



**CYNGOR BWRDEISTREF SIROL
RHONDDA CYNON TAF
COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

COMMITTEE SUMMONS

C Hanagan
Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication
Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
The Pavilions
Cambrian Park
Clydach Vale CF40 2XX

Meeting Contact: Emma Wilkins

YOU ARE SUMMONED to a meeting of **DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE** to be held **Virtually** on **MONDAY, 10TH MAY, 2021** at **5.00 PM.**

AGENDA

**Page
No's**

1. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

To receive disclosures of personal interest from Members in accordance with the Code of Conduct

Note:

1. Members are requested to identify the item number and subject matter that their interest relates to and signify the nature of the personal interest: and
2. Where Members withdraw from a meeting as a consequence of the disclosure of a prejudicial interest they must notify the Chairman when they leave.

2. MINUTES

To receive the minutes of the previous meeting of the Democratic Services Committee held on the 1st March, 2021.

3 - 8

3. LOCAL GOVERNMENT & ELECTIONS (WALES) ACT 2021

To receive the report of the Service Director, Democratic Services & Communication providing Members with details of the requirements of the Act.

9 - 30

4. ACCESS & ENGAGEMENT IMPROVEMENTS WITHIN DEMOCRACY

To receive the report of the Service Director, Democratic Services & Communication providing Members with an updated position in respect of the webcasting arrangements for the Council.

31 - 42

5. DIVERSITY IN DEMOCRACY WORKING GROUP

To receive an interim update from the Chair of the Diversity in Democracy working group in respect of the work undertaken to date.

43 - 74

6. INFORMATION ITEMS

- 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.](#)

7. URGENT BUSINESS

To consider any items, which the Chairman, by reason of special circumstances, is of the opinion should be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency

Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication

Circulation:-

County Borough Councillors:

Councillor M Webber, Councillor M Adams, Councillor J Bonetto,
Councillor J Brencher, Councillor G Caple, Councillor J Edwards,
Councillor H Fychan, Councillor K Morgan, Councillor S Rees,
Councillor E Stephens, Councillor G Jones, Councillor S Powderhill and
Councillor L Walker

Chris Bradshaw, Chief Executive

Christian Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication

Andy Wilkins, Director of Legal Services

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Democratic Services Committee meeting held on Monday, 1 March 2021 at 5.00 pm.

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

Councillor M Webber (Vice Chair)

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

Officers in attendance

Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication
Mrs D Hughes, Head of Organisational Development

43 Declaration of Interest

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

44 Apologies

An apology for absence was received from County Borough Councillor K Morgan.

45 Chairman

The Vice Chair, County Borough Councillor M Webber took the opportunity to thank County Borough Councillor M Diamond for his hard work and commitments over the last 2 years in his role as the Chair of the Democratic Services Committee and on behalf of the Committee conveyed their best wishes to Councillor Diamond following his recent resignation from the Council.

46 Minutes

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 30th November 2020 as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

47 Member Training

The Head of Democratic Services referred Members to his report which provided Committee with an update in respect of Members training following the Personal Development Reviews that were undertaken during the 2019 – 2020 Municipal Year and the training to be taken forward during the 2020-2021 Municipal Year.

Members were reminded that the Personal Development Reviews were undertaken by the Head of Organisational Development or Group Leaders and that training opportunities were established for each of the Members following the review by the Head of Democratic Services and Head of Organisational Development, with such training opportunities provided through one to one engagement sessions or open training for all Members to access, dependent on the training needs.

It was advised that during the 2019 -2020 Municipal Year invites were made to each of the Group Leaders and Independent Members to meet with the Head of Democratic Services and Council Business Manager to discuss any support that the Council Business Unit could provide to Members through training opportunities with such meetings being taken forward by some Group Leaders on a quarterly basis. The Head of Democratic Services has maintained regular contact with Group Leaders on this and other member needs during the current circumstances.

The Head of Democratic Services advised that In March 2020, during the Covid pandemic Committee meetings and Members training was put on hold. During this time the Council Business Unit worked with Members and ICT to ensure Members were equipped with the correct devices to allow them to conduct their roles and support their constituents in very difficult and uncertain times. Members were referred to Appendix A of the report which outlined the one to one training through a virtual basis which was offered to all Members and Co-opted Members via the Council Business Unit. Such training allowed Members to conduct their committee responsibilities through a virtual basis.

Members were informed that the PDR process was currently being undertaken and that the outcomes of the sessions would result in a new training schedule to be taken forward to meet Members identified training needs. The Head of Democratic Services also discussed the potential re-instating of the pre-Council training opportunities through the virtual meeting platforms.

The Head of Democratic Services discussed the importance of Members welfare and mental health and the need for Members to be aware of the support that is available to them if they wish to utilise. It was suggested that a pre-council training session is taken forward on this subject in the near future. In addition, Members were advised that the Council Business Unit would be facilitating a 'virtual coffee morning' for Members, to give Members the opportunity to come together, chat and share experiences,

which is hoped will boost Members wellbeing during the covid restrictions.

Members were reminded of the developments of the Members Portal which would sit as a central area for Members to utilise with training opportunities through the form of e-learning modules being made available within this system. The Head of Democratic Services concluded his report by advising of the Members Induction programme and the work that would be undertaken prior to the 2022 Local Government Elections in this area.

The Head of Organisational Development provided members with an overview of the themes that were emanating from the PDR process commenting on the wellbeing of Members, the benefits of future hybrid meetings, an induction process for any new Member to a committee following a committee membership change and the potential for some pension / retirement investment training. The Head of Service commented on the positive feedback received from Members in respect of the support provided over the last 12 months from the Council Business Unit and ICT.

The Deputy Leader, as Member Champion for Members training spoke of the importance of ensuring all members training needs were met and welcomed the virtual coffee morning being facilitate for the benefits for all Members

Other Members of the Committee also discussed the excellent support they had received from the Council Business Unit, ICT and HR and one Member commented on the promotion of development days to future Candidates to promote the work of Councillors and the support provided to Members. The Head of Democratic Services commented on the work of the diversity in democracy working group and the work being undertaken to promote the role of a Councillor and to engage with future candidates and reduce barriers to democracy.

One Member commented on the need for training for Emergency Planning to be included in the forward work programme of training, which would be beneficial to all Members in light of recent flooding events witnessed across the County Borough. The Head of Democratic Services agreed on the importance of such training and spoke of the potential for a more interactive session with a mock 'emergency' scenario being delivered to Members.

Members commented on the pre Council training framework and the benefits this framework provided for many Members, although it was noted the need for flexibility with such training and the opportunity for all Members to receive bespoke training packages if and when needed. Members also discussed the opportunity for the training provided to Members to be made available on the Members Portal as a catalogue of information.

Discussions surrounding Members behaviour at meetings was highlighted and the Vice Chair commented on the need for all Members to treat each Member with mutual respect and the open-door policy with the Head of Democratic Services to address any Members concerns.

Members of the Committee welcomed the PDR process and the training opportunities identified following such reviews. It was commented that in respect of ICT many Members had undertaken a steep learning curve to adapt to the new ways of working but had felt supported with the transition.

It was suggested that for the benefit of new Members a simple guide on some of the work and practicalities of the work undertaken by Members would serve as a valuable tool, to assist Members in their new role.

It was discussed that a training session on unconscious bias would prove valuable to Members and again aspects of promoting the training opportunities to new Members / candidates and the benefits of hybrid meetings to promote the diversity agenda. The Head of Democratic Services again referenced the ongoing work of the diversity working group and the need to overcome all potential barriers.

