

Meeting of:	Cabinet
Date of Meeting:	Monday, 20 December 2021
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	All Scrutiny Committees
Report Title:	Progress Update Regarding Hybrid Solution for Council Meetings and Public Participation and Engagement
Purpose of Report:	To provide an update on arrangements to enable a hybrid solution for Council meetings and progress with regards public participation and engagement.
Report Owner:	Jeff Rees, Operational Manager Democratic Services
Responsible Officer:	Karen Bowen, Principal Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	Strategic Leadership Team Progress update provided to Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group September 2021 Tom Bowring Head of Policy and Business Transformation Rob Jones Communications Manager
Policy Framework:	This is a matter for Executive decision

Executive Summary:

To provide Cabinet with an update on progress with regard to:-

- the provision and training for Members of a hybrid solution for Council meetings having regard to the requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 and the Welsh Government (WG) Interim Statutory Guidance on Multi-Location meetings published in August 2021;

- various aspects relating to other provisions as required under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 including the work being undertaken by the All Wales Monitoring Officers' Group in respect of a Model Constitution and the work being undertaken internally by Council Officers relating to a Public Participation Strategy; and

- work undertaken to date with regard to public engagement in the democratic process.

Recommendations

1. That Cabinet considers and notes the contents of this report having particular regard to paragraphs 2.12 to 2.16 of the report.
2. That Cabinet notes that the Council's Remote Attendance at Meetings Procedure is to be reviewed in light of Welsh Government statutory interim guidance on multi-location meetings (published August 2021) and to be reported for consideration prior to implementation in May 2022.
3. That Cabinet notes and approves that when further specific guidance is received having regard to Welsh Government's social distancing measures, and the implementation of Section 46 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 in May 2022 further consideration will be given to which Council meetings will be broadcast, and held on a physical basis, remote means or both and a further report will be submitted to Cabinet on the matter.
4. In light of the Council's proposals relating to Project Zero and Climate Emergency declaration Cabinet is requested to consider that all agendas and reports be provided by electronic means only from 1st January 2022 unless specific requests are made to the Head of Democratic Services for hard copies.

Reasons for Recommendations

1. Having regard to the contents of the report.
2. Having regard to the Welsh Government interim guidance on multi-location meetings (published August 2021).
3. Having regard to Section 46 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 to be implemented in May 2022, and Welsh Government social distancing measures.
4. Having regard to the Council's proposals in respect of Project Zero and its Climate Emergency declaration.

1. Background

- 1.1 Under the Coronavirus Act 2020, the Welsh Ministers issued regulations (The Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Meetings) (Wales) Regulations 2020, 'the 2020 Meeting Regulations') which temporarily relaxed the rules for Local Authority meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2020 Meeting Regulations were intended to enable Councils to safely continue to discharge their functions during the pandemic, whilst adhering to public health restrictions and guidance.
- 1.2 The provisions of the 2020 Meeting Regulations ended on 30th April, 2021 and were replaced by new provisions for Local Authority meetings made under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 (LG&E (Wales) Act 2021), some of which were to take effect from 1st May, 2021 and others May 2022.

Council Meeting Arrangements Prior to the COVID 19 Pandemic

- 1.3** Prior to the pandemic Council meetings were held 'in person' in the Civic Offices. Some of these were webcast from the Council Chamber, such as Planning Committee and Full Council on a regular basis, via the solution of the Council's webcast provider CIVICO. Some Scrutiny Committee meetings were also webcast where a matter of significant public interest was to be considered. The webcasts were broadcast live via the internet. Members of the public were and have continued to be able to register to speak at meetings where procedures allow, examples being Planning Committee and Scrutiny Committees. At scheduled Full Council meetings members of the public are able to submit questions for a response from the relevant Cabinet Member. All minutes were and continue to be uploaded to the website as soon as possible after the meetings save for the exception of Cabinet minutes which are subject to the Council's call-in procedure (paragraph 7.24 of Section 7 of the Council Constitution). Minutes are normally processed within two working days of the Cabinet meeting taking place.

