



**Un Llais Cymru  
One Voice Wales**

# **Community & Town Councils Digital Guidance**

## **Multi Location and Hybrid Meetings**

May 2024

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## Version History

	Date	Issuer	Reason	Review Date
V1	26/03/2024	Justin Horrell	Initial Version	26/03/25

## 1. Introduction:

The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 introduced provisions for multi-location meetings for local authorities, including Community councils. This is covered by section 47 of the Act.

The Act states that a local authority must make and publish arrangements to ensure that local authority meetings are able to be held so that; -

- persons who are not in the same place can attend meetings, and
- these persons can speak to and be heard by each other.

The Act does not require persons attending from different places to see and be seen by each other.

The Welsh Government published guidance in 2022 explaining and expanding on the provisions of the 2021 Act ([The Local Government and Elections \(Wales\) Act 2021: Statutory Guidance for Community and Town Councils | GOV.WALES](#)). The guidance notes that many councils have found that attendance at meetings, including from the public, and productivity has improved with multi-location meetings. There are also benefits in reducing travel and enabling councillors, members of the public and the press to engage more readily and more conveniently in council meetings.

The guidance notes that in practice multi-location meetings can include various situations:

- i) All participants are in the same physical location (no one has chosen to attend from another location)
- ii) All participants are in the same physical location except one individual who joins from another location e.g., by video or telephone conference.
- iii) Roughly equal number of attendees are present in a physical space and joining through remote means.
- iv) All participants join through remote means and no physical arrangements have been made.

Meetings in categories ii) and iii) where there is a mixture of attendees in a primary meeting location and others attending remotely are often referred to as “Hybrid”. These meetings present some specific challenges to ensure that all attendees have a satisfactory opportunity to contribute to the meeting on an equal basis. Some of these challenges result from the technology used whereas others can result from the way meetings are chaired or run.

## 2. Considerations when planning for the format of Multi-Location Meetings

The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 and subsequent guidance specifies that community councils need to provide for multi-location meetings such that attendees can hear and be heard. This provides for flexibility for councils.

- who may have infrastructure challenges related to their usual meeting locations.
- who choose not to invest in Video equipment to add the visual element or
- who wish to continue their customary meeting approach as far as they can while still complying with the legislation.

However, councils should also consider the overall experience of any attendees who are attending an audio-only meeting. It is generally beneficial for participants to see the faces of other attendees as this helps to

- identify who is speaking,
- understand the information and arguments they are presenting
- allow all participants to attract the attention of the chair.

There is a risk in a hybrid meeting that remote attendees who cannot see or be seen have a poorer experience than attendees in person. This is sometimes called “presence disparity”. In the context of local councils this disparity might reduce the ability of councillors to properly represent residents of their wards or districts and therefore have a negative impact on transparency and democratic health.

Councils may like to consider the balance between the risks from audio only or other restricted multi location meetings and the potential cost from investing in additional equipment, changing physical location or other mitigating actions.

### 3. Communications Platforms or Software:

Online audio and video conferencing platforms became familiar to almost everyone during the Covid pandemic in 2020 and 2021. These are the tools that facilitate real-time communication for meetings, seminars, and other interactions through the Internet.

Widely used platforms in the UK in 2024 include Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Google Meet but other platforms are available.

The choice of platform for councils will depend on several factors.

- Price and pricing model. Each of the platforms has a free version and several subscriptions tiers which add additional features or remove restrictions such as time limits on meetings. Microsoft Teams and Google Meet include a subscription as part of their respective collaboration packages (Microsoft 365 and Google Meet) though a standalone subscription is also available. Typically, a subscription is only needed to host a meeting or conference and attendees can register and attend using the free tiers.
- Features and benefits. The core features of the platforms are very similar, but each is continually being developed to include new features. An example is recording of meetings being developed to include automatic transcription and recognition of different speakers. Councils will need to assess the value of the different features to their individual needs.
- Integration with other communication and collaboration tools. All the platforms provide integration with other tools to support features such as automatic generation of meeting invites. The level of integration is greater where the conferencing platform is provided as part of a collaboration suite such as Microsoft 365 or Google Meet
- User Interface. A simple and intuitive user interface is essential for a smooth user experience. The platforms are continually improving their interface, but councils may want to select a platform for reasons of simplicity or familiarity.