Following detailed discussions it was **RESOLVED**:

- I. To note the training and development activities undertaken by Members outlined within section 3 of the report.
- II. To note the specific one to one training provided to all Members through the Council Business Unit in respect of virtual meetings to allow Members to continue their role through the Covid pandemic.
- III. To agree to re-commence the Pre-Council Training opportunities through the virtual meeting arrangements with the inclusion of Emergency planning and unconscious bias on the forward work programme.

48 Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021

The Head of Democratic Services provided Members with an overview of the duties placed upon the Authority through the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, which received royal assent on the 20th January 2021. Members were advised that in accordance with the requirements of the Act, a number of actions would need to be addressed to ensure RCT comply with the legislative requirements.

The Head of Democratic Services provided Members with a general overview of the Act which will change the way the Council operate across a range of areas from electoral reform, public participation, governance and performance management, democratic processes and stronger working arrangements with Town and Community Councils.

It was proposed that a report on the Act be provided at the next meeting

of the Committee for Members to discuss in detail the requirements of the Act.

Members **RESOLVED** to note the update and to receive a report on the Act at the next meeting of the Committee.

49 Lead Members and Officers for Member Support and Development Network

The Head of Democratic Services and the Vice Chair provided Members with details of the recent Lead Members and Officers for Member Support and Development Network.

Members were advised that discussions at the network focussed across an updated competency framework for councillors, which seeks to

- help candidates recognise the skills they need for the role and will be able to develop as a councillor.
- help members identify their learning and development needs and prepare for personal development interviews.
- help councils provide relevant councillor learning and development

The network also focussed on the new induction curriculum for members following the 2022 elections, with the Network suggesting that additional weight should be given to chairing multi-location meetings, public accountability including annual reporting, digital safeguarding, and the increased responsibility on Group Leaders for member behaviour. Also, that introduction to committee work should take place before the first meeting of the committee

To conclude the network meeting Members briefly discussed remote meetings, working and training, sharing experiences and plans.

The Vice Chair spoke of the inhouse training modules facilitated by the Council to support Members and the use of the WLGA to also support this training.

Members **RESOLVED** to note the update.

This meeting closed at 6.00 pm

**Cllr M Webber
Vice Chairman.**

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RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

10th MAY 2021

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT & ELECTIONS (WALES) ACT 2021

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to summarise the various elements of the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021 which received Royal Assent on the 20th January 2021.
- 1.2 The report sets out the context and requirements of the Act, detailing the Council's current position and seeks identification of the appropriate lead officer(s) to respond, support and implement the introduction of the legislative requirements.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are recommended to:

- 2.1 Note the update provided in this report.
- 2.2 Consider the Council's position statement outlined within the report in respect of the requirements of the Act

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The need to provide an overview of the duties placed upon the Authority through the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, which received royal assent on the 20th January 2021.
- 3.2 In accordance with the requirements of the Act, a number of actions will need to be addressed to ensure RCT comply with the legislative requirements. This report seeks to initiate this work through the identification of lead officer(s) in accordance with legislative guidelines.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The Local Government and Election (Wales) Act (The Act) received Royal Assent on the 20th January 2021.

4.2 The Act was one of only two Bills in the Welsh Government's legislative programme to continue during the Covid -19 pandemic. The Bill was prioritised given the timescales required to introduce the planned reforms in respect of the 2022 local government elections.

4.3 A link to the Act can be found [here](#) and explanatory notes found [here](#).

5. PREVIOUS ENGAGEMENT BY WELSH GOVERNMENT

5.1 The Act has been developed following engagement with local government over several years through:

- Draft Local Government Bill Wales – [Nov 2015](#)
- Consultation on Electoral Reform – [Oct 2017](#)
- Reforming Local Government: Resilience & Renewed White Paper – [Jan 2017](#)
- Consultation on Powers and flexibilities – Jan 2018
- Strengthening Local Government: Delivering for People – Welsh Government Green Paper – [June 2018](#)
-

5.2 Most recently the Council has considered and commented upon the following elements:

Overview of the Bill

- Council - [27th November, 2019](#)
- Council – [15th January 2020](#)

Webcasting

- Democratic Services Committee – [8th January 2020](#) ; [1st October 2020](#)

6. THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT & ELECTIONS (WALES) ACT 2021 SUMMARY

6.1 While the general focus of discussions in respect of the Act, has been based around the creation of Corporate Joint Committees (CJC) this substantive piece of legislation will change the way we operate across a range of areas from electoral reform, public participation, governance and performance management, democratic processes and stronger working arrangements with Town and Community Councils.

6.2 The Act includes provisions for:

- Reforming electoral arrangements for local government, including:
 - Extending the voting franchise to 16- and 17-year olds and foreign citizens legally resident in Wales,
 - Changes to voter registration,
 - and enabling a principal council to choose between the 'first past the post' or the 'single transferable vote' voting systems;
- A general power of competence for principal councils and eligible community councils;
- Reforming public participation in local democracy;

- The leadership of principal councils, including to encourage greater diversity amongst executive members and establishing a statutory position of chief executive;
- Strengthening Scrutiny arrangements and arrangements for member conduct;
- The development of a framework and powers to facilitate more consistent and coherent regional working mechanisms;
- A new system for performance and governance based on self-assessment and peer review, including the consolidation of the Welsh Ministers' support and intervention powers;
- Powers to facilitate voluntary mergers of principal councils and restructuring a principal area;
- Local government finance including non-domestic rating and council tax;
- Miscellaneous provisions relating to:
 - Support provided for Community Councils
 - Executive arrangements
 - The status of the Head of Democratic Services
 - information sharing between regulators,
 - abolition of community polls,
 - fire and rescue authorities,
 - the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales, and
 - Public Service Boards.

6.3 The 'Coming into Force' provisions of the Act are complex, with some provisions coming into force within days of Royal Assent, others within two months and the majority via Ministerial statutory instruments.

7. **PART 1: ELECTIONS**

Extension of the right to vote in local government elections - Extending the vote franchise to 16- & 17-year olds and foreign citizens legally residents in Wales (Section 2)

7.1 The Act provides for the extension of the local government franchise to allow 16 and 17 year-olds to be able to register to vote in Welsh local government elections and any poll in Wales which uses the local government franchise such as mayoral elections and referendums. The Act also allows for 'qualifying foreign citizens' to be included in the extended franchise

7.2 The Act places a duty on principal Council's to promote awareness of how to register to vote at local government elections amongst 'relevant young people'

and to take whatever action the Councils think is necessary to help them to register.

Position Statement:

The Democratic Services and Engagement Officer, sitting under the Council Business Unit is working with YEPS and the Director of Education and Inclusion to take forward engagement with young people to increase awareness regarding the right to vote. A social media campaign is being developed in collaboration with young people to ensure the message is effective.

Some of the work intended to be taken forward has been disrupted due to the Covid-19 pandemic, however alternative engagement provisions are being taken forward. A 'diversity in democracy' Member working group has also been created which will look in part at the engagement opportunities.

Identified Lead Officer(s)

Service Director of Democratic Services and Communications & Director of Legal Services

Two Voting systems - Enabling councils to choose between a 'first past the post' (FPTP) or a 'single transferable' (STV) voting system (Section 5)

- 7.3 Post 2022 the Act will introduce the opportunity for individual Councils to determine their own election arrangements.
- 7.4 Supporters of FPTP take the view that the voting and counting procedures are simple, familiar and relatively cheap, and therefore this system provides a straightforward relationship between where a candidate finishes in the tally of votes and whether or not they are elected.
- 7.5 The White Paper 'Reforming Local Government: Resilient and Renewed' contained the proposal to allow individual principal councils to choose their voting system, the choice being between the FPTP system or the STV system.
- 7.6 STV is a preferential voting system, which means voters are asked to rank the available candidates in order of preference, using numbers. Voters may choose to rank all the available candidates or only as many as they wish. STV is considered to be a system of proportional representation
- 7.7 Welsh Government highlight that each election of a principal council is a separate election confined to the area of the council. Welsh Government has therefore determined that it is appropriate that the council should decide on its voting system, which best reflects the needs of their local people and communities.

