

GWYNEDD COUNCIL CABINET



Report to a meeting of Gwynedd Council Cabinet

Date of meeting: 27 July 2021
Cabinet Members: Councillor Nia Jeffreys and Ioan Thomas
Contact Officer: Geraint Owen/Dafydd Edwards
Contact Telephone Number: 32335
Title of Item: **Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 - request for resources to enable remote attendance at meetings**

1. THE DECISION SOUGHT

That the Cabinet continues to support the Council's arrangements to enable hybrid meetings and remote attendance at meetings in accordance with the requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 by allocating a total of £130,000 to fund the schemes in accordance with the report.

2. BACKGROUND AND THE REASON FOR THE NEED FOR A DECISION

- 2.1 The requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 were reported to the Cabinet meeting on 6 July 2021 and to the full Council meeting on 8 July 2021. Interim arrangements were adopted to hold Cabinet meetings and to hold the Council's committees as a result of these reports.
- 2.2 As part of these arrangements, we are continuing to hold virtual meetings only at present.
- 2.3 It was reported that future meetings could be held virtually only or a combination of meetings held at a venue but with some members attending remotely. The requirements of the act are clear, that we must ensure that it is possible for those taking part to attend remotely. The term "hybrid" is used to describe meetings that are held in this way.
- 2.4 Specific project work has been established to drive the necessary technological developments in order to offer hybrid meetings. It will be necessary to ensure that the provision is technically easy to use in order to enable remote attendance conveniently, as well as satisfying the requirements of access for the public and press, and the further requirements in relation to web-casting that are likely as a result of the act. Naturally, we will consider practical matters such as bilingual, voting and web-casting requirements as part of the work.

3. THE RATIONALE AND JUSTIFICATION FOR RECOMMENDING THE DECISION

- 3.1 The Council has been successful in securing funding from Welsh Government's Digital Democracy Fund to develop the existing digital provision and upgrade Siambr Dafydd Orwig to

facilitate hybrid meetings. The grant funding received allows us to fund a hybrid system in the Chamber.

- 3.2 Since starting this work, it has become clear that the Council's existing resources in the chamber (cameras etc.) are dated and will reach the end of their lifetime in the near future. Upgrading the video system at the same time as enabling the hybrid system would be sensible in order to ensure
- That the process is entirely digital (rather than half digital and half analogue)
 - Better management of the entire system as one composite resource
 - Better quality via 4K provision (standard quality only at present)
 - Better experience for the users and those watching
- 3.3 In addition, it is crucial to ensure that hybrid provision is available from more than one location. Such meetings (hybrid meetings and/or fully virtual meetings) have received the support of Councillors and staff due to the potential to
- contribute to the carbon reduction agenda by reducing travelling
 - promote diversity in democracy by encouraging the flexibility of remote access to virtual meetings and thereby attracting more people who work and young parents to consider standing for election
 - use Councillors' time more sensibly by reducing travelling requirements
 - reduce travel costs
- 3.4 Ensuring that the provision is available from more than one location will support the Council's agenda of holding virtual or hybrid meetings for councillors and/or staff at formal or informal meetings. To this end, therefore, a request is made to upgrade both chambers in Caernarfon to enable hybrid arrangements from the chambers as well as upgrading the current camera provision to digital. In addition, the request includes upgrading the Council's meeting rooms in order to allow remote access for Councillors and staff at hybrid meetings with the location being one of the Council's other traditional meeting rooms across the County's buildings.

4. DETAILS REGARDING THE PROVISION

- 4.1 The request includes the following improvements:
- Creating a consistent system across the Council's meeting rooms to enable virtual meetings via Teams and Zoom as well as any video-conferencing providers
 - Creating a simple wi-fi system to enable connection to video-conferencing meetings
 - Enabling remote attendance at a meeting from more than one meeting room as well as remotely
 - Re-using the screens if the size is suitable for the room and upgrade if the provision is not appropriate.
- 4.2 A sum of £130,000 is requested in order to upgrade the technology and enable hybrid meetings from various locations to assist with remote access across Council services. The Council received a grant of £1.04 million during the 2020/21 financial year for Digital Transformation. This grant was allocated to a fund for recovery arrangements post Covid19 and it is appropriate for this source to be used to fund the £130,000.

5. NEXT STEPS AND TIMETABLE

Should the Cabinet approve the release of this money for this purpose, work to upgrade the chambers would happen over the coming months as a priority in order to respond to the requirements of the act. Work to upgrade and secure remote access to hybrid meetings at other locations would follow in the subsequent months with the work expected to have been completed by March 2022.

6. ANY CONSULTATIONS UNDERTAKEN PRIOR TO RECOMMENDING THE DECISION

The Monitoring Officer

As noted in the report, there are significant changes afoot in respect of the Authority's meeting arrangements, specifically relating to electronic methods of holding meetings. This means that we need to ensure provisions which allow meetings to be held in accordance with the requirements of these new statutory rights. I support the recommendation

The Head of Finance Department

I have collaborated with the author to prepare the technical and financial aspects of this report and I confirm the accuracy of the relevant content.