During Covid 19

- 1.4** In March 2020 the Council's calendar of meetings was suspended as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic with the Managing Director's Use of Emergency Powers (EP) procedure being amended to ensure the decision-making arm of the Authority was maintained. All the EPs approved under the Coronavirus EPs were uploaded to the Council's website for information.
- 1.5** From July 2020 some meetings of the Council, including Cabinet, Planning Committee, Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee and a Licensing Sub-Committee took place on a virtual basis and were again recorded for uploading to the Council's website (in line with WG Coronavirus Regulations).
- 1.6** Procedures for virtual Council meetings were also approved under the use of the Managing Director's Coronavirus EPs and published on the Council's website.
- 1.7** From September 2020 the Council's Calendar of Meetings was re-instated with all meetings being undertaken on a virtual basis and recorded for uploading to the Council's website. The Council also reverted back to the procedure for the Use of the Managing Director's EPs as contained within the Council's Constitution.
- 1.8** At this time the Microsoft TEAMS software application utilised by the Council internally for business did not have a "dial-in" facility to allow for Elected Members and / or Members of the public to dial into a Council meeting as required under the WG Coronavirus Regulations 2020. Democratic Services therefore purchased 'Go To Meeting' and 'Go To Webinar' software licences which provided this functionality at this time.
- 1.9** Towards the end of 2020 a dial-in function became available to the Council in the TEAMS software application with the Council using this software for Council meetings from then onwards.
- 1.10** As at 1st May 2021 Section 47 of the LG&E (Wales) Act 2021 required that all Local Authorities must make and publish arrangements for the purpose of

ensuring that meetings are able to be held by means of any equipment or other facility which enables persons who are not in the same place to attend the meetings.

- 1.11** Under the use of the Managing Director's EPs the Council from 1st May 2021 published its arrangements for Attendance at Local Authority Meetings and agreed at the same time that all meetings would be live-streamed going forward.
- 1.12** As a result of the decision to live-stream all meetings and to continue to hold meetings on a virtual basis, (having regard to COVID 19 restrictions and Welsh Government guidance), the meetings were and continue to be undertaken in TEAMS with the use of OBS software via a media server uploaded through YouTube to allow live-streaming on the website. Links to the live-streams are also made available on the Council's website for the public to view (save for where confidential matters are discussed).
- 1.13** Resourcing live streaming via this method has been and continues to be staff resource intensive.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

- 2.1** In August 2021 Interim Statutory guidance on multi-location meetings was received from Welsh Government (<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-08/interim-statutory-guidance-on-multi-location-meetings.pdf>). The draft statutory guidance indicates that the overall purpose of the new legislation is to give Authorities powers and freedoms to convene meetings in a way which achieves greater accessibility and improved public participation in local government.
- 2.2** The draft 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 sets the framework within which authorities must consider options and decide the meeting arrangements which best suit the Authority and the communities it serves. The draft guidance also confirms that the meeting arrangements should be incorporated into the procedure rules set out in the Council Constitution.
- 2.3** It is the intention that the Council's current procedure for attendance at Local Authority meetings (Section 47 of the Act refers) be reviewed in light of this guidance and a policy developed and reported to Full Council prior to May 2022.
- 2.4** Although the Council agreed to live stream its Council meetings from 1st May 2021 there was no legal requirement at that time to do so. Section 46 of the LG&E (Wales) Act 2021 for the broadcasting of meetings by a Principal Council does not come into force until May 2022. Section 46 however will require that a Principal Council must make and publish arrangements for the purpose of ensuring that Council meetings open to the public are broadcast electronically to ensure that members of the public not in attendance at a meeting can both see and hear the proceedings.