- 7.8 The Act provides that each principal council may decide for itself on the voting system to use, whether FPTP or STV. A principal council will continue to use the existing FPTP voting system until such time as it may decide to change. A decision to change voting system will require the support of at least two-thirds of the total number of councillors on the council (whether or not present and voting on a proposal to change). If a council has considered and rejected a proposal to change the voting system, the council may not re-visit the issue during the same electoral cycle.
- 7.7 Provision is made to prevent a principal council, having changed to a different voting system, from moving back until at least two ordinary elections have been held under the new system.

Position Statement

RCT comply with the current voting system of first past the post. A change from one voting system to another would require a Full Council decision and a fresh electoral arrangement review of the council area, which would be undertaken by the Local Democracy & Boundary Commission for Wales.

Identified Lead Officer(s)

Director of Legal Services & Service Director Democratic Services & Communications

Change of electoral cycle from 4 years to 5 years (Section 14).

- 7.8 The Act changes the electoral cycle of principal councils and community councils from four to five-year terms. This would bring local government elections into line with the five-year terms for the UK Parliament (as set in the Fixed Term Parliaments Act 2011) and for the Assembly in the Government of Wales Act 2006.
- 7.9 70% of respondents to the main electoral reform consultation agreed the term should be set at five years.
- 7.10 The Act also seeks to provide a regulatory provision to increase the flexibility available to the Welsh Ministers, subject to consultation, to alter the date on which that election is held.

Position Statement:

At the 2017 local government elections, Elected Members were elected on a 4 year term. Under section 37ZA(2) and (3) of the Wales Act 2017, the day of an ordinary local government election in Wales cannot take place on the same day as the Assembly ordinary general election, therefore Members terms of office was extended for a 5 year period, until May 2022. The standard five year term provided under the Act would not only allow a consistent

approach to terms of office across the democratic process but would also allow Members a further year to gain experience and knowledge for the benefit of their residents and the Council.

Identified Lead Officer(s)

Director of Legal Services

Disqualification for election and being a member of a local authority (section 20)

- 7.11 The Act provides the ability for council officers and employees, other than those holding politically restricted posts, to be entitled to stand for election to their own council. They will only be required to resign their paid employment with the council if they are elected. Welsh Government believe this will widen the pool of potential candidates while ensuring there is no conflict of interest once the candidate is elected.
- 7.12 If a council officer or employee makes a declaration of office following the Election the person must resign from their position. This resignation will have immediate effect irrespective of any notice period required.

Position Statement

Currently officers within the Council are unable to stand for election within Rhondda Cynon Taf. Going forward, the Senior Leadership Team will need to be mindful of any succession planning needed to ensure the role and duties of a candidate are continued if they are elected.

Identified Lead Officer(s)

Senior Leadership Team

Candidacy

- 7.13 The Act amends the eligibility criteria for candidates at local government elections to allow a citizen of any country to stand for election. This is subject to the other qualifying criteria, such as age and residence. All other disqualification criteria will continue to apply.
- 7.14 The Act amends the disqualification provisions in Wales to disqualify individuals, from standing for election, or holding office as a member of a principal council or community council in Wales, if they are subject to a bankruptcy or debt relief restrictions order, a person guilty of a corrupt or illegal practice, a person subject to the notification requirements of, or an order under, Part 2 of the sexual offences act 2003 and a person convicted, during a period of 5 years before the election of an offence for which he or she has been sentenced to a term of imprisonment of 3 months or more.

Position Statement

It is the candidate's responsibility to ensure they meet the eligibility criteria and not prohibited from standing by any of the disqualification provisions.

Identified Lead Officer(s)

Director of Legal Services

Meeting expenditure of returning officers (section 22)

- 7.15 The Act clarifies that Returning Officers can only claim expenses properly incurred in the running of a local government election in Wales.
- 7.16 Personal fees in respect of services rendered during the conduct of a local government elections cannot be claimed as they are not "expenses". It is proposed that the personal fee will also be removed for National Assembly for Wales elections when an order is next made under article 23 of the National Assembly for Wales (Representation of the People) Order 2007 (currently the National Assembly for Wales (Returning Officers' Charges) Order 2016 is in force).

Position Statement:

In Rhondda Cynon Taf the Returning Officer does not claim for costs incurred as part of local elections. The Chief Executive has not fulfilled the role of Returning Office since 2014

Identified Lead Officer(s)

None applicable

8. PART 2 - GENERAL POWER OF COMPETENCE

- 8.1 The Act provides principal councils and eligible community councils ('qualifying local authorities') with a general power of competence, with the aim of bringing about more effective, capable and innovative local government.
- 8.2 The general power will allow qualifying local authorities to act in their communities' best interests, generate efficiencies and secure value for money outcomes. They will also be able to raise money by charging for discretionary services and to trade in line with existing powers.
- 8.3 In addition, the general power will allow qualifying local authorities to engage in activities potentially judged to be outside the remit of well-being power within LGA 2000. It is considered the general power will allow qualifying local authorities to be more innovative, and move away from a position where they have to identify a specific power in order to undertake a particular activity, to one in which it is assumed they can do something unless there is a statutory restriction preventing it.

- 8.4 Specifically in relation to ‘eligible community councils’, the general power will empower this tier of local government, so it is better placed to be part of the Welsh public service in the future and can better contribute to local well-being and community resilience. Access to the general power will enable them to be ambitious and innovative.
- 8.5 The restrictions on the use of the general power are in line with similar restrictions placed on councils in England in relation to their use of the general power of competence in the form that has applied in England since 2012.

Position Statement

The Council continually work with the best interests of residents in mind, working to achieve value for money and efficient services across the County Borough. The general power of competence will further embed this principle, allowing greater opportunities for the Council to explore.

Work will need to be taken forward to support RCT’s Town and Community Councils with the eligibility criteria and exercising of the general power (if eligible to do so), with the platform of the Community Liaison Committee assisting with this support.

Identified Lead Officer(s)

Senior Leadership Team

9. PART 3 – PROMOTING ACCESS TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT

- 9.1 The Welsh Government is keen to encourage a more diverse range of members of the public to engage with local democracy. The majority of respondents to the draft Bill consultation agreed that improved public participation in local government was valuable. The Act places a statutory requirement upon principal councils to encourage public participation in their decision-making and scrutiny procedures for the first time. The proposals are also intended to support openness and transparency.
- 9.2 The Act includes a duty to encourage local people to participate in local government (and to produce a strategy to that effect);
- Duty to make petition scheme (and repeal of community polls);
 - Duty to broadcast certain meetings;
 - Greater flexibility around remote attendance of members.

RCT have already been approached by Welsh Government to assist in the development of the guidance that will accompany Chapter 4 of the Act in respect of public participation and transparency.

Public Participation Strategy (section 42)

- 9.3 Principal councils will be required to encourage local people to participate in local government. In addition, councils will be required to prepare, consult on, publish and review a 'public participation strategy', with the aim of making it easier for members of the public to understand how local government functions; how it makes decisions; and how local people can follow proceedings, input their views, and have them taken into account.

Position Statement:

In 2018 the Council introduced a public engagement strategy to support positive engagement in the work of scrutiny. This will provide a useful basis to comply with this requirement. Work is also being taken forward with the 'Bang the table' consultation platform which will assist in addressing participation and consultation in the democratic process going forward.

Identified Lead Officer(s)

Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication and the Director of Legal Services

Petition scheme (section 43)

- 9.4 The Act requires a principal council to make a petition scheme setting out how it will handle and deal with petitions, including e-petitions. Such a proposal is similar to schemes already in place within a number of public bodies in Wales, such as the Assembly.

