



## **THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL**

### **CABINET REMOTE MEETING PROCEDURE**

**This Procedure has been issued in response to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the Coronavirus Act 2020 (“the Act”) and the Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Meetings) (Wales) Regulations (as amended) 2020 (“the Regulations”). The Procedure applies to Cabinet Meetings. The content is based on guidance issued by the Welsh Government.**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Meetings) (Wales) Regulations 2020**

On 21 April, 2020, Julie James, Minister for Housing and Local Government issued guidance concerning the expected impact of the Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Meetings) (Wales) Regulations 2020. The Regulations came into force on 22 April, 2020 and made temporary provision in relation to Local Authority meetings and for public and press access to these meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The measures employed to combat COVID-19 include social distancing and the requirement to work from home where possible. Prior to the Regulations there were requirements on local authorities to meet in person in specified offices, to make many meetings open to the public and to enable the public to inspect documents related to the meetings, in some cases, in the offices of Local Authorities. This clearly was counter to the measures being put in place for tackling COVID-19.

The Regulations provide flexibility to enable Local Authorities to operate safely, effectively and lawfully, while retaining the principles of openness and accountability to the public by, for example, enabling meetings to be conducted on the basis of full or partial remote attendance and by making provision about the electronic publishing of certain documents (with regard to proceedings at the virtual meeting the Council's Constitution at Section 5 will still apply subject to the Act and Regulations taking precedence).

Councils can therefore hold official meetings virtually, with Members dialling in to teleconferences or participating via video conferencing.

The following changes within the Regulations specifically applicable to Cabinet meetings are:

- The Regulations are directly applicable – where the Council's Constitution is contrary to the Act and the Regulations, the Act and the Regulations take precedence .
- Any existing reference to the need to publish documents, notices, summons etc. may be interpreted as meaning via electronic means (website) only.
- As a minimum, Members attending a Remote Meeting must be able to hear and be heard.
- Public access to documents, agendas etc. is electronic (the existing timelines still apply), and the requirement to give access to meetings is suspended up until 30 April 2021.

Paragraph 5.8.3 of the Council's Constitution refers in part to the Cabinet meeting being held at the Council's main offices or another location to be agreed by the Leader; in line with this procedure such meetings will be held electronically either by video conferencing or by telephone. Although the new regulations will allow greater flexibility around managing Council business, Members need to be aware that the Council's resources and staff have been refocused and reprioritised to respond to the Coronavirus pandemic. Members should therefore bear in mind that meetings are only likely to be held to take decisions on urgent and business critical issues until the

pandemic subsidies. Research and reports will be limited and will have to be prioritised according to business need.

Members will be aware of the current use of the Managing Director's Emergency Powers exercised during the COVID-19 pandemic, as detailed in the Constitution, to deal with the ongoing emergency situation. Details for the use of Emergency Powers are currently being reported every two weeks and are available on the Vale of Glamorgan website.

## **MEMBERSHIP OF CABINET**

The Cabinet of the Vale of Glamorgan Council consists of 7 Members as outlined below.

Councillor Neil Moore (Executive Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources)

Councillor Lis Burnett (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration)

Councillor Mrs. M.R. Wilkinson (Cabinet Member for Housing and Building Services)

Councillor E. Williams (Cabinet Member for Legal, Regulatory and Planning Services)

Councillor K.F. McCaffer (Cabinet Member for Leisure, Arts and Culture)

Councillor P.G. King (Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Services and Transport)

Councillor B.T. Gray (Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health)

## **OTHER OFFICERS ATTENDING THE MEETING**

The Officers who usually support Cabinet meetings are:

- Rob Thomas, Managing Director – (01446) 709202  
[DRThomas@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk](mailto:DRThomas@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk)
- Miles Punter – Director of Environment & Housing Services (029) 20673101  
[MEPunter@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk](mailto:MEPunter@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk)
- Paula Ham – Director of Learning and Skills (01446) 709161  
[pham@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk](mailto:pham@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk)
- Lance Carver – Director of Social Services (01446) 704678  
[lcarver@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk](mailto:lcarver@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk)
- Debbie Marles – Monitoring Officer/Head of Legal and Democratic Services (01446) 709402  
[DMarles@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk](mailto:DMarles@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk)
- Carys Lord – Head of Finance / Section 151 Officer (01446) 709254  
[CLLord@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk](mailto:CLLord@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk)
- Tracy Dickinson – Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development (01446) 709357  
[tdickinson@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk](mailto:tdickinson@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk)
- Marcus Goldsworthy – Head of Regeneration and Planning (01446) 704630  
[MJGoldsworthy@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk](mailto:MJGoldsworthy@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk)
- Matthew Swindell – Cabinet and Committee Services Officer (01446) 709479  
[mlswindell@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk](mailto:mlswindell@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk)

In some circumstances, additional officers will attend Cabinet meetings where there are specific technical requirements or explanations required in support of certain Cabinet reports.