Remember that there is no one-size-fits-all platform. The best platform for your needs will depend on your specific requirements and circumstances. The availability of free tiers will allow councils to evaluate different platforms without making any investment or commitment.

## 4. Equipment:

The equipment needed for the different styles of multi-location meetings varies but, in all cases, needs to consider both equipment for remote attendees and for any physical meeting room.

### Equipment for Audio-only Meetings:

#### Remote Attendees

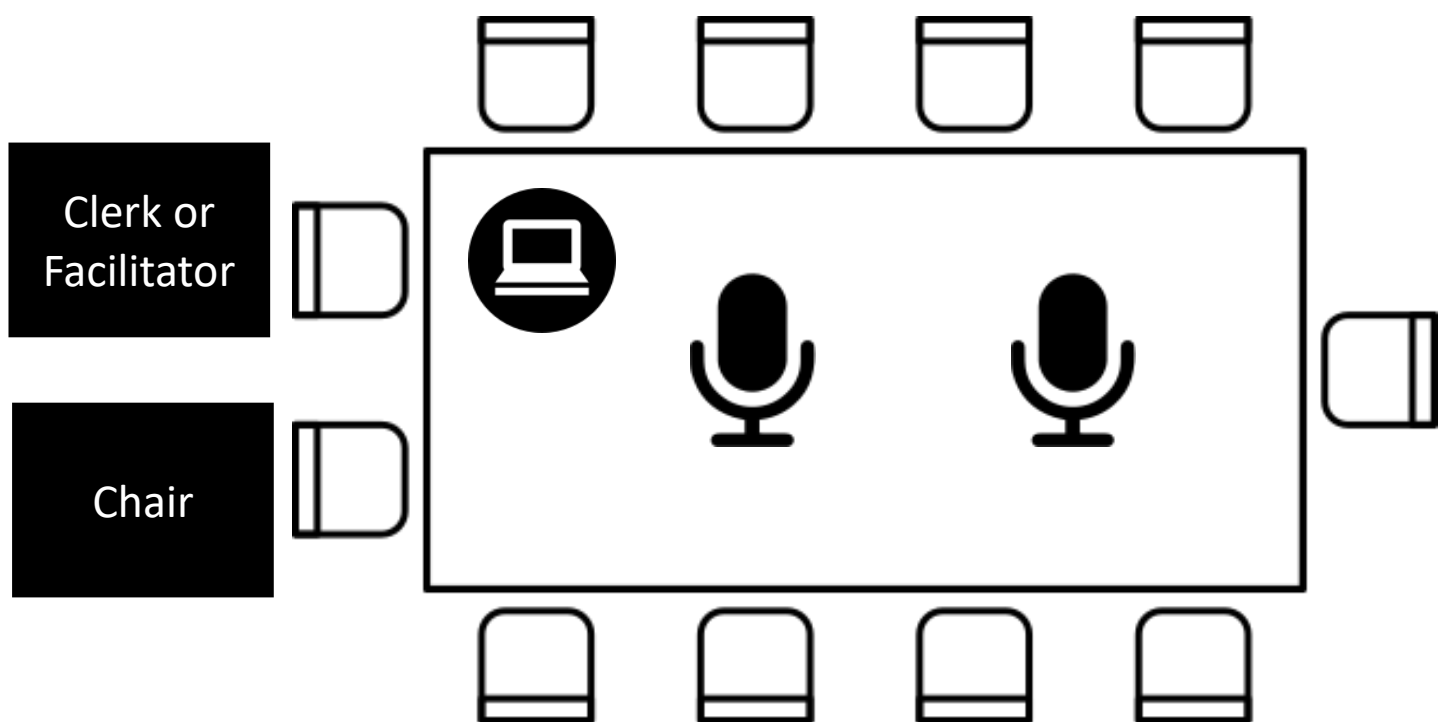
- 1 Mobile or Landline phone. It should be possible to attend meetings using only a phone connection, depending on the communications platform used to create the “bridge” for the meeting.
- 2 Internet Connection. A basic internet connection may be needed depending on the communications platform. Attending an audio-only meeting, even via an online platform, should not require high speed Internet.
- 3 Speakers/Headphones. This may allow attendees to have a much better experience in a longer meeting without needing to keep their phone in their hands for an extended period.
- 4 Microphone. A clear microphone is important in an audio-only meeting. A separate device may be needed if the speaker or headphones used doesn't have an integrated microphone of suitable quality.
- 5 Computing Device. Attendees may also like to have access to a Computing device (desktop/laptop/tablet) to allow them to review documents including any which may be distributed or updated during the meeting. This may also be a much more straightforward approach if a platform such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams or Google Meet is being used.