Position Statement

In 2019 the Council adopted a Petitions criterion allowing publication of the outcome of petitions received at Council meetings. This process will provide a useful basis to comply with this requirement.

Identified Lead Officer(s)

Service Director of Democratic Services and Communication

Publication of Official addresses (Section 44)

- 9.5 Elected members should be freely accessible to local people. A duty will be placed on principal councils to publish an electronic and postal address for each member of the council on its website to support this objective. A council address may be used if the member wishes to protect the privacy of their home address

Position Statement

The Council already publishes this information on the Council website under each of the Members portfolio. Council policy recommends that Members should use their Council email address when contacting residents and officers within the Council, rather than a personal email address. In addition, the Council already assists members to direct constituent correspondence

through Members Services, if a Member has requested the removal of their home address from the website

Identified Lead Officer(s)

Service Director of Democratic Services and Communications

Constitution Guides (section 46)

- 9.6 The Act will require principal councils to prepare and publish a guide to their constitution, which explains in ordinary language the content of their constitution. This will be a layperson's guide to the constitution, enabling the general public to understand how the council operates and makes decisions. The intention is to make it easier for local people to understand how their council functions.

Position Statement

The Council's Constitution is available on the Council website and a copy of the document is available at the Council Headquarters. Hard copies of the constitution are also provided to members of the public if requested for a nominal charge.

Monitoring Officers & Heads of Democratic Services are discussing the development of an easy-to-read explanation of rules of procedure and other relevant information

Identified Lead Officer(s)

Service Director of Democratic Services and Communications and Director of Legal Services.

Electronic Broadcasts of meetings of certain local authorities (Section 47).

- 9.7 The Act places a duty on principal councils to put in place arrangements for a broadcast of council meetings so that members of the public who are unable to attend are able to see and hear proceedings as they happen. Recordings of meetings should also be publicly available for a reasonable period after the meeting.

Position Statement

The Council has recently invested in broadcasting technology in anticipation of the requirements of the Act and due to the current virtual meeting process (in accordance with the Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Meetings) (Wales) Regulations), recording of Committee meetings are available on the Council website. A retention policy on the availability of these recording will need to be produced going forward.

Identified Lead Officer(s)

Service Director of Democratic Services and Communications

Conditions for remote attendance of members of local authorities (section 48)

- 9.8 The Act modifies the provisions in the 2011 Measure with the intention of making it easier for remote attendance to operate. Essentially, the conditions attached to the operation of remote attendance within the 2011 Measure are removed, in favour of leaving the principal council's standing orders to specify the conditions about how it should operate within that council. In addition, the chair of the meeting will need to be happy that the conditions for remote attendance are satisfied in the case of any particular meeting before business should proceed.

Position Statement

The Council has recently invested in broadcasting technology in anticipation of the requirements of the Act. The Council Business Unit is in the process of developing arrangements to integrate our virtual meeting arrangements into the newly introduced Public-I technology to enable hybrid meetings once restrictions allow.

Identified Lead Officer(s)

Service Director of Democratic Services and Communications

Notice of local authority meetings to be published electronically (paragraphs 2-8)

- 9.9 The Act also makes provision in relation to notices of principal council and community council meetings. Much of the legislative provision governing the meetings and proceedings of council business is contained in section 99 of, and Schedule 12 to, the 1972 Act and reflects the practices of the time. Provision for access to meetings and documents of certain authorities, committees and sub-committees is set out at Part VA of the Act. While many of the provisions remain relevant, there is scope to modernise them. Schedule 12 predated the internet and the production of electronic documents and use of electronic communications. Provision has been made to amend the law relating to meetings in order to modernise the rules governing the meetings and proceedings of principal councils and community councils. For example, notices of meetings may be published electronically by the Proper Officer, instead of with the consent of an individual member.

Position Statement

The Council already complies with this requirement with publication of Committee papers electronically at least three clear working days prior to a meeting. Publication of Committee papers are provided on the Council website and through the restricted Modern Gov app. Work is being undertaken to make the Modern Gov a public app for public view.

Identified Lead Officer(s)

Service Director of Democratic Services and Communications

10. Part 4 Local Authority Executives, Members, officers and committees

REFORMING DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES & LEADERSHIP

- 10.1 The Act changes or enhances a number of requirements in respect of Local Authority Executives, Members, Officers and Committees. The changes include:
- Appointment of Chief Executives (rather than a head of paid service) with specific duties;
 - Appointment of assistants to cabinets and allowing job-sharing leaders or cabinet members;
 - Updating family absence provisions in line with those available to employees (via regulations);
 - Requiring leaders of political groups to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by members of their groups.

Chief Executives (Section 53)

- 10.2 The term “chief executive” (occasionally “managing director”) is widely used throughout local government in Wales to denote the head of a principal council’s administration, but the title is not found in local government legislation. The principal responsibility of chief executives is to ensure the operational effectiveness of their council so that the organisation is capable of delivering the executive’s objectives and discharging the other statutory functions of the council, in a way which is lawful and fiscally appropriate. The Act replaces the statutory post of the ‘Head of Paid Service’ with the statutory post of ‘Chief Executive’.
- 10.3 The amendments contained within the Act make clear that the leader, not the chief executive, is the spokesperson for the council on policy matters, while the chief executive is responsible for management of the principal council and its staff, who are charged with carrying out the decisions of the council and its leadership.

Position Statement

The Council already have an appointed ‘Chief Executive’ and the current arrangements effectively support positive working relationships between the Senior Leadership Team and Council Members.

Identified Lead Officer(s)

Director of Human Resources

Appointment of assistants to executive and job sharing (sections 56 and 57)

- 10.6 The Act makes provisions for Welsh Ministers to issue guidance designed to encourage good practice in relation to equality and diversity. The Leader will be

obliged to have regard to the guidance when exercising functions relating to executive arrangements, including the appointment of executive members.

- 10.7 The Act also requires local authorities to include in their executive arrangements provision enabling two or more councillors to share a cabinet post, including the position of executive leader. This will offer more councillors the opportunity to participate as a cabinet member and enable executives to reflect the diversity of their relevant area.
- 10.8 The Act also makes provision to allow principal councils operating executive arrangements to exceed the limit on cabinet size in order to accommodate job-shared cabinet posts.

Position Statement

The Councils current Executive arrangements will enable the Council to swiftly respond and positively utilise these provisions. The cabinet have previously supported the arrangements for deputy cabinet members under previous regulations and will positively look to utilise the opportunities provided under the Act.

Identified Lead Officer(s)

Service Director of Democratic Services and Communications following a decision of the Leader.

Family absence for members of local authorities (Section 60)

- 10.9 The 2011 Measure introduced a system of family absence for principal councils in Wales. The system was intended to require local authorities to extend to councillor's similar family absence entitlements available to officers of those authorities. The objective was to remove some of the barriers which restrict the ability of people with family responsibilities from seeking to become candidates.
- 10.11 Changes in employee statutory family leave arrangements have, in part, been updated.
- 10.12 As there has been no corresponding change in the provisions for family absence set out in the 2011 Measure and the underpinning regulations the arrangements for family absence for councillors of principal councils are now out of step. The provisions in the Act remove the obstacles which might prevent the regulations from being able to keep in step with UK employment law.

Position Statement

The Council already complies with the current family absence arrangements.

Identified Lead Officer(s)

Service Director of Democratic Services and Communication

**Duties of leaders of political groups in relation to standards of conduct.
(Sections 61 and 62)**

- 10.13 The Act will require the leaders of political groups to take reasonable steps to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by the members of their group. In doing so, a group leader must co-operate with the council's standards committee in the exercise of its functions to promote and maintain high standards of conduct. In turn, a standards committee has new functions under the Act to ensure group leaders have access to advice and training to support their new duties and to monitor group leaders' compliance with those duties.
- 10.14 Standards committees will be required after the end of each financial year to make an annual report to the authority describing how the committee's functions have been discharged during the financial year and setting out an overview of conduct matters within the council. The council will be obliged to consider the report and any recommendations made by the standards committee within 3 months of receipt.

