CYNGOR SIR *POWYS* COUNTY COUNCIL.

County Council
18 May 2023

Report Author:	**Cllr James Gibson-Watt**
	Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for an Open and Transparent Council
SUBJECT:	**Ways of Working – Member meetings**
Report For:	**Decision**

1. Purpose

1.1. The purpose of the report is to consider a new working model for all Members attending council meetings.

2. Background

2.1. At the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic (March 2020) the whole organisation transitioned to working from home, in May 2021, the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 was enacted, requiring local authorities to allow members the flexibility to participate in meetings remotely.

2.2. Powys is a large county, covering a quarter of Wales' landmass, with the most sparsely populated population (26 people per square km) in England and Wales. The county is vast, stretching 100 miles from Llanfyllin in the north to Ystradgynlais down in the south (90-minute car journey). For many members, the journey to County Hall in Llandrindod Wells is a long, often using poor road networks as public transport is limited (*please see **Appendix A** for detail).*

2.3. Several surveys have been conducted over the past few years in relation to understanding how members perceive working from home. When asked what the organisation could put in place to create a good flexible working situation the following were identified:

- Blend of face-to-face and online meetings, sessions, and training
- Informal get togethers online or in-person
- Bigger and separate screen to work on
- Better and more reliable broadband

Respondents also noted some benefits to working from home:

- less/no travel
- a better work-life balance
- having time to undertake other things such as constituency work, more time with family
- work / Councillor balance - ability for working Councillors to balance their Councillor responsibilities with those as an employee and attend Council meetings easier and then return to work

2.4. Following the Council elections in 2022 the number of members has reduced from 73 to 68 due to changes in the electoral boundaries.

3. **Advice**

3.1. The table below provides an overview of current member meetings, in terms of the:

- number of members attending each meeting
- number of officers invited to attend each meeting (to present topics)
- frequency of meetings and the format used.

3.2. Council meetings currently take place in one of three ways: -

- face to Face – all participants in the same room
- online – all participants connecting remotely
- hybrid – 30% of participants being face to face in a room and others connecting remotely

Member meetings	No of Members attending	No of Officers attending	Frequency	Format
Full Council	68	9 – 15	7 meetings p.a.	Hybrid
Cabinet	11 - 14	8 – 15	26 / 29 meetings p.a.	Hybrid
Planning Committee **	21 - 26	9 – 15	16 / 17 meetings p.a.	Hybrid
Finance Panel	11	3 – 7	Monthly	Online
Democratic	14	3 – 5	Quarterly	Online
Licensing **	14	1 – 2	Usually, 1 meeting p.a. sometimes up to 3	Online
Employment $$	14	4 – 6	3 / 4 meetings p.a.	Online
Pensions	7 - 8	4 – 8	5 / 8 meetings p.a.	Online
Member Development sessions	68 - 74	3 – 8	Generally, 3 sessions per month, sometimes more as required.	Online
Standards Committee / Standards Sub-Committee	12	3 – 4	3 / 4 meetings p.a.	Hybrid
Governance and Audit ££	10	6 – 15	7 meetings p.a.	Online
Scrutiny Committees x3 ££	14 - 23	8 – 14	9 meetings p.a.	Online
PSB Scrutiny Committee	8 – 10	2 – 5	Quarterly	Online

Key:
p.a = Per annum / once a year

*** Taxi-Licensing and Licensing Sub-Committees (Panel of 4 Members) will meet as and when required to consider applications - online. 3 - 4 Members and 3 Officers*
$$ Shortlisting / Appointments Sub-Committees or Appeals Sub-Committees will meet as and when required – probably face to face.
££ Working Groups will meet as and when required – online.
Standards Committee or Sub-Committee hearings – as and when required – online or hybrid / face to face. 9 Members and 3 officers plus Ombudsman.

3.3. Having analysed the costs associated with the three meeting formats, face-to-face meetings are approximately 3 times more expensive than hybrid meetings (costing £127,588 for face-to-face compared with £38,277 for hybrid), online meetings are cost negative in terms of mileage claims. Please note that member mileage claims are included in the calculation however whole costs are excluded (such as member time, officer time and expenses, property, and heating costs etc). For further detail, please see *appendix B and C.*

3.4. Some benefits to adopting a hybrid or online model are:

- a reduction in our organisational carbon footprint
- less travel time and more productive worktime
- financial savings relating to travel and subsistence costs for Members
- shorter and more focused meetings
- an increase in openness and transparency due to more meetings being broadcast publicly.