#### Meeting Room (if used)

- 1 Mobile or Landline phone or Computing Device. To connect to the communications platform being used.
- 2 Internet Connection. A basic Internet connection may be needed depending on the communications platform. Hosting an audio-only meeting, even via an online platform, should not require high speed Internet though it should be stable to avoid interruptions for the remote attendees.
- 3 Speakers and Microphones or a Speakerphone. The configuration needed will depend on the number of attendees in the room and the size of the room. For a larger room and, say, greater than 10 attendees then multiple microphones will be needed so everyone can be heard. For smaller rooms or fewer attendees then an integrated speakerphone should be sufficient.

4 Computing Device for clerk or facilitator. The facilitator for the meeting will benefit from a computing device to establish the call on the meeting platform and look for remote attendees who wish to contribute. Attendees may also like to have access to a computing device (desktop/laptop/tablet) to allow them to review documents including any which may be distributed or updated during the meeting and have a similar experience to remote attendees.

*Figure 1: Potential Meeting Room Layout for an audio meeting*



## Equipment for Video Meetings:

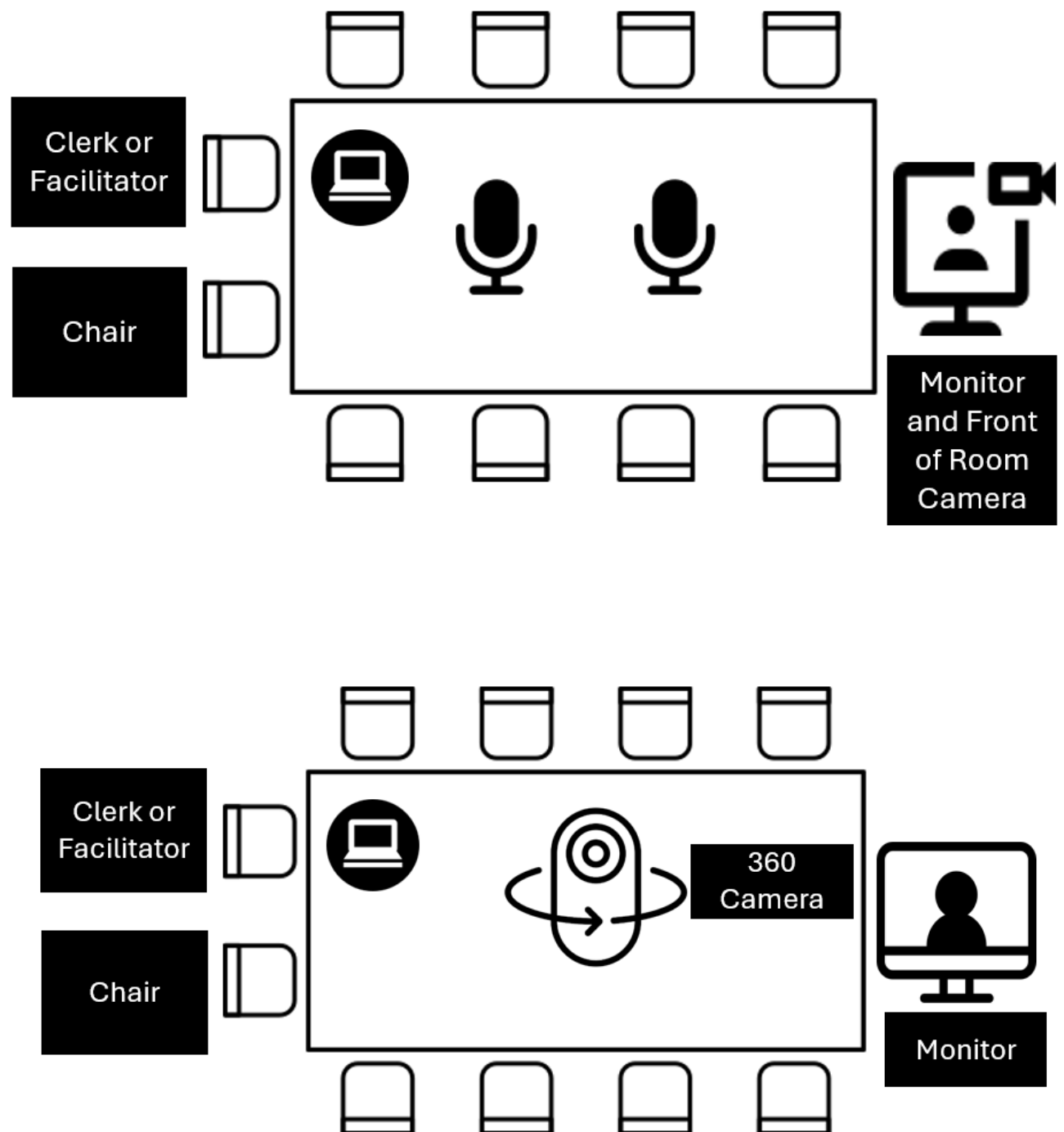
### Remote Attendees

- 1 Computing Device. (Desktop/Laptop/Tablet) to connect to the communications platform. The device should have a web camera integrated or connected to allow remote attendees to share their video.
- 2 Internet Connection. Stable Internet access via broadband or 4G/5G Mobile data
- 3 Speakers/Microphone/Headphones connected to the computing device. To ensure clarity hearing and speaking in the meeting.

### Meeting Room (if needed)

- 1 Computing Device for the primary connection. To connect to the communications platform being used.
- 2 Internet Connection. Stable Internet access via broadband or 4G/5G Mobile data