## **PREPARATION FOR THE MEETING**

Please note that the (Coronavirus) (Meetings) (Wales) Regulations 2020 do not affect the quorum for a meeting of the Executive, or a Committee of it, which shall remain as three (as stated in Paragraph 5.8.5 of the Vale of Glamorgan Council Constitution).

Where a Cabinet meeting is called, Cabinet Members must ensure that:

- All Cabinet Members can fully present their reports;
- Each person participating is able to hear and be heard by means of video link or telephone.

Prior to the meeting, an officer from Democratic Services will contact all meeting attendees to ensure;

- That as a minimum, they have the facility to join the meeting by telephone.
- They are able to participate in a virtual meeting by telephone and video conference, if available.

Prior to the meeting, all attendees will receive details of the platform to be used and receive technical guidance on how to access and participate in the meeting.

## **NOTICE OF THE MEETING**

Public access to documents, agendas etc. will be electronic (the existing timelines of at least three clear days' notice of any meeting still apply), and the requirement to give access to meetings is also suspended until 30 April 2021.

Agendas and reports for the meetings will usually be despatched within five working days, prior to the meeting. The agenda / notice of meeting will also be uploaded to the Vale of Glamorgan website at the same time, where possible.

Ahead of the day of the meeting, the Cabinet Officer will contact all Cabinet Members and relevant Officers via email to provide a hyperlink and / or telephone number to be used to access a videoconference meeting at a date and time previously specified in the Notice of Meeting / Agenda.

Prior to the meeting, all attendees will receive the necessary telephone number, hyperlink and relevant password to enable access to the remote platform.

All attendees are advised that the virtual meeting will be recorded and where possible, may be uploaded to the Vale of Glamorgan Council website.

The agenda contents list which are subject to Access to Information legislation are translated into Welsh.

## **DAY OF THE MEETING**

On the day of the virtual meeting, all attendees will be asked to be ready with their connection device 15 minutes before the allocated meeting start time to ensure there are no issues with connectivity.

In the event of the existence of technical issues where a live broadcast of any meeting is not possible, the meeting will be recorded via the appropriate meeting programme facility and uploaded to the Council website following the meeting.

## **ADVICE TO ALL PARTICIPANTS**

### **Device**

- Before the date of the meeting, please check whether your device is fully compatible with the system to be used for the meeting.
- If multiple devices are available to you (such as a phone and a laptop), we recommend using the device with the biggest screen, as this will be the one that most likely gives you an option to see all participants, rather than being restricted to only viewing the participant who is currently speaking.
- Take some time before the date of the meeting to familiarise yourself with where the microphone and headphone plug-in is on your device, as knowing where to find these will be helpful if you are required to speak more loudly and / or hear more clearly. The best audio quality will likely be achieved by plugging a separate microphone into the device – most modern headphone sets include a microphone.
- Make sure before the meeting starts that your equipment is fully charged or has the capacity to charge without impeding your audio / visual settings while the meeting is ongoing. Keeping your device plugged in to a power source if possible as this will give you confidence that the battery will last for the duration of the meeting.

### **Room setting and position**

- Please take some time to consider where you'll be able to make yourself comfortable so that you can focus on the discussion at hand.
- If participating with video, where possible it is best to try and find a space with a plain background. Other participants may find it distracting to see photos or shelves full of books or ornaments in the background. Also consider lighting – if a light source is behind you in the shot your face will likely end up looking darker on screen. Equally, too strong a light in front of you might have a 'bleaching' effect. Most devices will allow you to access your camera ahead of the meeting so you can identify where best to position yourself.
- If participating with video, aim to position your device appropriately so that your head and shoulders are in the shot (similar to a passport photo).
- Know how to announce your presence by turning your microphone on and off again.
- Make sure that you can easily view any necessary documentation. Please ensure that you can access both the meeting and related paperwork that will have been made available to you electronically prior to the meeting.

- If referring to a document during the meeting, please be specific regarding which Appendix it is in as well as the page number and please allow time for others to locate the same document.
- Have a pen and paper ready to use. Conversation won't flow as naturally as it would with people in the room together, and the Chairman will be moderating the order in which participants speak. You may therefore find it helpful to take notes of any points you would like to make so you can refer back to them when it is your turn to speak.
- Before the meeting starts, please ensure that any other nearby electronic devices are set to silent, or mute notifications on the device you're using. If you experience interference during the call, this could be caused by other devices nearby so you may want to turn off any other devices or remove them from the same room as you.

