

Revised Motion – Amendment to Multi-location Meetings Protocol

Background and Supporting Information

The current arrangements for obtaining remote access details can create practical difficulties for residents wishing to observe or participate in Council meetings online. Several residents have advised that they have been unable to join meetings because joining details were not received in sufficient time.

Whilst the current protocol was introduced with good intentions, experience of its operation has identified opportunities to make the process simpler, more predictable and more accessible.

A requirement to submit a request within a relatively limited period before every meeting can create unnecessary barriers for some residents. This may particularly affect people who are neurodivergent, including those with ADHD or other conditions affecting memory, organisation or executive functioning, as well as people with learning or cognitive difficulties, sensory impairments, mental health conditions, fluctuating health conditions, caring responsibilities or other circumstances which can make compliance with a narrow recurring administrative process more difficult.

Accessible public participation should, wherever reasonably practicable, minimise unnecessary procedural barriers. A straightforward opt-in system, coupled with a reasonable deadline for individual requests, would provide greater certainty for residents whilst remaining simple for the Council to administer.

It is also good practice when introducing a new process to consider how that process is working in practice, to seek and take account of feedback from those using it, and to make proportionate adjustments where experience identifies avoidable difficulties. The proposed changes reflect feedback received from residents and are intended to improve the operation of the protocol rather than alter its underlying purpose.

Welsh Government guidance on multi-location meetings emphasises greater accessibility and improved public participation in local government and recognises the value of considering whether arrangements work effectively for those participating in and observing meetings.

Earlier publication of agendas also supports transparency and enables residents to understand the business to be considered and decide in reasonable time whether they wish to attend. Publishing agendas one week before an Ordinary Council meeting, wherever practicable, would be consistent with good governance and with the previous practice of this Council, whilst also having the additional benefit of exceeding the statutory minimum notice period.

Proposal

I propose that the Council reviews Section 4.2 of the Multi-location Meetings Protocol and adopts proportionate measures to improve the accessibility, predictability and effectiveness of arrangements for public online attendance.

Desired Outcome and Benefits

That the Council agrees:

1. To extend the deadline for requesting joining instructions to **5.00 pm on the Friday before an Ordinary Council meeting.**

2. To establish and maintain an **opt-in distribution list** for residents who wish to receive joining instructions automatically for each Council meeting, removing the need to submit a separate request each month.
3. Where a request is received after the 5.00 pm Friday deadline, to allow the Clerk discretion to provide joining instructions where reasonably practicable. **A late request should not be refused solely on the basis that the deadline has passed where the joining instructions can reasonably still be provided. Where a late request cannot be accommodated, there should be a valid and reasonable rationale for declining the request.**
4. To publish the agenda for an Ordinary Council meeting on the Council website **one week before the meeting**, wherever practicable, in line with good governance principles and the previous practice of this Council, and to use the Council's social media channels effectively to signpost residents to the published agenda.
5. To review the operation of these arrangements after six months, taking account of feedback from residents and office staff, alongside the practical experience of their operation, and to consider whether any further amendments are necessary.