- 2.5** The Act also requires proceedings to be broadcast from 5th May 2022 (Section 46 (2) (b) refers) as they take place subject to any specified exceptions.
- 2.6** Further guidance regarding the meetings that are to be required to be broadcast is awaited, however it is anticipated that there will also be some local choice.
- 2.7** Notwithstanding the fact that the Council continues to hold its meetings on a virtual basis, a facility is required under the LG&E (Wales) Act 2021 to enable persons who are not in the same place to attend a meeting, this is commonly known as a hybrid meeting. The TEAMS software does not currently provide this facility for hybrid meetings to be undertaken within the building with the use of microphones in the Chamber and be live streamed at the same time. TEAMS also does not have a Welsh Language facility at present.
- 2.8** The Council's current provider for webcasting, CIVICO, has developed an application that provides a hybrid solution, (this being a meeting held in the Civic Offices with Members attending remotely at another location) and which can upload meetings live to the web and provide a recording for archive purposes. The solution can also be used on a remote / virtual only basis. The solution will be less staff resource intensive for Democratic Services and ICT as it provides the live stream and archive facility within the system. Once a decision of the Council is made to hold hybrid meetings (should WG Coronavirus restrictions be lifted) the CIVICO application will be utilised for this purpose.
- 2.9** Currently officers within Democratic services are working with CIVICO to align the system to meet Vale of Glamorgan requirements by making some design changes. Once these alterations have been confirmed training will be provided on the system to Elected Members and officers. It is the intention that the training be undertaken as soon as possible commencing in January 2022 in order that future Council meetings can be arranged using the solution. An implementation schedule has been prepared and is attached at Appendix 1 to this report. Members will be consulted as appropriate and provided with user guidance and support from the Democratic Team and the solution provider CIVICO. It is also important to note that Co-opted Members, Observers on Committees and Members of the public who have registered to speak at meetings, where Council procedures allow, will also be supported through the process when such meetings are arranged.
- 2.10** The interim Statutory Guidance on Multi Location Meetings referred to in paragraph 2.1 above requires that any product or combination of products should provide for a number of elements and indicated below are the elements required and which the CIVICO application (app) can and will provide prior to the requirements for broadcasting of meetings under the LG&E (Wales) Act 2021 in May 2022:
- Electronic broadcast of meetings – CIVICO App
 - Participants being able to speak, be heard and be seen – CIVICO App (8 people will be able to be seen on screen at any one time)
 - Ability for participants to be named/labelled so that others can easily identify them - CIVICO App

- The ability for participants and observers to be able to join via mobile, or tablet, without losing significant functionality - CIVICO App
- The ability to provide for simultaneous translation. Relevant Authorities should ensure that they use a meeting platform which provides for simultaneous translation and that Members are comfortable with its use. Principal Councils will need to decide whether to broadcast a feed in English, in Welsh, or in both – this is covered in more detail in separate guidance on broadcasting – Currently being developed in CIVICO App deadline date 6th December 2021
- The ability to both record and broadcast the meeting and for participants and observers to know when recording and broadcasting is taking place - CIVICO App and to be uploaded to the Council’s website
- The ability to caption or subtitle, either live (which may be partially or fully automated) or through editing after the meeting has taken place - CIVICO App
- A “chat” facility, visible only to meeting participants, and which can be turned off by the meeting organiser if necessary - CIVICO App
- Sufficient security measures to ensure that the meeting cannot be accessed by unauthorised persons, and to ensure that unauthorised persons can be ejected from the meeting where necessary - CIVICO App
- A user interface which is intuitive and easily understood - CIVICO App
- Details of where and how meetings will be broadcast – on Council’s website
- Provision of electronic voting – CIVICO App

Implementation Plan for CIVICO App

2.11 A procurement exercise has been undertaken with the awarding of a contract to CIVICO 2021 to provide a hybrid and or a virtual service for the Council. Relevant training session plans and materials will be provided by CIVICO with all Members and officers who support meetings to receive training on the CIVICO App. Democratic Services and ICT Officers will provide the training, with CIVICO in attendance for some of the sessions. It is intended that sessions will take place during January, February and March 2022 for Members of the Council, Co-opted members and observers with the aim of using the solution before the end of the current municipal year to build Members’ experience of hybrid working. Training to take place on a grouped and/or individual basis as required – see draft roll-out programme at Appendix 1. The Request for Quotation Procedure via Sell2Wales was used with the contract being awarded utilising the Managing Director’s EPs as reported previously to Cabinet on 25th October 2021.

Considerations Going Forward

2.12 The Council will need to consider from May 2022 under the LG&E (Wales) Act 2021 which meetings it intends broadcasting and the meetings which will be undertaken on either a hybrid basis, entirely physical and / or entirely remote

basis. With regard to the broadcasting of meetings, further statutory guidance is awaited. The interim statutory guidance outlined in paragraph 2.1 above also advises that the exact content of a multi-location policy should be agreed at local level with Councils deciding which meetings will have physical provision made for them and which will be conducted wholly through remote means. There is no requirement for each meeting to be held in the same way every time it meets. For example, a Council could decide to hold some Full Council meetings entirely remotely and others as multi-location meetings. However, the guidance does state that "it is worth reiterating that relevant authorities will not be able to require that all participants attend physically and that a Multi-Locations Meeting Policy details such arrangements".

