenau-gwent.gov.uk\)](https://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/council-constitution)

*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

Information Security Policy –



Information-Security-Policy-v12-FINAL.d