

## **GWYNEDD COUNCIL**

### **PROTOCOL FOR VIRTUAL MEETINGS**

#### **1. GENERAL**

- 1.1 This Protocol has been prepared in accordance with Section 47 of The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 (the Act). That Act provides for attendance at local authority meetings, whilst Part 1 of Schedule 4 amends existing legislation in relation to arrangements for local authority meetings and documents, including access by the press and public and requiring electronic publication of certain meeting documents.
- 1.2 From 1 May 2021, local authorities will be required to make arrangements to ensure their meetings are capable of being held virtually, partially virtually or as physical meetings. Section 47 does not prescribe how meetings are to be held, and this is a matter for each authority
- 1.3 The Council's Constitution Standing Orders arrangements will be followed when holding meetings. The Protocol is designed to advise and support the Constitution and in the event of a conflict between provisions the Constitution will take precedence.
- 1.4 Meeting "virtually" is different and requires an alternative way of working. Neither the way the discussion works nor the environment in which contributions are made is the same as in an usual meeting. The purpose of this Protocol is to guide contributors through meetings and give guidance on best practice.
- 1.5 This Protocol provides a procedure for virtual meetings in order to ensure that the meetings are held in an appropriate and fair manner and ensures the confidence of the public in Gwynedd Council's democratic arrangements over the period of the crisis.

#### **2. PRE-MEETING PERIOD**

##### **NOTICE , AGENDA AND REPORT**

- 2.1 The Agenda and reports will be published and circulated to members as usual. As usual, the date and time of the meeting will be noted on the agenda.
- 2.2 An electronic invitation to the meeting will be sent which will contain a link to facilitate access to the meeting.
- 2.3 The Notice of the meeting will also include details of the time of the meetings and how members of the public can access the meeting.
- 2.4 Members of the press and public will be able to access the meeting through one of the following means:
  - (a) Live webcast, or
  - (b) Webinar facilities, or
  - (c) An alternative way in appropriate circumstances.

### **3. 3. THE DAY OF THE COMMITTEE**

#### **3.1 TESTING THE SYSTEM AND PREPARING**

All members and officers will be expected to log-in to the system at least 20 minutes before the meeting in order to ensure that the connections are working. As all 75 members are invited to the Full Council meeting, members will be expected to log-in to the system 30 minutes before the meeting. Capacity to resolve technical problems during the meeting is limited.

A Democratic Services Officer will test connections immediately in this period to ensure:

1. That the provision is working
2. That all members and officers who are taking part have access to the system
3. If there is a technical problem, to identify a solution and implement it.
4. That the translation is working for the non-Welsh-speaking members.

A member of the Democratic Team will act as Host and will manage admittance to the meeting. To facilitate arrangements also, technical support will be available in some meetings to act as "Technical Manager" in order to deal with any technical issues.

The legal officer or other lead officer will confirm that a quorum is present and the meeting can start and inform the chair.

A quorum is defined as members who are in attendance (logged into the meeting) by electronic means and can speak and be heard at the meeting.

#### **3.2 CHAIR TO OPEN THE MEETING**

The Chair will open the meeting by explaining the procedure and how everything will work in a virtual meeting (noting the procedure for allowing local members and third parties to speak, proposals, requests to speak from committee members and voting). Specifically, the following must be explained:

- That requests to speak will be made by "raising" the virtual hand and waiting to be invited to speak by the Chair.
- That microphones must be on mute at all times unless a contributor has been invited to speak by the Chair. The microphone should be muted immediately afterwards.
- Explain the procedure in terms of loss of connection etc. (explain below) and that the rules about being present to listen to the addresses apply.
- The 'chat' function will not be available during a meeting

#### **3.3 DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST AND PROTOCOL MATTERS**

- Chair to ask if anyone is declaring an interest. Members to note by using the Raise Hand icon, their intention to declare so that the Chair can ask them to address the Committee.

- Members to note the item and the reason for expressing an interest (members should contact the Legal Officer beforehand for advice in order to facilitate the process).
- If the member declares a prejudicial interest in any item. When the item begins, they must "leave" the meeting. A Democratic Services Officer will ensure that this happens by 'moving' the member to a 'waiting room'. A Democratic Services Officer will ensure that the member re-joins at the end of the item by inviting them back to the main meeting from the 'waiting room'.

### 3.4 DISCUSSION

- Members will note their wish to make or second a proposal or amendment or otherwise speak by using the Raise Hand icon. Members should not unmute their microphone until the Chair has invited them to speak. So as to maintain order and assist the Chair, after speaking, every member will need to lower their hand by clicking on the Lower Hand icon and remember to mute their microphone immediately.
- The Chair will go through these in turn. So as to maintain order, members should restrict their contribution to one address. The Chair will maintain discretion to allow additional questions.

### 3.5 PROPRIETY OFFICERS

The Chair must be aware of any requests by a Statutory Officer to draw the Chair's attention to either a matter of order or propriety which needs to be drawn to the meeting's attention. Therefore, if the Propriety Officer makes a request to speak **they should confirm whether the officer wishes to speak immediately** in relation to a point of order or whether they would be willing to wait their turn. If the Chair does not see the Statutory Officer's request to speak, the officer will need to interrupt the meeting to sort the matter out.

### 3.6 VOTE

- Votes can be undertaken in the following manner:
  - Where there is an available electronic voting system with the use of that system,
  - By asking every member with the right to vote to express orally how they are voting, i.e. in favour of the proposal, against the proposal or abstaining their vote.
  - At a meeting of 12 or fewer voting members, the electronic hand method may be used for voting if it is available to members and that it is possible to see their vote.
  - If the vote is tied, the Chair will use his/her casting vote by expressing this orally at the Committee and formally announcing the result.

### **3.7 TECHNICAL ISSUES**

- If, at any time during the Committee, that technical issues mean that an audio and/or video connection is lost with members or officers, the Chair will adjourn the meeting in an attempt to rectify the problem and allow the member to continue to take part whether with video and audio or on an audio only basis.
- Members are required to contact the Technical Manager or Democratic Services Officer if they are having difficulties. As far as is possible, members and officers must have an alternative method for contacting them e.g. phone, e-mail or other means.
- If technical issues remain to the extent that members who wish to participate are unable to do so, and that this has a significant effect on an item or items or the propriety of continuing, the Chair will consider whether an item or the rest of the meeting should be deferred until a later date and/or time.