## **Speaking**

- If you are not speaking, please mute your microphone. This will help to reduce the level of disruptive and distracting background noise and assist all participants in meeting one another as clearly as possible.
- If you wish to speak, please indicate this via the instructions sent to you for the remote platform and wait until the Chair asks you to speak.
- When speaking, don't shout. The Cabinet Officer will advise if a participant's volume of speech is too low; it will usually require participants to either move closer to the microphone or to adjust the microphone / volume settings.
- Please try and remember that not all participants will have the same visual access to the meeting. There will be an option to dial in on a telephone call rather than use a screen, as not all participants will have access to a camera. It's therefore important that all participants communicate as much as possible verbally, as not everyone will be able to see gestures or facial expressions. The Cabinet Officer will confirm at the start of the meeting which participants have screen access and whether any aren't visible on camera.
- If the connection becomes too slow or disruptive to the meeting, the Cabinet Officer will ask all participants to turn their cameras off for a short amount of time to allow time. If this problem recurs, the Cabinet Officer may ask all participants to turn their cameras off, and only turn them on when it is their turn to speak.
- Should participants become disconnected from the meeting, the Cabinet Officer will ask for a short recess to give those who are disconnected a fair amount of time to be able to reconnect.
- You will receive advice on what happens if there are connection problems to the meeting.

## THE CHAIR

- Once all participants have joined the meeting, check that all are comfortably set up and ready to participate, and have easy access to the documentation.
- Make sure all participants are aware of how the discussion will be moderated. It will be difficult to moderate the flow of the discussion completely, and it is therefore a good idea to try and keep discussion structured on a topic-by-topic basis as much as possible:
- It's a good idea to routinely check in with the Democratic Services Officers as to whether all participants are still connected and haven't been 'lost'. Should confirmation be received that a participant is having technical difficulties, the Chairman should advise all participants that a short adjournment is necessary and ask all to mute their microphones until the hearing can resume.

## **Order of meeting and procedure.**

Meetings are only likely to be held to take decisions on **urgent and business critical issues** until the pandemic subsides.

**Step 1:** We ask that you take steps to join the meeting (see technical guidance below for instructions) fifteen minutes prior to the start of the meeting, which will allow the Cabinet Officer time to assist with any difficulties if needed.

The Chairman will need to advise those participating and following the meeting (either live or pre-recorded and posted later) of the details of the meeting (date, time, function, etc.) as well as ensure that all attendees are formally introduced.

**Step 2:** Approval of the previous meeting's minutes. The Chairman will need to formally ask for minutes to be approved and for another Cabinet Member to move the item as correct, for the record.

**Step 3: "Apologies for absence"**, in the main, are known in advance as Members contact to advise they are unable to attend.

**Step 4:** All agendas will have **Declaration of Interests** as a standing item. **Members seeking advice on this item are asked to contact the Monitoring Officer at least 48 hours before the meeting**). If Members have an interest, they will need to complete the relevant form and include the nature of the interest i.e. personal / prejudicial, whether they have a dispensation from Standards Committee and whether they intend to remain or leave the meeting. If Members are unsure about anything in relation to this, advice can be sought from Democratic Services in the first instance in advance of the meeting.

**Step 5: References.** As there are no current Scrutiny meetings scheduled to take place at time of drafting, there should be no references to Cabinet. However, there may be matters forthcoming and Cabinet would consider them at this time.

**Step 6: Reports of Meetings.** Cabinet can still publicly note reports and minutes from, for example, Cardiff Capital Region City Deal, etc., but it is more likely that at this time these would be circulated to Member colleagues for information.

### **Step 7: Reports for each Cabinet Member Portfolio.**

Reports that have been determined **urgent and business critical** would then be considered under the relevant Portfolio heading. The relevant Cabinet Member would have to present the report, take and answer questions and move the report to be formally seconded by a Cabinet colleague. All decisions would be formally captured as part of the minutes of the meeting.

### **Step 8: Part II Items**

After moving into private session where confidential matters are to be discussed under Part II, the Chair and the Cabinet Officer will ensure that the broadcast / recording is closed to ensure that only relevant parties remain to hear the detail of the items to be discussed.

Following the meeting, the outcome of the Part II discussions would be formally captured as part of the minutes of the meeting, advising the public of the final decisions of the Cabinet.

**NOTES:**

**Adjournments**

The Leader/Chairman of Cabinet may adjourn the meeting where considered necessary for example, technical difficulties or if no longer quorate.

***NB – for the purposes of this procedure, references to the Cabinet Officer also include an additional Democratic Services Officer who may be assisting with the technology or other areas at the meeting.***