Position Statement:

The Council has an established Standards Committee which considers both the code of conduct in respect of the Council and Community and Town Councils within RCT. The Committee already publishes a Standard's Committee Annual Report, which is reported and presented to Council by the Chair of the Committee.

Identified Lead Officer(s)

Director of Legal Services and Service Director Democratic Services & Communications

Making information available to Overview & Scrutiny

- 10.15 The Welsh Government consulted in the White Paper 'Power to Local People' on proposals to make the role of scrutiny within a principal council more effective and to ensure the local community has a greater involvement in the scrutiny of council policies.
- 10.16 Section 22(10) of LGA 2000 enables the Welsh Ministers to make regulations requiring the provision of information about decisions the executive have made or intend to make. In England regulations have been made regarding what are commonly known as 'key decisions', that is, decisions which have a significant financial implication or a significant effect on local communities. To date, the Welsh Government has not made such regulations. As indicated in 'Power to Local People', the intention is to do so, in order to ensure scrutiny committees are given sufficient notice of important decisions before they are made, so they may scrutinise the executive more effectively. The Act amends section 22(10) of LGA 2000, so that regulations may require that scrutiny committees and their sub-committees are given such notice.

Position Statement:

In 2015 the Council enhanced the provision of information to enable wider engagement by elected members in the key decisions of the Council. The inclusion of the role of Head of Democratic Services as part of the Senior Leadership team has provided the opportunity to cite the requirement of scrutiny in advance of key decisions. In addition to this quarterly meeting between Scrutiny Chairs and the relevant Cabinet Member portfolio holder are taken forward to discuss the forward work programme of the Cabinet to identify areas for future scrutiny.

Identified Lead Officer(s)

Service Director of Democratic Services and Communication

Power to require authorities to appoint Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committees

10.17 The Act amends a regulation-making power in the 2011 Measure so that regulations may require principal councils to establish a joint scrutiny committee. The amended regulation-making power could be used to require councils to establish a joint scrutiny committee where services are being provided across those councils' areas. The purpose of this provision is to ensure effective and efficient scrutiny of services delivered in collaboration.

Position Statement

The Council has positive experience of supporting and hosting joint scrutiny committees and is currently host for the Cwm Taf PSB JOSC and the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal JOSC.

Identified Lead Officer(s)

Service Director of Democratic Services and Communication.

11. PART 5 - COLLABORATIVE WORKING BY PRINCIPAL COUNCILS.

Application by principal councils to establish a corporate joint committee (Section 69)

- 11.1 This provision enables two or more principal councils to make a corporate joint committee to exercise specific functions in relation to the principal areas of those Councils.
- 11.2 Cabinet and the Council's Overview Scrutiny Committee recently considered a joint report in respect of the powers for councils to initiate the establishment of Corporate Joint Committees (CJCs) covering the *four functions of economic wellbeing, transport, strategic planning and school improvement*
- 11.3 The Council responded to the consultation on these regulations and a copy of the report can be found [HERE](#).

12. PART 6 - PERFORMANCE & GOVERNANCE OF PRINCIPAL COUNCILS

Performance, performance assessments and intervention – chapter 1

- 12.1 The Act seeks to establish a more regularised performance and governance system which will place an onus on the principal council to take ‘ownership of its own improvement’, and should seek to build reflection on performance and action to improve into its system.
- 12.2 This will now entail a system that requires annual self-assessment of performance by principal councils and a periodic review to provide an external, expert perspective on the council’s performance and its progress in improving its performance.
- 12.3 The Act also makes provision for the Welsh Ministers to provide support and, where necessary, to intervene in principal councils facing significant problems. The Welsh Ministers will be able to provide support to principal councils to address difficulties they are facing. In more serious cases, the Welsh Ministers will be able to intervene to enable improvement.
- 12.4 The support and intervention provisions develop the existing legislative framework set out in the 2009 Measure (which will be repealed). The new provisions include a power for the Auditor General for Wales to carry out a special inspection that is similar to his existing power. The purpose of a special inspection is to support a principal council in meeting or increasing the extent to which it is meeting its performance requirements.

Position Statement

We are well placed to respond to these new duties within our current performance processes. There is a mature performance culture in place across the Council which is underpinned by being clear about our strengths and where we can improve.

Our current arrangements are evidence based and inform the allocation of resources, and enable the Council to both formulate a set of medium term priorities, as included within the Corporate Plan, and monitor, scrutinise and evaluate progress and impact on an on-going basis. The arrangements also have a positive track record of supporting compliance with performance related legislation and responding to recommendations arising from Regulator reports.

In developing our performance arrangements for 2021/22 we have considered the detailed requirements of the Act to ensure they can all be met within existing arrangements across the Council. This includes widening and strengthening our opportunities for residents’ feedback and considering how we apply the new Public Sector Equalities. We are also currently considering how we can best prepare to meet the requirement to undertake our first Panel Performance Assessment following the Local Government Elections in 2022

Identified Lead Officer(s)

Director of finance & Digital Services.

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Governance & Audit Committees (Chapter 2)

- 12.1 The Act enhances the remit of the Audit Committee, renaming the committee as the Governance and Audit Committee. The reforms increase lay representation and the role of Chair must be performed by one of the Lay members. The Committee will also have additional responsibilities in respect of reviewing the Council's Complaints procedures to ensure its 'adequacy.' These measures become a requirement from 2022.
- 12.2 The Act repeals the 2009 Measure duties, replacing the audit and reporting duties with a self-assessment and panel assessment process (peer review).

Position Statement

Implementation of the amendments proposed with the Act have been identified. The Committee's current membership incorporates one lay member which will need to be built upon to fulfil the requirements of the act.

Identified Lead Officer(s)

Service Director of Democratic Services and Communication and Director of finance & Digital Services.

PART 7 - MERGERS AND RESTRUCTURING OF PRINCIPAL AREAS

- 13.1 In line with the Welsh Ministers' commitment to assist principal councils wishing to merge, the Act makes provision for the voluntary merger of principal councils.
- 13.2 The Bill provides for two or more principal councils to submit a joint application to the Welsh Ministers for the voluntary merger of their respective areas and councils. The Welsh Ministers would be enabled to make regulations ("merger regulations") to give effect to the abolition of the principal councils which had submitted the joint application and for their replacement by a single new area and council.

Position Statement

The Council have developed positive joint working arrangements across local authorities to produce a more efficient, robust and value for money service.

Identified Lead Officer(s)

Senior Leadership Team

14. LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE

The Act includes regulations in respect of Non-domestic rating and Council Tax and the imprisonment of debtors. A separate report advising of this detail will be presented at a future date.

15. ADDITIONAL PROVISIONS

- 15.1 Part 9 of the Act includes miscellaneous provisions relating to a range of matters, which Welsh Government will believe will strengthen and modernise the operation of local government.

Information sharing between regulators

- 15.2 The Act includes information sharing provisions similar to those in the 2009 Measure which facilitate the sharing of information between the Auditor General for Wales, Estyn and the Welsh Ministers).
- 15.3 The purpose of this addition is to ensure that regulators are able to share information for the purpose of exercising their specified functions in relation to a principle council.
- 15.4 The Act also provides that the Welsh Ministers and the Auditor General for Wales may request information for the purposes of their functions relating to collaborative working by principal councils, performance and governance of principal councils, and the restructuring of principal areas.

