

# **Guidance on Virtual and Hybrid Proceedings**

## Issued by the Llywydd under Standing Order 6.17

November 2022

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This guide relates to virtual and hybrid proceedings.

It can be used to assist Members and others involved in Senedd business and should be considered alongside the following relevant guides:

- Members' Guide to Plenary
- Guide to Business Committee
- Guidance on the proper conduct of Senedd Business

It covers:

- Procedures for virtual and hybrid meetings
- Technical guidance on how to participate virtually



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# Virtual and hybrid proceedings

Virtual and hybrid<sup>1</sup> formats for Senedd proceedings were developed during the Fifth Senedd to ensure the continuity of Senedd business during the COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2022 the Business Committee considered the future of remote participation in Senedd proceedings as part of its review of Standing Order 34 (Emergency Provisions) and agreed that the ability for Members to participate remotely in both Plenary and committee meetings should be maintained.

The Business Committee also agreed that further guidance should be issued by the Llywydd, in consultation with the Business Committee and the Chairs' Forum, to cover a range of matters relating to procedures and rules on attendance and conduct that should apply in meetings held in virtual or hybrid formats, as well as in relation to voting in Plenary proceedings.

This guidance is issued by the Llywydd under Standing Order 6.17 and is intended to supplement the *Guidance on the Proper Conduct of Senedd Business issued in accordance with Standing Order 6.17* and the *Guide to Plenary*.

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<sup>1</sup> In the context of this guidance, hybrid means a meeting with participants contributing both in-person and remotely via video-conference.

# Virtual and hybrid Plenary meetings

A virtual or hybrid Plenary meeting held in accordance with the Standing Orders of the Welsh Parliament constitutes proceedings of the Senedd for the purposes of the *Government of Wales Act 2006*.

All Members are entitled to participate in Plenary proceedings and will be treated equitably in every regard, whether they are participating virtually or in person. Members will be called to speak at the discretion of the Chair, and speaking opportunities and the length of contributions will be the same for Members contributing from the Chamber or remotely. The Presiding Officer will ensure that speaking times for groups are proportionate to the membership of the Senedd as a whole.

## Interventions

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All Members are entitled to seek to make interventions on a contribution. Members participating via Zoom can indicate an intention to intervene by physically raising their hand, following which the Chair will inform the Member speaking that another Member wishes to make an intervention. In common with interventions made in the Siambr, there is no right of intervention and it is not a matter for the Chair if the Member speaking refuses to give way.

## Microphones and virtual connections

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ICT and Broadcasting staff will 'host' the virtual element of meetings, and will control microphones centrally in both the virtual environment and the Siambr.

It is solely the responsibility of a Member wishing to participate virtually to ensure that they have a secure and reliable connection to the meeting in good time ahead of any contribution that they wish to make. A Member who, for any reason, is not visible to the Chair at the time required to make their contribution will be treated in the same way, regardless of whether they intended to contribute virtually or from the Siambr.

ICT will work directly with any Member experiencing technical issues to attempt to rectify the matter, however, if the Member is part of a political group, their fellow Members should be prepared to cover their requests to speak whilst a resolution is ongoing, where possible.

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## **Use of audio-visual material**

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Due to the technical complexity involved, use of audio-visual aids will not be permitted in virtual or hybrid Plenary meetings.

## **Voting**

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In accordance with Standing Order 12.41, Members will cast their votes individually<sup>2</sup> using electronic voting. All Members will use the same online voting application.

Members casting votes must be present in the meeting and visible to the Chair at all times.<sup>3</sup>

In order to place the voting arrangements developed for virtual and hybrid proceedings on a permanent footing, it is intended that the practice of suspending proceedings before a series of votes, as well as the use of a PIN and test vote, will be discontinued. However, the Presiding Officer and Deputy Presiding Officer remain able to suspend proceedings in advance of any vote should they deem it necessary (under Standing Order 12.18). The provisions of Standing Order 12.44<sup>4</sup> also apply.

In accordance with Standing Order A12.41A, prior to a vote in which they intend to participate, it is solely the responsibility of Members to ensure that they have in person or remote access to a Plenary meeting and any voting system that is in operation. Members should ensure that they are joining meetings from a location, and with a device and connection, that will enable them to be visible to the Chair and to use the remote voting system in good time ahead of the anticipated time of any votes.

Members should be aware that the timings on Plenary agendas are estimated and of the potential for meetings to run ahead of schedule. Therefore any Member intending to vote remotely is strongly advised to ensure that they have secured their access to the meeting and voting system ahead of any votes. They should allow time to access ICT support in the event of any issues. Any Member

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<sup>2</sup> Except for any Members exercising a proxy vote under Standing Order 12.41A.

<sup>3</sup> If it is not possible for a Member to be visible to the Chair for reasons of technical failure, they must be present in the Zoom meeting and clearly audible.

<sup>4</sup> “Before a vote is taken, when at least three Members so request, the bell must be rung [...] Five minutes after the bell began ringing, the vote or votes must be taken.”

who anticipates that they may experience difficulty in casting a vote should make this known to ICT support staff at the earliest opportunity.

### **Locations**

Members present on the Senedd Estate are expected to participate and vote in Plenary meetings from the Siambr in order to reduce risk and complexity around proceedings, particularly voting time.

Members must not vote from outside of the United Kingdom. Any Member travelling abroad under Senedd or Government business should seek pairing arrangements for any votes that will occur during that time period.