3.5. A discussion took place with Group Leaders on Thursday 6th October to identify a preferred way forward in terms of future ways of working. It was recognised that meeting face to face is particularly important during the early stages of a new administration and with many new members. However, Group Leaders also felt that we should largely see a continuation of our current working. As the term of the administration progresses, working arrangements would need to be reviewed.

3.6. This report was discussed at Democratic Services Committee on 17 February 2023. The committee felt that Full Council was best placed to decide on the preferred way forward.

4. Resource Implications

4.1. The move to hybrid meetings has already occurred and the additional costs for the software are around £20,000. There are no additional officer support costs for the hybrid meetings.

4.2. Travel savings of £45,620 have already been made and there has been a reduction in our carbon emissions. The members travel budget has been reduced by 51.8% (from £88,000 in 2019/20). Further savings of £7,000 can be achieved should the proposal be approved.

4.3 The Head of Finance (Section 151 officer) notes the content of the report and can support the recommendation.

5. Legal Implications

5.1. The Head of Legal and Monitoring Officer notes that recommendations can be supported from a legal point of view.

6. Data Protection

6.1. The proposal does not involve the processing of personal data.

7. Comment from local member(s)

7.1. As mentioned previously, a discussion took place with Group Leaders on Thursday 6th October to identify a preferred way forward in terms of future ways of working. It was

recognised that meeting face to face is particularly important during the early stages of a new administration and with many new members.

7.2. However, Group Leaders also felt that we should largely see a continuation of our current working. As the term of the administration progresses, working arrangements would need to be reviewed.

8. **Impact Assessment**

8.1. An impact assessment is not required since the current working arrangements will continue.

9. **Recommendation**

9.1. It is recommended to:

- continue with the current working arrangements.
- task Scrutiny Chair's to determine, with their committee, how they would like to work.
- that each Committee meet at least twice a year face to face.

Contact Officer:
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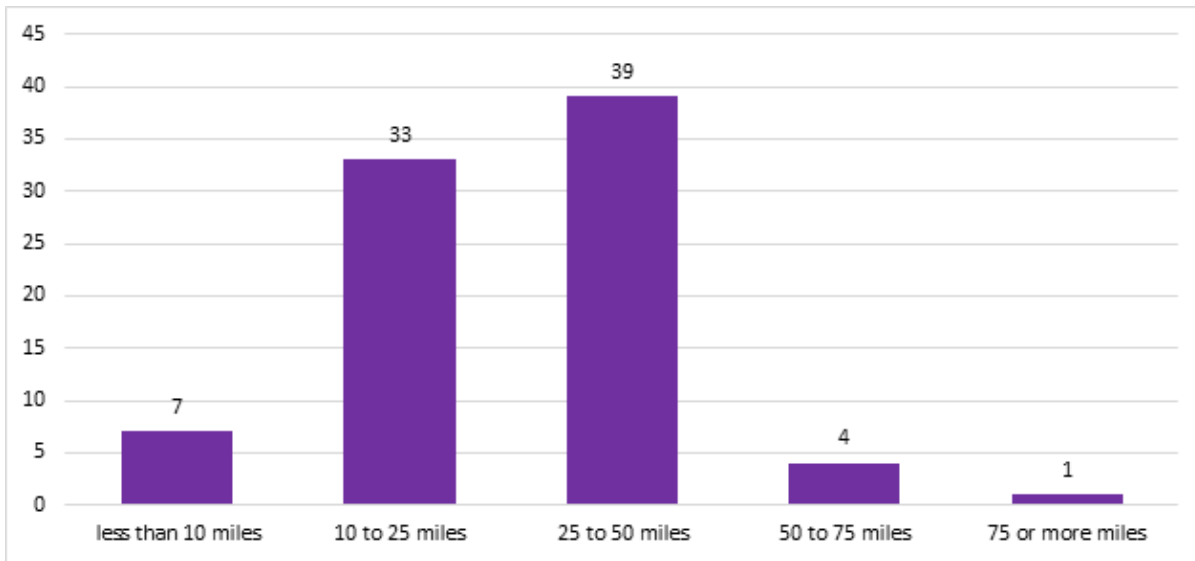Tel: 01597 826768
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Appendix A: Member distance travelled from home to County Hall (one way)