- 3 Speakers and Microphones. The configuration needed will depend on the number of attendees in the room and the size of the room.
- 4 Computing Device for clerk or facilitator. The facilitator for the meeting will benefit from a computing device to establish the call on the meeting platform and look for remote attendees who wish to contribute. Attendees may also like to have access to a computing device (desktop/laptop/tablet) to allow them to review documents including any which may be distributed or updated during the meeting and have a similar experience to remote attendees.
- 5 Display Screen: To display remote participants to onsite participants. This would typically be a large television or monitor
- 6 Camera: To display the room to remote participants. There are several different styles of camera which can be used. The choice for individual councils will depend on the number of usual attendees in the room, the size and layout of the room and the budget available. At a high level these choices are
  - A “Front of Room” camera. These resemble large webcams and would typically be placed on top or in front of the display screen. They provide a static view of the meeting room to remote attendees.
  - A “360 degree” camera. These can be placed in the centre of the meeting room. They usually rotate to film the person who is speaking using a directional microphone

*Figure 2: Potential Meeting Room Layouts for video meetings*



## Equipment to Support Hybrid Meetings with Simultaneous Translation

Welsh Government 2022 guidance ([The Local Government and Elections \(Wales\) Act 2021: Statutory Guidance for Community and Town Councils | GOV.WALES](#)) notes that although community councils are not subject to the Welsh language standards deriving from the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011, they are expected to uphold the main principle of the Measure and treat the Welsh language no less favourably than English. Many councils have adopted language schemes which set out how they treat the two languages.

