



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Democratic Services Committee held on Monday, 10 May 2021
at 5.00 pm.

County Borough Councillors - Democratic Services Committee Members in attendance:-

Councillor Webber (Chair)

Councillor J Bonetto	Councillor J Brencher
Councillor G Caple	Councillor J Edwards
Councillor H Fychan	Councillor K Morgan
Councillor S Rees	Councillor G Jones
Councillor S Powderhill	Councillor L Walker
Councillor Adams	

Officers in attendance:-

Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication

50 APOLOGY

An apology for absence was received from County Borough Councillor E Stephens.

51 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, there were no declarations made pertaining to the agenda.

52 MINUTES

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 1st March 2021 as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

53 LOCAL GOVERNMENT & ELECTIONS (WALES) ACT 2021

Members received the report of the Service Director, Democratic Services & Communication, which provided Members with details of the requirements of the Act.

The Chair thanked officers for the report and noted the Councils continued commitment to pre-scrutiny, the support provided to the Community and Town Councils with provisions of the Act by the Council through the Community Liaison Committee and the strengthening of public participation in the democratic process.

Discussions ensued and a Member sought clarification on the abolition of community polls. The Service Director, Democratic Services & Communication explained that there is the ability for electorates to request community polls on a particular issue, however, this has been abolished within the Act.

A Member sought clarification on the number of young people who voted in the recent elections. The Service Director explained that he did not have the figures to hand but would be able to circulate these to Members following the meeting.

A Member noted that following Storm Dennis in 2020, outside bodies were called in to Scrutiny and that this was a valuable experience. The Member queried whether this process would continue within the Council. The Service Director confirmed that the intention is to strengthen that ability within the Council and for Members to be able to scrutinise other public bodies.

Discussions continued and a Member sought clarification on whether any training would be provided in relation to certain provisions in the Act, such as hybrid and webcasting meetings. The Service Director confirmed that the intention is for training to be rolled out to every individual Committee following the Council's AGM. The Chair further confirmed that if any Member felt that they needed any further assistance in relation to the Act then they can contact the Democratic Services Team who will be forthcoming in respect of any training needs.

A Member voiced her agreement with the earlier conversation regarding the figures for the turn out of the number of 16-17 year olds who voted in the recent elections. The Member also commented on the provisions within the Act that allows Council officers to stand as candidates and commented on politically restricted roles within the Authority and the potential for that an officer of the Council, standing as a candidate could use their position for electoral gain. The Service Director advised that the Council would of course consider what practicalities could be put in place to avoid such a situation and advised that a list of roles would be provided.

The Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee noted that this point was recently discussed in the Scrutiny Committee and that it was noted Members had been reassured about this point by the Service Director, Democratic services & Communications.

Following discussion, Members **RESOLVED** to note the update in the report and to also note the Council's position statement outlined within the report in respect of the requirements of the Act.

54

ACCESS & ENGAGEMENT IMPROVEMENTS WITHIN DEMOCRACY

The Service Director, Democratic Services presented his report to provide Members with an update in respect of the introduction arrangements to enable the broadcasting of committee meetings and the engagement opportunities to improve public participation in the democratic process.

The Chair praised the new facilities within the Council Chamber for the benefit of Members and the public through the provision of webcasting.

In respect of hybrid meetings, a Member queried how Members would exercise their right to attend virtually or attend in person. The Service Director confirmed that there would need to be a discussion in advance of every meeting due to current covid restrictions for those wishing to attend on site, however, the Service Director also stressed that the majority of Members seem to prefer the flexibility of having the options to engage virtually in meetings.

Discussions ensued and a Member sought clarification as to when meetings will start being held again in the Council Chambers. The Service Director explained that at present he was unable to give a date, however, he emphasised his hope would be to resume physical meetings before the school summer holidays. The Chair also emphasised that Members will all need a level of training in the Chamber to facilitate hybrid meetings.

A Member also felt there was an improvement with the quality of debate during virtual meetings and the focused discussions taken forward. Members sought clarification in respect of The Member also sought clarification in respect of the proposal to retain some meetings as virtual commenting on the importance of attending meetings onsite if needed. The Chair confirmed, as outlined within the report that there will always be the need for flexibility going forward, and a meeting could be taken forward at a location if in the interests and benefit of the Committee.

Following discussion, Members **RESOLVED** to:

1. Note the development of the provision of webcasting within Rhondda Cynon Taf Council, in line with the requirements of the Local Government & Elections Wales Act, 2021;
2. Support the development of webcasting to further assist with the promotion of public engagement and transparency of decision making by the Council; and,
3. Note the meetings that are proposed to remain as virtual meetings and those that will be facilitated through a future hybrid approach, subject to the caveat of flexibility as outlined within the report.

55 DIVERSITY IN DEMOCRACY WORKING GROUP

The Service Director presented the interim report of the Diversity in Democracy Working Group and sought Members agreement to approve the interim report and the recommendations contained within it.

The Chair of the Working Group, Councillor M Adams, presented this interim report to the Committee. It was noted that Diversity within Local Government is all about creating an inclusive environment, accepting of every individual's differences, enabling all Councillors to achieve their full potential and as a result, allowing Council services to reach their fullest potential for the benefit of its residents. It was emphasised that the more representative of society and diverse Councillors are the better understanding they would have of the needs of the local community and therefore are better equipped at carrying out their duties and responsibilities.

The Chair of the Working Group noted that trying to achieve this diverse culture is challenging and as a working group the group have, in a short period of time, already identified potential barriers that may dissuade members of the public to stand as a candidate for election. Members were advised of the need to ensure that any perceived barriers are eradicated and to celebrate and promote the rewarding experiences of becoming a Councillor. Councillor Adams advised

Members that the work would be ongoing until the 2022 Local Government Elections to ensure that the Council achieves all it can to push the diversity agenda and develop a more diverse democratic profile. It was emphasised that there were many things outside of the Council's control and work will need to be taken forward in conjunction with political parties and other stakeholders to push the agenda forward.

The Chair thanked Councillor Adams and Members were then presented with the opportunity to ask questions.

A Member noted that the new curriculum for Wales has a strong element that relates to democracy and noted that mock elections in schools encourages diversity. The Member queried what the Council could do to engage with schools in respect of democracy and diversity. The Chair noted that the Council is already engaging with schools and working with young people and noted that the work is of a vital importance. The Service Director confirmed that the Council has already facilitated mock elections in schools across the County Borough and agreed that the work will continue moving forward.

Another Member noted the importance of having these conversations with young people in schools but also within their local communities as well.

Discussions ensued and a Member sought clarity that all schools would be included in this scheme, particularly as some schools haven't got a sixth form facility. The Service Director confirmed that all schools will be included and that the work will continue beyond the 2022 elections.

A Member queried whether it would be possible to hand over the training to the school itself. The Service Director confirmed that this is done and that a young person would enjoy the experience of attending the Chamber.

The Chair confirmed that the work is ongoing and thanked Councillor Adams for chairing the Group. Councillor Adams also thanked all Members and officers who provided support to the Working Group.

Following discussion, Members **RESOLVED** to note and endorse the 16 recommendations contained within the report.

56 INFORMATION ITEMS

The Service Director referenced the information report, in particular the Minister for Housing and Local Government to commission an Independent Review into the ethical standards framework in Wales and the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales.

[Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales Annual Report 2021.](#)

This meeting closed at 5.47 pm

**CLLR M WEBBER
CHAIR.**