Head of Democratic services

- 15.5 The 2011 Measure introduced provisions requiring principal councils to appoint a democratic services committee with various functions, including the duty to designate one of the council's officers as the head of democratic services.
- 15.6 The 2011 Measure made no determination as to the level of officer that should fulfil the duty. Welsh Government have noted that in many Welsh local authorities, the head of democratic services is at middle management with insufficient authority within the council to deliver the wishes of the Democratic Services Committee. The Welsh Government believe that scrutiny must have appropriate and sufficient support, in the form of skilled officers and its own budget.
- 15.7 The Act amends the 2011 Measure and the Localism Act so that the head of democratic services is treated as a chief officer and afforded appropriate statutory protection.

The Council's Head of Democratic is already appointed as a Chief Officer and is a member of the Council's Senior Leadership Team. The statutory opinion of the Head of Democratic Services is that the support provide to Scrutiny and non-executive members is sufficient.

Abolition of community polls

- 15.8 The Act provides for the abolition of community polls, and implementation of a system of petitions in their place.
- 15.9 The exception is community governance polls, those which enable a community to hold a poll in respect of a proposal to establish or dissolve a community council or to group with other communities under a common community council.

Public Services Boards

- 15.10 The WFG Act enables Public Services Boards to merge, if they consider it would assist them in contributing to the achievement of the well-being goals. The Act also states that Welsh Ministers may direct two or more Boards to merge if the Welsh Ministers consider it would assist the boards in contributing to the achievement of the well-being goals.
- 15.11 However, the WFG Act does not currently explicitly enable Public Services Boards which have merged to demerge, or partially demerge, at a later date. This means there is a potential lack of flexibility for Boards. The provisions in the Act aim to address this inflexibility and to provide for steps to be taken following merger and demerger.

Town & Community Councils

- 15.12 The Act includes a number of provisions which enhance the profile of Town and Community Councils and the support a Principal Council is encouraged to provide. The new provisions placed upon Town and Community Councils mirror those now required by a Principal Council in respect of Public Participation and broadcasting. In addition specific requirements in respect of Members Training and support and how principal Councils support this work are included.

In 2020 the Council adopted a new Community Charter to support positive working relationships and share good practice in the best interest of local communities.

Fire & Rescue Authorities

- 15.13 The Welsh Government proposes to introduce a new performance management system to reflect the operating contexts and challenges which each fire and rescue authorities face.
- 15.14 FRSA 2004 requires the Welsh Ministers to prepare a Fire and Rescue National Framework, setting priorities, objectives and guidance to fire and rescue authorities on the discharge of their functions.
- 15.15 The Act provides powers for the Welsh Ministers to make regulations requiring fire and rescue authorities to develop and publish strategic plans in relation to the exercise of their functions, and the objectives and priorities set out in the Fire and Rescue National Framework. These regulations may also specify the

performance management arrangements to be used to assess a fire and rescue authority's performance against these plans.

16 **SUMMARY**

- 16.1 The 'Coming into Force' provisions of the Act are complex, with some provisions coming into force within days of Royal Assent, others within two months and the majority via Ministerial statutory instruments.
- 16.2 An updated and more detailed timeline will be shared when available, but in general it is anticipated that CJC regulations will be introduced in the Senedd during February-April 2021, for commencement in the summer (and first meeting of CJs planned by end of September 2021), subject to further consideration by the Minister given the ongoing consultation on this issues.
- 16.3 Remote attendance and related matters will be commenced from April 2021 (when the current emergency coronavirus meeting regulations end);
- 16.4 Performance and governance arrangements will be commenced from April 2021 (with the final performance report from the 2009 Measure published by 31st October 2021).
- 16.5 Most of the electoral reforms will be introduced in time for implementation at the 2022 local elections; and
- 16.6 The power of general competence, public participation duties, broadcasting of meetings and new councillor duties will apply from the 2022 local elections.
- 16.7 As stated above, the Welsh Government has already consulted on the draft Regulations to Establish CJs and the regulations of General Application and statutory CJC guidance. The Welsh Government is currently also consulting on draft statutory guidance on the 'performance and governance of principal councils. RCT have already been approached by Welsh Government to assist in the development of the guidance that will accompany Chapter 4 of the Act in respect of public participation and transparency.
- 16.8 In addition to the statutory guidance on CJs and performance and governance, it is anticipated that several sets of statutory instruments will be laid and a further 5 statutory guidance notes will be produced during the next 12 months (covering public participation, executive members' duties on equality and diversity, collaboration, mergers as well as updated scrutiny guidance and the role of the Head of Democratic Services and the independence of that role. (based on the 2011 Measure).

17. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 17.1 The regulatory impact assessment relating to the Act contains Welsh Governments costs analysis of the implementation of the provisions within the Act.

- 17.2 Where the costs of implementation by the Council of the required measures in the Act are not drawn from existing budgets then these will be the subject of future reports.
- 17.3 Separate reporting will be required in relation to the matter of CJC's and new performance measure costs.

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RHONDDA CYNON TAF

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

10th MAY 2021

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

ACCESS & ENGAGEMENT IMPROVEMENTS WITHIN DEMOCRACY

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of the report is 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.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that the Democratic Services Committee:

- (i) 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.
- (ii) Support the development of webcasting to further assist with the promotion of public engagement and transparency of decision making by the Council;
- (iii) Consider the meetings that are proposed to remain as virtual meetings and those that will be facilitated through a future hybrid approach.
- (iv) Consider the meetings that will be webcast and live streamed through the Council website.
- (v) Note the move to the Modern.Gov system to publish information to the Council website, including Member attendance details.
- (vi) Consider the wellbeing proposals in respect of formalising comfort breaks at meetings and agenda setting.
- (vii) Note the funding received via the Digital Democracy Fund to further support the developments needed to be taken forward with webcasting within the Council Headquarters.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 At the Democratic Services Committee on the 9th January 2020 Members agreed to take forward changes to the facilities within the Council Chamber through the procurement of equipment to facilitate webcasting and to further assist in the hybrid meetings requirement.
- 3.2 The Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act places a duty on principal councils to put in place arrangements for the broadcast of council meetings so that members of the public who are unable to attend are able to see and hear proceedings as they happen. Recordings of meetings should also be publicly available for a reasonable period after the meeting.
- 3.3 There are a number of benefits achieved through webcasting which include:
- A positive demonstration of accountability and transparency;
 - Encouraging engagement and debate, by creating more opportunities for the public to access meetings;
 - Accuracy of recording of meetings including recording of decisions, voting and attendance;
 - The opportunity to raise the profile of the work of Councillors, and the discussions behind the decisions of Council and its committees.
 - Assists in supporting our paper light approaches to meetings moving forward as some facilities in the Council chamber are currently inhibiting the role-out of a paper-light approach.
- 3.4 The Democratic Services Committee have received numerous updates in respect of the development and implementation of the webcasting equipment, which has been significantly delayed due to the covid pandemic. On the 15th April, the webcasting equipment within the Council Chamber was signed off for completion and the Council Business Unit, along with colleagues from ICT and the Welsh Language Unit will undertake socially distanced training on the new equipment during this week (11th May 2021).

4. WEBCASTING GOING FORWARD.

- 4.1 The introduction of a webcasting service will require the Council Business Unit to conduct a number of trial meetings to ensure the final product is a professional webcast stream of Council meetings. For this reason, it is recommended that the introduction of live webcasting be rolled out on an incremental basis to allow for experience to be gained with the live system operations.
- 4.2 It is intended to adopt the same incremental approach as was utilised for the roll-out of virtual meetings during the summer of 2020.