Many community councils have historically enabled the use of the Welsh language at community council meetings by providing simultaneous translation for anyone who does not understand Welsh. An interpreter joins the meeting, listens to the contributions of those speaking Welsh and then provides English translation to those who need it via individual headsets. There are several underlying technologies which can be used to connect the headsets including Infra-red, RF and Wi-Fi compatible approaches. Councils may have their own translation equipment, may use equipment provided by their meeting location or the translator may bring equipment as part of their service for the meeting.

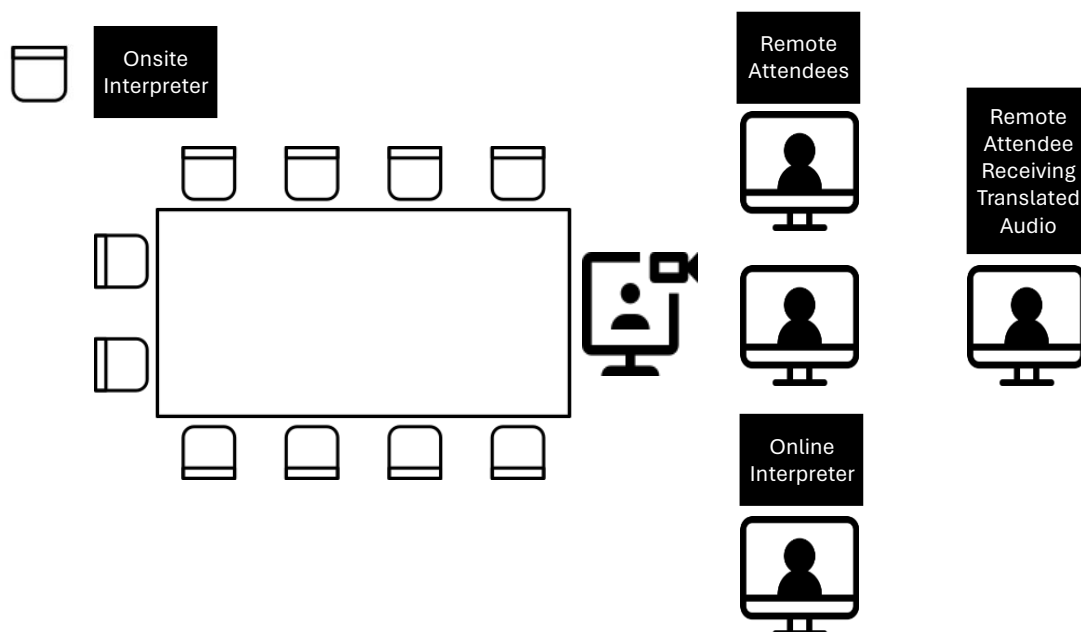
For meetings held on a wholly remote, online basis then communications platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams provide an interpretation facility. Interpreters can join the meeting via their computing devices and their translation can be shared with participants who require the interpretation by selection of a separate audio channel.

Provision of such simultaneous translation for a multi-location meeting introduces an additional layer of complexity as both attendees in a designated meeting room and remote attendees may need access to the interpretation. There are several approaches which can be used to resolve this.

### Option 1

Separate interpreters can be used for online and in-person attendees. This is a robust solution but involves additional expense for councils in funding multiple translators.