Attempting to vote whilst travelling increases risks relating to the quality and security of a Member's connection to the meeting and voting system, and the prospect of signal being lost during voting time. Members are therefore expected not to seek to vote whilst travelling, or using only a mobile device. Any additional risk which arises from a Member's choice of where and how to vote rests solely with that Member, in accordance with Standing Order A12.41A. Members attempting to vote through the use of a mobile device are reminded of the requirement to be visible to the Chair at all times during voting sessions.

Subject to the discretion of the Chair, voting time will not be suspended in the event that a Member is unable to cast a vote.

### **ICT support**

ICT support will be on hand, in advance of and during any votes, to assist Members intending to vote in the Siambr or remotely.

Any Member in the Siambr or on Zoom who has an issue during voting time should indicate this to the Chair as soon as possible, while a vote is open. The Chair will use their judgement in deciding whether an oral vote is appropriate for any Members experiencing difficulties and when to close a vote.



# Virtual and hybrid committee meetings

A virtual or hybrid committee meeting held in accordance with the Standing Orders of the Welsh Parliament constitutes proceedings of the Senedd for the purposes of the *Government of Wales Act 2006*.

## **Decisions about the format of meetings**

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Members of committees may choose the mode (virtual or in person) through which they participate in committee proceedings on a meeting-by-meeting basis. In doing so, they should take account of the business under consideration, any decision or agreement made by the chair or committee about the optimal format for a specific meeting and any guidance issued by the Llywydd. It is expected that hybrid will become the usual format for committee meetings.

In circumstances where a committee has determined that it will meet in person for a given meeting but a member of that committee is unable to attend in person, consideration should be given to arranging a substitute for that meeting.

Standing Order 17.23 provides that overall meeting procedures are determined by the chair. In making decisions related to the format of meetings, chairs should consult the other committee members and witnesses, consider the business at hand, and take advice from clerks.

## **Decisions about mode of participation by individual Members**

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Whilst it is recognised that there will occasionally be circumstances in which a Member may need to change their plans at short notice, for example a family or constituency emergency, it is helpful in terms of planning business and the use of resources (and in particular Senedd Commission ICT and Broadcasting support) if clerking teams could be informed of the Member's chosen mode of participation 48 hours in advance of the meeting.

## **Participation by witnesses**

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Remote participation by witnesses in committee meetings is a well-established practice, predating the more recent introduction of fully virtual and hybrid meeting technology. Committee chairs and clerking teams will continue to work

with witnesses to determine the most appropriate means through which witnesses will attend each meeting.

Where a committee is meeting in person, it is expected that Ministers will also attend in person. However, it is acknowledged that there will be occasions where that may not be possible. In these cases chairs will engage constructively with the Minister to ensure that an appropriate solution can be found.

# Conduct and etiquette in virtual and hybrid meetings

Standing Order 13 relating to Order in Plenary meetings, and Standing Orders 17.24A – 17.30 relating to committee meetings, apply equally to meetings held fully in person or in a virtual or hybrid format. The key principles are:

- Members must at all times in their conduct promote respect for the Senedd and extend respect and courtesy to other Members;
- Members must comply with any directions given by the Presiding Officer about conduct and order in Plenary meetings, or by the chair of a committee meeting.

No distinction should be made between the conduct of Members participating remotely and those within the Siambwr or a committee room. Chairs of meetings should seek to ensure that equal standards of conduct and etiquette are maintained by all participants at all times, regardless of whether they are present physically or virtually.

## **Members participating remotely**

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Members should ensure that they join meetings from a quiet, private location away from distractions or other people who are not participating in the meeting. This is especially important when participating in committee proceedings being held in private session.

Conduct that would not be acceptable in an in-person meeting, for example holding a conversation with someone who is not part of the meeting or speaking on the phone, will be treated as a matter of order under Standing Order 13 (for Plenary meetings) or Standing Order 17 (committee meetings).

Members should seek to present a plain background, free from any distractions to their contribution, and should not display any promotional materials in the background nor use any props that would not be allowed in the Siambwr or a committee room.

Members participating remotely should refrain from making or broadcasting any audio or video recording, photographs or screenshots of virtual and hybrid meetings, in accordance with Siambwr and committee room rules. Likewise,

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Members should refrain from using their mobile phones at all within meetings, especially whilst they are visible on Zoom.

If you decide to leave a meeting permanently before it finishes, please click 'leave meeting' on the bottom right of the Zoom screen. If you wish to leave a meeting temporarily, please click 'stop video' in the bottom left corner to avoid an empty chair being visible during your absence. You will need to click 'start video' when you resume your seat, or it will not be possible for others to know that you have returned. However, in relation to committee meetings, Members should be conscious of the quorum rules in operation and of the risk of a meeting becoming inquorate as a result of them no longer appearing to be present, even for a short period of time.

The cameras of Members who are not currently contributing may be turned off at the request of a Chair or Clerk should their conduct risk causing a distraction to the meeting or bringing the Senedd into disrepute.

### **Members in the Siambr (hybrid Plenary only)**

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Fixed seating arrangements are in operation in the Siambr and groups are responsible for allocating seats to their Members. Should any Member attempt to sit in a seat which has not been allocated to them, the Presiding Order will treat the matter as an issue of order in the Siambr under Standing Order 13.

Members in the Siambr can contact the Presiding Officer and the front desk for speaking requests during the meeting using instant messaging, or via the Plenary Requests email. Members participating virtually should use the Plenary Requests email.