



## COUNCIL - 10TH JUNE 2014

**SUBJECT: REMOTE ATTENDANCE AT COUNCIL MEETINGS**

**REPORT BY: ACTING DIRECTOR CORPORATE SERVICES AND SECTION 151 OFFICER**

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### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To ask members to note the provisions of Section 4 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 and associated guidance.
- 1.2 To seek a recommendation from Council to prohibit the implementation of remote attendance at this time.
- 1.3 To seek approval to make the necessary changes to the Council's Procedure Rules and Constitution as set out in the recommendation.

### **2. SUMMARY**

- 2.1 Section 4 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 recently introduced the possibility of remote attendance at council meetings. The policy intention of this reform was to make it easier for Members with domestic or employment responsibilities and who may need to travel long distances, attend council meetings. This report recommends precluding the use of remote attendance at this time as the county borough is relatively small with good road communication links.

### **3. LINKS TO STRATEGY**

- 3.1 To ensure the Council consider the implications of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 and Statutory Guidance.

### **4. THE REPORT**

- 4.1 Remote attendance allows members to attend a council meeting without having to be present at the published meeting place. This is achieved by a form of video conferencing subject to certain limitations. In particular, any Member attending a meeting remotely must, when speaking, be able to be seen and heard by those Members in actual attendance. In addition, members of the public taking part in a committee meeting must be able to be seen and heard by the remote attendees and visa versa. Finally, if remote attendees are at more than one remote location, all the members attending remotely must be able to at least hear the other remote attendees.
- 4.2 In practice, the remote attendance requirements are very specific and will be technically difficult to achieve. The Welsh Government acknowledges that there are technical and staffing implications associated with the implementation of remote attendance as Members could attend remotely from a council office or any other location with the correct IT equipment

and sufficient broadband connection.

- 4.3 Remote attendance may be of particular interest to large rural local authorities such as Ceredigion and Powys where Members are required to travel long distances to attend council meetings. For geographically large authorities, remote attendance will allow a significant reduction in travel time and expenses for Members and, in the longer term, may encourage under represented groups to consider standing as a councillor.
- 4.4 That said, councils such as Caerphilly County Borough Council, do not have significant geographical challenges. Indeed, the county borough has good road and rail links and Members are able to travel to Penallta House or Pontllanfraith House within a reasonable time regardless of their home address. Therefore, the benefits associated with remote attendance would not be realisable.
- 4.5 There is currently no known demand for remote attendance by members of the Council.
- 4.6 The final Statutory Guidance from Welsh Government (a copy of which is attached at Appendix 1) provides that "meetings can only take place remotely if not prohibited by the local authority's standing orders/rules of procedure". It is therefore up to each local authority to decide whether it wishes to make remote attendance available.
- 4.7 Despite the fact that there is a recommendation from officers that Council prohibits the implementation of remote attendance at this time, the legislation requires that the Council make an amendment to its Procedural Rules affecting quorum in so far as it relates to remote attendance.
- 4.8 Members are asked to note that the proposed amendment set out in recommendation 9.3 below will have no practical effect unless the Council decides at some time in the future to provide facilities for remote attendance. In the event of that decision being made further amendment to the Constitution would be required.

## **5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The principles of remote attendance fit well with equalities requirements by allowing elected members, who may fall under one or more of the protected characteristics, greater access to meetings, as noted in section 4 above.
- 5.2 Due to the relatively small geographical area of the county borough however, along with good transport links, the overall accessibility of council offices, and with a very high attendance level of members in any case, realising improvement in terms of equalities implications for this Council will not be so great as it would be for some other councils in Wales

## **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 There are no financial implications arising out of this report.

## **7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 There are no personnel implications arising out of this report.

## **8. CONSULTATIONS**

- 8.1 The Democratic Services Committee considered this report on 28th May 2014. The Committee endorsed the reports' recommendations.

8.2 There are no other consultation responses not reflected in this report.

## **9. RECOMMENDATIONS**

9.1 That members note the provisions of Section 4 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 and associated guidance.

9.2 That members prohibit the implementation of remote attendance at this time.

9.3 In accordance with the requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 and associated guidance relating to remote attendance to amend the Council's Constitution and Rules of Procedure to confirm that there is no quorum for a meeting of the Authority at any time when the number of members in actual attendance constitutes less than 30% of the total number of members in attendance at the meeting.

9.4 That the Interim Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer be given delegated authority to make the necessary changes to the Council's Constitution

## **10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

10.1 To ensure the Council consider the implications of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011.

## **11. STATUTORY POWER**

11.1 The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 and associated guidance.

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Appendices:  
Appendix 1 Welsh Government Statutory Guidance made under Section 4 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011