- 4.3 This approach would initially prioritise Cabinet, Planning and Development and the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.
- 4.4 The next phase would see the adoption, on an incremental basis by thematic scrutiny committees following the schedule of the committee calendar, with a hybrid Council meetings being enabled at the end of this process.
- 4.5 This technology will provide the opportunity to 'lock-in' the opportunity already created, through the virtually meetings arrangement via Zoom and the publication of meeting recordings on the Council website.
- 4.6 It will be important to maintain flexibility in our approach to each specific committee, between full attendance, hybrid and virtual, to maintain and build upon the positive enhancements, which have been achieved over the last twelve months.
- 4.7 A full programme of training will be needed to be developed for members over the coming weeks to provide the opportunity for members to familiarise themselves with this technology.
- 4.8 The Council's Rules of Procedure will need to be adapted in this new environment and will be considered by the Corporate Governance & Constitution Committee and subsequently Full Council.
- 4.9 Alongside the discussions of this committee, the Head of Democratic Services will continue to engage with Group Leaders in respect of these developments and future roll-out plans.

5 COUNCIL CHAMBER AND COMMITTEE ROOM 1.

- 5.1 As well as the introduction of webcasting the Council Chamber has undergone significant amendments to ensure accessibility and to improve the democratic environment. The new webcasting equipment improves the audio within the Chamber, the addition of screens will make it easier for Members to engage in the process and the new furniture arrangements addresses DDA requirements. The pavement outside of the Council Chamber has also been lowered due to accessibility issues. These issues have been identified via the Diversity in Democracy Working Group.
- 5.2 To further enhance the translation facilities provided during Committee meetings the chamber now consists of an integrated translation booth, which will benefit members of the welsh language team to undertake this vital role and further enhance diversity in the democratic process.
- 5.3 In addition to the expansion of webcasting infrastructure equipment the procurement of new headset systems for all Members / Officers and Members of the public when in attendance at meetings will be taken forward, to ensure the translation provided within a meeting is easily accessible for all. The current headsets are no longer compatible with the new system and there is a need for any new headsets purchased to be easily sanitised after each use, as is with

current practice in the Council Chamber and which is even more important in the current climate. The provision of such headsets again ensures equality of provision for those Members / Officers / public that wish to transverse bilingually at meetings.

- 5.4 In December 2020, the Minister for Housing and Local Government, Julie James announced funding opportunities of £500,000 to support the digital transformation of democracy required to underpin many of the provisions contained within the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act, 2021. RCT Council submitted 3 bids to the fund:
- Expansion of the Webcasting infrastructure (Bid 1)
 - Strengthening of the Members Portal and voting Apps (Bid 2)
 - Support framework to further assist Town and Community Councils with the implementation of the Local Government & Elections Wales Act.(Bid 3)

Expansion of the Webcasting infrastructure (Bid 1)

- 5.5 Our first bid recognised that the Council's current investment in the webcasting infrastructure would will only support webcasting of Council proceedings, with this facility supporting full Council and planning meetings. The bespoke set-up used for scrutiny proceedings, which as Members will be aware is often better facilitated within our smaller committee rooms. It is was therefore proposed that funding be ascertained to take forward a further purchase of webcasting infrastructure within our smaller committee room settings. The bid also recognised the importance of the provision to provide a hybrid platform for most meetings to support Members whether they attend remotely or in person at a meeting. The Council recognised there was a strong need to plan for future hybrid meetings for the benefit of all Members, ensuring meetings are accessible and Members are treated equally. There are always significant accessibility risks for hybrid meetings and enabling use of the smaller committee room settings in the first instance, learning where possible from other successful organisations who conduct hybrid meetings would increase the scope of engagement, not just formal committee meetings, but in terms of pubic and partner engagement and participation. It was therefore seen as essential that the smaller committee rooms were equipped with the webcasting facilities in the first instance.

Strengthening of the Members Portal and voting Apps (Bid 2)

- 5.6 The Second bid looked to further improve the facilities within the Members portal which is being developed for the benefit of Members. Through the current virtual meetings arrangements taken forward by the Council it has become apparent that the Members Portal could also serve as an important area for a voting system to be developed, integrating the system with the Modern.Gov system, utilised by the Council. The need for an online voting system will be instrumental to the continuation of Council business in a timely and proficient manner, preventing a role call basis as currently utilised. This system will ensure accessibility and equality without any discrimination for those outside of

the Council Chamber. The placing of the voting system within the Portal will again promote the Members Portal and ensure ease of access for all Members.

- 5.7 On the 10th March, the Head of Democratic Services received notification that RCT had been successful with each of the bids submitted. Going forward this means, that the Council will look to procure additional equipment to support the webcasting provision and future hybrid meetings. In respect of the voting app the Council Business unit will work with the Head of Business Support and Customer Care to take forward the creation of such an app.

6 **WEBCASTING RECORDINGS.**

- 6.1 A webcast is a transmission of audio and video over the internet. The webcasting equipment within the Council Chamber and going forward Committee Room 1 captures the live information of a Committee meeting and sends it to a central server, which in turn sends it to anyone that would like to view the meeting. Through the use of a persons internet connection (either broadband or via a dial-up modem) and [Windows Media free player](#) Members of the public can view Council meetings live from the comfort of their own home.
- 6.2 The system also allows viewers to watch / re-watch meetings following closure of the meeting through the publication of such materials on the Councils website. The archives allow viewers to view the meeting at their leisure and, through the use of the index points, allow viewers to jump to a specific agenda point or speaker.
- 6.3 The webcasting system is fully integrated within the Modern.Gov system, which further enhances a viewers understanding of a meeting. Through such integration agenda items are easily accessible and in addition viewers can find out further information about a member speaking by linking to a Members profile page in the Modern Gov system.
- 6.4 For such information to be available, it will be necessary for RCT to push the Modern.Gov system 'public'. Currently the Council have been utilising a 'restricted' version of the system. This means only RCT members / co-opted Members and Officers have access to its content. When the system becomes public the information published on the system will be pushed to the Council website and the Modern. Gov app, therefore in the public domain, unless a report is an exempt item, where system parameters are in place to prevent public view. The benefits of this publication prevents the duplication that is currently being undertaken by the Council Business unit (Officers publish agendas within the modern gov system and then further have to publish through the contensis system on the Council website); The Modern. Gov system will populate the Council website in respect of a Members profile data, including extra features such as party logos. The system will also capture details in respect of Member attendance and details such as Member training. The recording of Member attendance will become a seamless and real-time public-facing record of members attendance. Attendance will be 'live' with the information being made available a few days after a meeting. Currently the recording and updating of Member attendance records is input manually by the

Council Business Unit which often requires an updating period before up-to-date attendance is subsequently published on the web. Another benefit of the system is the timely notifications of Member Attendance to the Council Business unit if a Member has not attended a meeting for a four month consecutive period.

- 6.5 Another benefit of the Modern.Gov system is the availability of a 'live calendar of meetings'. This calendar will illustrate all meetings that are scheduled in line with the agreed Calendar of Meetings and will illustrate all documentation linked to these meetings when such documentation has been published in line with current publication requirements. Any amendments to the calendar will automatically be updated so always providing a 'live' calendar of meetings.
- 6.6 Members must be mindful that the publication of the information to the web via the modern gov system will need to be from a point in time. Therefore it is proposed that the system is pushed live at the start of the new Municipal Year. Committee agenda's, minutes and things such as Member attendance details will be available on the system prior to this start point due to the details already being recorded by the Council Business Unit, but for accuracy going forward the details should be viewed from June 2021.
- 6.7 The newly acquired webcasting system also incorporates the opportunity for recording of Members voting during a meeting through the system, reducing the need for a manual show of hands or roll call of Members.