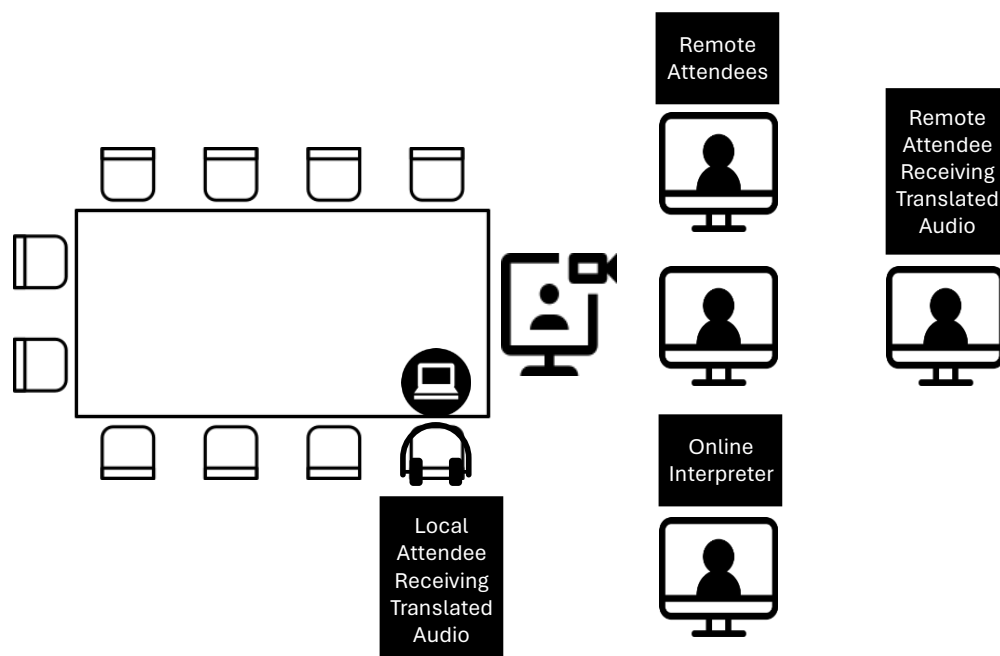
*Figure 3: Separate interpreters for online and in-person attendees*



## Option 2

An online translator can be used via the Communications Platform and attendees in the meeting room join the online session via individual devices with headphones or headsets to hear the translation. This allows the translator to be remote from the meeting and e.g., attend from home which can be more efficient. However, it requires all attendees in person who require translation, including members of the press or public who are observing the meeting, to have access to a device and a headset. Councils have invested in a small number of devices which can be loaned during a meeting for this purpose.

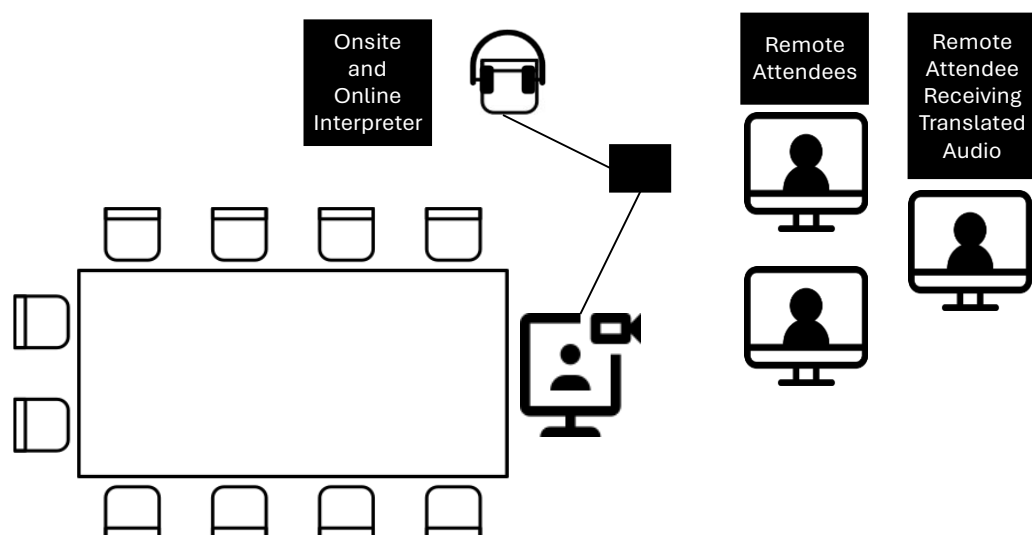
*Figure 4: Local attendees listen to online interpretation.*