- 2.13** In light of the Interim Statutory Guidance requirements, it is recommended that the Council's Remote attendance at meetings procedure be reviewed with the intention of a Policy being presented and reported for consideration to Cabinet and for approval by Full Council for inclusion into the Council's Constitution by May 2022 in line with Welsh Government coronavirus restrictions.
- 2.14** The Council should also consider in light of Project Zero and its Climate Emergency declaration that all agendas and reports be only provided electronically as soon as possible and certainly by 1st May 2022. Section 19 of Part 1 of schedule 4 of the LG&E Act states that every Member of the council must be sent an electronic agenda and each member must specify an electronic address for that purpose. Although Member's by request can ask for a hard copy of the papers it is envisaged that in light of the above, it is recommended that agendas are sent electronically only unless specific requests are made for hard copies.
- 2.15** For Members' information, officers are continuing to work through the LG&E Act action plan, which has previously been reported to the Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee Scrutiny and Cabinet. Updates are referenced in the Background Papers to this report.
- 2.16** The All Wales Monitoring Officers' Working Group has also commissioned a piece of work to develop a Model Constitution and Constitution Guide (in line with provisions set out within section 45 of the LG&E Act 2021 which is again currently being worked through internally by officers with the intention to report to Full Council for consideration and approval prior to May 2022.

Public Engagement

- 2.17** By way of a further update to Members following the Audit Wales review report on improvements to Scrutiny, an Action Plan was developed with progress reported to the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group on a regular basis. A final report was presented to Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet in April/May 2021. The link to this report can be found at <https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/Documents/Committee%20Reports/Cabinet/2021/21-05-12/Ref-from-CPR-Audit-Wales.pdf>
- 2.18** It has been agreed that the initiatives developed as a result of the Action Plan be embedded as business as usual within the Service Area.

- 2.19** Prior to and during the pandemic the public continued to have the opportunity to engage in some Council meetings, where procedures allow, via a registering to speak process or via the provision of written representations as agreed within the Council's Constitution, save for meetings where confidential matters are discussed.
- 2.20** The use of virtual meetings and live streaming has also continued to facilitate public engagement and Democratic Services have provided support to members of the public to facilitate this engagement. Links to live streams of meetings and archive recordings are available on the Council's website for Members of the public to view and the links to the recordings are also made available in minutes of meetings, save for meetings where confidential matters are discussed. Registering to speak procedures for Planning Committee and Scrutiny Committees continue to be in place and the public also continue to have the opportunity to raise questions at Full Council.
- 2.21** The Scrutiny web pages will also be revised to allow for greater public participation in meetings and will continue to be reviewed as and when required which include comments forms and requests for items to be considered by Scrutiny Committees by Members of the Public. Other initiatives approved by the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group are also being developed by the Democratic Services Team.
- 2.22** Statistics to date, for meetings viewed, are available and will continue to be reported to the Democratic Services Committee, Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group and any other Committee as deemed appropriate. The latest report having been reported to Democratic Services Committee on 12th July, 2021.
- 2.23** To further facilitate public engagement, the Council's Facebook and Twitter pages are highlighting upcoming meetings and items of interest for the public's information.
- 2.24** The Council has also pivoted much of its public engagement work to online forums. High profile engagement exercises, such as Project Zero, included interactive webinar sessions which were open to the public via Zoom. In many instances these proved more popular than traditional face to face drop-in sessions. The Communications Team has also increased its use of online polls during its consultation and engagement work. All exercises would have previously included an online survey element but social media polls have been utilised in 2020/21 to offer residents more informal opportunities to have their say which again have proved very popular.
- 2.25** The provisions under sections 39 -41 of the LG&E (Wales) Act 2021 require a Local Authority to publish and prepare a Public Participation Strategy by May 2022. This will reflect the issues highlighted in this report alongside other mechanisms for promoting public engagement. This work is being developed by the Council's Communications Team, in conjunction with the Senior Leadership Team and Democratic Services and the Communications Team with the intention to report to Full Council by May 2022.

3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?

- 3.1** This report seeks to update Cabinet and Members of the Council on progress in relation to the requirements of the LG&E (Wales) Act 2021. The matters raised in this report will contribute to the achievement of the Council's well-being objectives, in particular commitments to enhance public participation and engagement, to support elected members, the use of digital technology and work to tackle climate change. The proposals as set out in the report demonstrate the Council's consideration of the five ways of working, with a particular emphasis on involvement, collaboration and thinking to the longer-term.

4. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

- 4.1** The work by officers in undertaking the requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 as detailed in this report will be met from existing resources.
- 4.2** The costs associated with the development of the Model Constitution and guide commissioned by the Monitoring Officers' Group have been met by the WLGA.

Employment

- 4.3** None directly applicable to this report given that the report seeks to update Cabinet.

Legal (Including Equalities)

- 4.4** The Council is required to undertake the provisions as outlined within the legislation.

5. Background Papers

Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021

https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/Documents/_Committee%20Reports/Scrutiny-CRP/2021/21-01-20/Ref-from-Cab-Local-Government-and-Election-Wales-Bill-Update.pdf

CIVICO Hybrid Meeting Solution Implementation Schedule
Elected Member & Officer Training Schedule

Week 1	Monday 3rd January	<i>BANK HOLIDAY</i>
	Tuesday 4th January	DSSO Admin Refresher 1-2-1 Sessions with Amy Rudman
	Wednesday 5th January	Notification Email to Members and Officers from Rob Thomas/Leader/Jeff Rees.
	Thursday 6th January	
	Friday 7th January	

Democratic Services Officers will be in touch with Members and Officers of their respective Committees to arrange training for the dates identified below.

Week 2	Monday 10th January	Preparations for App Log-in Orientation & Mock Meetings (Members & Officers)
	Tuesday 11th January	Preparations for App Log-in Orientation & Mock Meetings (Members & Officers)
	Wednesday 12th January	Preparations for App Log-in Orientation & Mock Meetings (Members & Officers)
	Thursday 13th January	Preparations for App Log-in Orientation & Mock Meetings (Members & Officers)
	Friday 14th January	Preparations for App Log-in Orientation & Mock Meetings (Members & Officers)

Week 3	Monday 17th January	Preparations for App Log-in Orientation & Mock Meetings (Members & Officers)
	Tuesday 18th January	Preparations for App Log-in Orientation & Mock Meetings (Members & Officers)
	Wednesday 19th January	Preparations for App Log-in Orientation & Mock Meetings (Members & Officers)
	Thursday 20th January	Preparations for App Log-in Orientation & Mock Meetings (Members & Officers)
	Friday 21st January	Preparations for App Log-in Orientation & Mock Meetings (Members & Officers)

Week 4	Monday 24th January	Mock Meetings Held / Technical Issues Resolved
	Tuesday 25th January	Mock Meetings Held / Technical Issues Resolved
	Wednesday 26th January	Mock Meetings Held / Technical Issues Resolved
	Thursday 27th January	Mock Meetings Held / Technical Issues Resolved
	Friday 28th January	Mock Meetings Held / Technical Issues Resolved

Week 5	Wednesday 2nd February	Mock Meetings Held / Technical Issues Resolved
	Thursday 3rd February	Mock Meetings Held / Technical Issues Resolved
	Friday 4th February	Mock Meetings Held / Technical Issues Resolved

Week 6	Monday 7th February	Mock Meetings Held / Technical Issues Resolved
	Tuesday 8th February	Mock Meetings Held / Technical Issues Resolved
	Wednesday 9th February	Mock Meetings Held / Technical Issues Resolved
	Thursday 10th February	Mock Meetings Held / Technical Issues Resolved
	Friday 11th February	Mock Meetings Held / Technical Issues Resolved

Week 7	Monday 14th February	Mock Meetings Held / Technical Issues Resolved
	Tuesday 15th February	Mock Meetings Held / Technical Issues Resolved
	Wednesday 16th February	Mock Meetings Held / Technical Issues Resolved
	Thursday 17th February	Mock Meetings Held / Technical Issues Resolved
	Friday 18th February	Mock Meetings Held / Technical Issues Resolved

Week 8	Monday 21st February	Mop-Up Week 1
	Tuesday 22nd February	
	Wednesday 23rd February	
	Thursday 24th February	
	Friday 25th February	

Week 9	Monday 28th February	Mop-Up Week 2 and further opportunities for any further training to take place
	Tuesday 1st March	
	Wednesday 2nd March	
	Thursday 3rd March	
	Friday 4th March	