

# BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

## REPORT TO COUNCIL

15 JUNE 2022

### REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

#### MULTI-LOCATION MEETINGS POLICY

#### 1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is for Council to approve the Multi-Location Meetings Policy.

#### 2. Connection to corporate well-being objectives / other corporate priorities

- 2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate well-being objectives under the **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**:-
1. **Supporting a successful sustainable economy** – taking steps to make the county borough a great place to do business, for people to live, work, study and visit, and to ensure that our schools are focused on raising the skills, qualifications and ambitions for all people in the county borough.
  2. **Helping people and communities to be more healthy and resilient** - taking steps to reduce or prevent people from becoming vulnerable or dependent on the Council and its services. Supporting individuals and communities to build resilience, and enable them to develop solutions to have active, healthy and independent lives.
  3. **Smarter use of resources** – ensure that all resources (financial, physical, ecological, human and technological) are used as effectively and efficiently as possible and support the creation of resources throughout the community that can help to deliver the Council’s well-being objectives.

#### 3. Background

- 3.1 Section 4 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 makes provision to allow for “remote meetings”. At the outset of the Covid-19 Pandemic in March 2020 the Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Meetings) (Wales) Regulations 2020 enabled local authorities to convene meetings by remote means.
- 3.2 Under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, local authorities are required to put in place, and publish, arrangements for multi-location meetings, that is, formal meetings where meeting participants may not all be in the same physical place. The meeting arrangements are comprised of the rules and procedures adopted by the local authority in accordance with the statutory requirements, and should be reflected in the Council’s Constitution.

3.2 Alongside the legally mandated arrangements that authorities must make for multi-location meetings, authorities should develop a wider policy setting out the detailed systems chosen by the authority for the operation of its multi-location meetings.

#### 4. Current situation/proposal

4.1 The draft policy attached as **Appendix 1** takes account of interim statutory guidance issued by Welsh Government (WG), which sets out a number of guiding principles to be considered in developing multi-location meeting arrangements, as well as practical considerations. The guidance also lists suggested issues to be included in the policy, but indicates that the exact contents of the policy will be agreed at local level.

4.2 The WG guidance says: ‘A multi-location meetings policy may make provision that different kinds of meeting be convened, by default, with all participants joining through remote means, or with some arrangement being made for people to attend and participate and observe in person. Policies should recognise that the Act requires participants to be able to join meetings through remote means for all formal meetings. It will not be permitted for relevant authorities to decide that all meetings will be held entirely physically. Physical meetings should not be seen as representing the “gold standard” with multi-location meetings being second best. Physical meetings may be convenient and effective for those most familiar with and comfortable with how they work – but they may also be inaccessible and impractical to many.

4.3 The Council has been convening all of its meetings by remote means throughout much of 2020 and 2021. While meeting this way has proven challenging in the context of the global coronavirus pandemic, it has also resulted in a number of benefits:

- Enhancing and supporting local democracy. Having the flexibility to convene meetings in this way will reduce the barriers that might previously have been in place for explaining and demonstrating how relevant authorities do business.
- Working more productively. When participants come together by remote means, they have often been able to get more done. Multi-location meetings have also resulted in a dramatic reduction in the amount of paper needed and produced.
- Making it easier for the public to observe meetings.
- Making the Council more resilient and sustainable in how it carries out its work. The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 requires relevant authorities to think about, and act on, long term needs in the way that policy is developed and made. Multi-location meetings reduce the carbon footprint of physical meetings (although digital activity is not of course carbon-neutral). They can also help relevant authorities to reduce the risk of future unexpected events, such as extreme weather, which could in future present a challenge to in-person meetings. Issues of sustainability are explored in more detail below.
- Reducing the need for travel. Significant time and cost savings for councillors, officers and other participants have arisen. In turn, this makes it easier for

participants to take part if they have professional and caring commitments potentially removing some significant barriers to standing for public office.

- Better support for members from diverse backgrounds. Just as barriers are being removed to public participation, multi-location meetings have made it easier for care providers, or disabled people, or people with other protected characteristics, to engage on an equal footing. In some cases, participants have found the formality of physical meetings to be off putting, and multi-location meetings have removed this factor.

4.4 The Council has the following committees which support its statutory, regulatory and governance arrangements and all meetings must be able to operate as multi-location meetings to ensure that participants are able to attend remotely:

- Appeals Panel
- Appointments Committee
- Cabinet, Cabinet Committee - Corporate Parenting, Cabinet Committee - Equalities
- Council
- Democratic Services Committee
- Development Control Committee
- Governance and Audit Committee
- Licensing Act 2003 Committee, Licensing Act 2003 Sub Committees A & B
- Licensing Committee, Licensing Sub Committees A & B
- Rights of Way Sub Committee
- Standards Committee
- Town and Community Council Forum
- Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committees 1, 2 and 3
- Public Service Board

4.5 The Council will continue to use Microsoft Teams as its primary remote meeting platform. This will be used by Elected Members from their Council provided devices to ensure effective security. Non-Council devices may be used although the functionality available when using these “guest” devices may differ from that provided by the Council. Other participants are able to join meetings using links provided by the Council contained within the meeting invitation.

4.6 Works are ongoing in the Council Chamber to upgrade the systems to allow for hybrid meetings. It is anticipated that these works will be completed by the end of June which will allow training sessions and some meetings to take place, on a hybrid basis, in July, subject to Health and Safety guidance.

4.7 It is proposed that a review be undertaken after 12 months from the implementation of the policy.

## **5. Effect upon policy framework and procedure rules**

5.1 If approved the policy will be published on the Council’s website.

5.2 Any necessary changes to the constitution which if this policy is approved, will be reported to Council for approval.

## **6. Equality Act 2010 implications**

6.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act 2010, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales, the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services and functions. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

## **7. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 implications**

7.1 The well-being goals identified in the Act were considered in the preparation of this report. It is considered that there is no significant or unacceptable impact upon the achievement of well-being goals/objectives as a result of this report.

## **8.1 Financial implications**

8.1 There is funding in place within ICT budgets for the Council's hybrid meeting system to be installed in the Council Chamber.

## **9. Recommendation**

9.1 It is recommended that Council approve the policy attached as **Appendix 1**.

**K Watson**

**Chief Officer – Legal and Regulatory Services, Human Resources and Corporate Policy and Monitoring Officer**

**8 June 2022**

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**Background documents:** None