### Option 3

The local translation equipment can be connected by means of a specific device to a laptop and then to the Communications Platform session. This allows a translator in the room to provide translation via headsets to local attendees and to join the Communications Platform session and provide a translated channel for remote attendees. However, the exact connections needed between the local translation equipment and a laptop vary depending on the technology in use and the design and operation can be quite complex. A direct discussion with the equipment supplier is needed to ensure the correct equipment is specified and bought.

*Figure 5: Local interpretation is connected to the online platform.*



## 5. Best Practices during a Meeting:

Many councils are successfully running multi location meetings where attendees have a good experience. However, besides the technical configuration and setup, it's important to focus on how the meeting is run and how the technology is used to avoid problems.

### Procedural Guidelines:

Ensure at the start of the meeting that all attendees are familiar with the basic operation of the conferencing platform and how the meeting will be run on the platform including.

- How to attract the attention of the Chair. This is often done via the “raise your hand” function which is available in all platforms.
- How to mute and unmute themselves to avoid disruption to the meeting from background noise in remote locations
- If the agenda and other documents will be shared online by means of the platform or if pre-shared versions will be used
- If there are any accommodations needed to ensure all attendees are fully included. This might include e.g., using captioning if it is available.
- If there are any specifics in the standing orders of the council around behaviour in online meetings

### Etiquette Specifically for Remote Attendees:

- Be On Time: Join the meeting promptly to avoid unnecessary interruptions.
- Be prepared to identify yourself.
- Mute When Not Speaking: This helps to minimize background noise.
- Raise Your Hand to Speak: Use the 'raise your hand' function to indicate a wish to contribute.
- Stay Focused: Avoid multitasking during the meeting.

### Technical Guidelines:

- Test Your Setup: The officer or councillors who are leading the meeting should ensure they arrive or join early for the meeting to allow time for testing of internet connection, audio, and video.
- Nominate an onsite facilitator. If the Chair and officers are all attending remotely then there needs to be clarity of who will make any adjustments to the setup in the meeting room to avoid any discussion or delay in making necessary changes
- Prepare for Technical Issues: The officer or councillors who are leading the meeting should familiarise themselves with common

issues that might arise during an online or hybrid meeting and how to troubleshoot them. It is a good practice to keep a record of specific issues encountered and how they have been resolved. This record can then be consulted in future meetings if similar problems arise.

#### Security Guidelines:

- **Enable Waiting Room.** This allows you to verify attendees before admitting them into the meeting.
- **Require a Passcode.** A passcode can be set for online meetings and shared with participant separately to any standing invitation. This prevents unauthorized participants from joining the meeting.
- **Follow Platform Security Guidelines.** All platforms provide extensive guidelines on securing your meetings.

## 6. Troubleshooting:

Hybrid meetings can provide an excellent experience for attendees both remotely and in person. However, it is inevitable there will sometimes be problems.

There are a significant number of physical and software components involved in Hybrid meetings, and, in the event of problems, it is essential to be patient and try to review the various components to consider how the situation could be improved. Each meeting room and building will have different acoustics and a different setup for network components which means there will always be an element of trial and error in resolving problems.

## 7 Links and References

Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 ([Local Government and Elections \(Wales\) Act 2021 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#))

Guidance for the 2021 Act ([Statutory guidance on governance for community and town councils | GOV.WALES](#))

Zoom ([One platform to connect | Zoom](#))

Microsoft Teams ([Video Conferencing, Meetings, Calling | Microsoft Teams](#))

Google Meet ([Google Meet: Online web and video conferencing calls | Google Workspace](#))



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