**ONE VOICE WALES**

**GUIDANCE TO COUNCILS ON HOLDING MEETINGS ON A PHYSICAL BASIS**

We have been receiving many requests from Councils about how they might now plan for a return to the holding meetings on a physical rather than on a remote basis. This guidance note is intended to guide Councils as to the steps they need to take before making an informed decision about holding meetings in a Council Chamber, hall or community centre. It is extremely important that the factors highlighted in this note are properly considered before any decision is taken in order to ensure that due regard is given to the health and safety of Councillors, employees and members of the press and the public as well as compliance with prevailing regulations and guidance published by the Welsh Government.

It is acknowledged that the decision as to whether to hold meetings on a physical basis is ultimately for the Council to decide but it is hoped that this guidance will provide a foundation upon which to base that decision.

**WELSH GOVERNMENT REGULATIONS AND GUIDANCE**

It is the responsibility of every Council to consider two specific regulations these being: -

1. The Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Meetings) (Wales) Regulations 2020 (Web Link - <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/wsi/2020/442/made>) which provide the framework within which Councils are able to meet and work throughout the pandemic. They provide flexibility for Councils to meet at all stages of the crisis on a remote basis using video conferencing, telephone conferencing or a mixture of both. In a recent survey conducted by One Voice Wales on remote working it was found that around 85% of respondents were already holding meetings on this basis.
2. The Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (No. 2) (Wales) Regulations 2020 as amended (Web-Link - <https://gov.wales/health-protection-coronavirus-restrictions-no-2-wales-regulations-2020> are also of significant relevance.
3. For those Councils who meet in halls and community centres, it will be necessary for them to assure themselves that the venue used is compliant with prevailing Welsh Government guidance regarding the safe use of such premises – Web Link <https://gov.wales/safe-use-multi-purpose-community-centres-covid-19>

**ASSESSMENT OF THE RISKS TO HEALTH AND SAFETY**

Councils need to be mindful of the risks associated with meeting on a physical basis especially in relation to their more vulnerable Councillors, the duty of care to their employees as well as to members of the public and press who may be in attendance. A risk assessment will be required and this would be an expectation of the Council’s insurers, This would require an assessment of the risks faced by those attending physical meetings; action needed to control the risk; who will carry out the actions and the target date for completion of the actions. The risk assessment will need to be a written document which should be shared with those attending such meetings. Guidance on preparing risk assessments can be accessed from the following web-link: -

Health and Safety Executive - <https://www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/working-safely/risk-assessment.htm>

**KEEPING ABREAST OF CHANGES IN REGULATIONS AND GUIDANCE**

Councils will be aware that the Welsh Government is undertaking regular reviews of published guidance and it is important that Councils keep up to date with such changes. One Voice Wales will, however, continue to circulate any changes we become aware of to reduce the need for Clerks to expend time in checking for updates.

In concluding this guidance note, we would urge Councils to focus on safety and avoiding the spread of the virus and to only commence physically held meetings when they have satisfied themselves that the risks can be effectively managed.