The graph below shows all members (including co-opted members, and lay members) and the number of miles travelled between home and county hall (one way):

Appendix B: Estimated Annual Mileage and Expense Calculations

The following table provides estimated mileage and claim calculations comparing face-to-face, hybrid and online meetings:

- The average journey travelled per member from home to County Hall is 57.5 miles (return trip).
- The average is calculated by the number of miles from each member's home address divided by the number of members.
- The cost per mile is 0.45 pence.
- Where the number of members attending a meeting is between two values, we have used the higher maximum attendance for the calculations.
- Hybrid – calculated using 30% of attendance in person.

Members meetings	No of Members attending	No of Officers attending	Frequency	Current Format	Per meeting Face-to-Face Meeting costs	Per meeting Hybrid meeting costs	Online costs	Annual Face-to-Face Meeting costs	Annual Hybrid meeting costs
Full Council	68	9 - 15	7 meetings p.a.	Hybrid	4,890 miles £2,201	1,467 miles £660	0 miles £0.00	34,230 miles £15,406	10,270 miles £4,622
Cabinet	11 - 14	8 - 15	26 / 29 meetings p.a.	Hybrid	805 miles £362	242 miles £109	0 miles £0.00	5,639 miles £2,537	1,692 miles £761
Planning Committee **	21 - 26	9 - 15	16 / 17 meetings p.a.	Hybrid	1,495 miles £673	449 miles £202	0 miles £0.00	25,415 miles £11,437	7,625 miles £3,431
Finance Panel	11	3 - 7	Monthly (12 p.a.)	Online	633 miles £285	190 miles £85	0 miles £0.00	7,595 miles £3,418	2,278 miles £1,025
Democratic	14	3 - 5	Quarterly (4 p.a.)	Online	806 miles £362	242 miles £109	0 miles £0.00	3,222 miles £1,450	967 miles £435
Licensing **	14	1 - 2	Usually, 1 meeting p.a. sometimes up to 3	Online	806 miles £362	242 miles £109	0 miles £0.00	2,417 miles £1,087	725 miles £326
Employment $$	14	4 - 6	3 / 4 meetings p.a.	Online	806 miles £362	242 miles £109	0 miles £0.00	3,222 miles £1,450	967 miles £435
Pensions	7 - 8	4 - 8	5 / 8 meetings p.a.	Online	460 miles £207	138 miles £62	0 miles £0.00	3,682 miles £1,657	1,105 miles £497

Member Development sessions	68 - 74	3 - 8	Generally 3 sessions per month, sometimes more	Online	4,258 miles £1,916	1,277 miles £575	0 miles £0.00	153,279 miles £68,976	45,984 miles £20,693
Standards Committee / Standards Sub-Committee	12	3 - 4	3 / 4 meetings p.a.	Hybrid	690 miles £311	207 miles £93	0 miles £0.00	2,762 miles £1,243	829 miles £373
Governance and Audit ££	10	6 - 15	7 meetings p.a.	Online	575 miles £259	173 miles £78	0 miles £0.00	4,028 miles £1,812	1,208 miles £544
Scrutiny Committees x3 ££	14 - 23	8 - 14	9 meetings p.a. per committee	Online	3,972 miles £1,788	1,191 miles £537	0 miles £0.00	35,731 miles £16,079	10,719 £4,824
PSB Scrutiny Committee	8 – 10	2 - 5	Quarterly (4 p.a.)	Online	575 miles £259	173 miles £78	0 miles £0.00	2,301 miles £1,036	690 miles £311
Total for the year							Online £0	In Person £127,588	Hybrid £38,277

Appendix C: Member Travel Budget and Travel Claims 2019/20 to 2021/22

The table below shows the members travel budget over the last four years:

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Travel budget	£88,000	£77,970	£51,350	£42,380
*Percentage reduction**		11.3%	41.6%	51.8%

*Reduction calculated from travel expenses baseline budget 2019/20

The table below shows member travel claims for 2019/20 through to 2021/22:

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Total miles claimed	189,086	1,220	1,235
Average miles per member	2,590	16	16
Total cost	£85,089	£2,710	£2,745