7. COMMITTEE MEETINGS GOING FORWARD.

- 7.1 Following the need to conduct virtual meetings through the Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Meetings) (Wales) Regulations 2020 and in readiness for the forthcoming requirements of hybrid meetings and remote attendance through the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act the Council already have well established practices in place to conduct such meetings through the zoom platform, with the recording following these meetings being available on the Council website.
- 7.2 Going forward, and with the future steady move (restrictions permitted) to undertake physical meetings for most Committee meetings it is proposed that some of the smaller Council meetings that are undertaken are continued to be held through a virtual meeting setting. The reason for such a proposal is following consideration of:
- The likely duration of the meetings – Consideration of the agenda item content and also using Councillor and Officers time more sensibly by reducing the travel requirements;
 - Promote diversity in Democracy by encouraging the flexibility of remote access to virtual meetings and thereby attracting more people who work and young parents
 - Contribute to the carbon reduction agenda by reducing travelling and reducing travelling costs.

- 7.3 It is proposed that the following meetings are undertaken on a virtual basis only and reviewed annually to ensure the arrangements are fit for purpose:
- LEA Governors
 - VER Panel
 - Llwydcoed Crematorium Joint Committee
 - Ynysangharad War Memorial park Cabinet Committee
 - Community Liaison Committee
 - Pensions Fund Committee
 - Corporate Parenting Board
 - Welsh Language Cabinet Steering Group
 - Arts & Strategic Culture Steering Group
 - City Deal Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee
 - Cwm Taf PSB Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee
- 7.4 In addition, it is proposed that appropriate flexibility is provided for the Head of Democratic Services and the responsible Committee Chair to determine whether a meeting should be convened virtually, through a hybrid set-up or at a physical location. This should be determined by the nature of business being considered.
- 7.5 Subject to the above proposal it is also suggested that where necessary, the Chair of the Committee will be able to hold a meeting with Members present in a specific location if in the interests and benefit of the Committee ...i.e Site visits / meetings on location to assist Members with their role and understanding of work being undertaken.

8 HYBRID MEETINGS

- 8.1 The Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021 modifies the provisions in the 2011 Measure with the intention of making it easier for remote attendance to operate. Essentially, the conditions attached to the operation of remote attendance within the 2011 Measure are removed, in favour of leaving the principal council's standing orders to specify the conditions about how it should operate within that council. In addition, the Chair and Proper Officer of the meeting will need to be happy that the conditions for remote attendance are satisfied in the case of any particular meeting before business should proceed. A local authority must ensure that the facilities necessary to satisfy the conditions set out in its standing orders are available where the meeting is being held.
- 8.2 The Council are in a good position to undertake hybrid meetings and working with the webcasting facilitators will enhance the process going forward. Changes to the Council's Constitution to facilitate such meetings will need to be addressed and it is suggested that a 'multi locations meeting policy' is contained within the Council Constitution to address the future workings of meetings. A report will be presented to the Council's Corporate & Constitution Committee outlining the potential new ways of working and the resulting changes needed to the Council's procedure rules. This report will be dependant

on the Welsh Government Guidance in relation to the facilitating of hybrid meetings and the requirements for webcasting, which currently, Councils are awaiting on.

- 8.3 Going forward, any member attending a meeting remotely (“remote attendee”) must, when they are speaking, be able to be seen and heard by the members who are attending the meeting at the place where the meeting is held (“members in actual attendance”) and the remote attendee must, in turn, be able to see and hear those in actual attendance. In addition, a remote attendee must be able to be seen and heard by, and in turn see and hear any members of the public entitled to attend the meeting and who exercise a right to speak at the meeting. If there is more than one remote location, all the members attending remotely must be able to hear – but not necessarily see – the other remote attendees.
- 8.4 Practicalities surrounding confidential, or “exempt” issues in consideration at a meeting – as defined in Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 – will need to be considered. It would be important to ensure that there are no members of the public at remote locations able to hear or see the proceedings during discussions of such confidential items. Any member in remote attendance who failed to disclose that there were in fact persons present who were not so entitled would be in breach of their Code of Conduct responsibilities.
- 8.5 The Council will have to build into its Council Procedure Rules arrangements to provide for voting to take place simultaneously at the main and remote location(s). It is suggested for all hybrid meetings Members utilise the voting app that will be developed within the Members Portal. Council Procedure Rules will need to cover this issue so that chairs of meetings are aware of the correct procedure to follow.

9 MEMBERS WELLBEING

- 9.1 Attending meetings virtually brings with it many benefits for Members, allowing them the flexibility to attend meetings while balancing different priorities with work / home or additional Councillor duties. The ability to attend meetings virtually will play an important role in promoting greater diversity of representation on the Council. However, it can often lead to both Members and Officers being in front of visual display screens for prolonged periods over the course of a day.
- 9.2 As we seek to embed the positive aspects of virtual working and the progress we have made over the last twelve months, it is important to recognise how our meetings operate and the importance of time – management, which needs to be considered as part of any virtual or hybrid approach. The Welsh Government has commissioned proposals to reconsider how democratic processes and procedures might operate consistently across Wales in a digital-first way.

- 9.3 It is often the case that Council meetings within RCT and some other meetings of the Council can exceed the 3-hour meeting duration. To ensure the wellbeing of Members and officers during meetings, especially in relation to screen time for those attending virtually, it is suggested that the Presiding Officer / Chair shall have the discretion to call an adjournment at an appropriate time in order to facilitate a 10-minute comfort break. In accordance with the Council's Display Screen equipment policy short frequent breaks should be taken from visual display equipment and if possible, breaks should be taken away from a workstation to allow the user to stand up, move about and/or change posture. Such breaks would ensure the wellbeing of all Members in attendance. Although this practice is undertaken informally for Council meetings, a change to the Council constitution would enforce these wellbeing breaks going forward.
- 9.4 In addition, to try to manage the duration of meetings it is proposed that timings are placed against agenda items to promote appropriate time-management and afford appropriate priority to each business matter. This approach is already facilitated at other levels of government including the Welsh Parliament and UK Parliament. This is also the case in other Welsh local authorities. It is envisaged that this method would assist with agenda setting, to ensure agendas are not overloaded with reports and also assist with the focus of debate. Any time limits on agenda items may only be extended at the discretion of the Presiding Officer / Chair. This proposal will be considered by the Constitution & Corporate Governance Committee later in the month.

10 **TRAINING.**

- 10.1 Members have taken forward training in respect of the zoom platform to assist them in undertaking virtual meetings. Future training will need to be taken forward on the equipment within the Council Chamber, when safe to do so, to allow for hybrid meetings to take place.
- 10.2 Training to Chairs and Vice Chairs of Committees will also be provided to assist in the chairing of hybrid meetings.
- 10.3 Once developed, training will also be provided on the voting app that will be available for Members to utilise in the Members Portal.

11 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 The provision of a webcasting service would promote democracy and encourage public engagement. By removing potential barriers for members of the public to attend meetings at the chamber, webcasting opens up opportunities for wider public engagement and transparency. The aspect of hybrid and virtual meetings also promotes the democracy agenda, allowing the undertaking of Council business by Members to be more accessible and manageable.

12 **CONSULTATION**

- 12.1 The opportunities offered by web-casting have been considered by members as part of the business of full Council, Cabinet, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, the Corporate Governance and Constitution Committee, formal meetings of Chairs & Vice-Chairs.
- 12.2 Promoting public engagement in the democratic processes, including webcasting, has also been discussed in the recent introduced meeting between the Chief Executive and Political Group Leaders, which the Head of Democratic Services attends.

13. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 13.1 The associated funding to deliver these improvements were included as part of the Council's 2020/21 Budget, following support provided previously by the Democratic Services Committee. Additional funding has also been sought from Welsh Government in respect of further advancements with webcasting equipment as outlined within the report.

14. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1 The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 outlines a mandatory requirement for Local Authorities to provide a webcasting service.
- 14.2 The implementation of webcasting will require amendments to the Council's Constitution. Therefore a report will be presented to the Corporate Governance and Constitution Committee for consideration, before endorsement by Council.

15. LINKS TO CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT.

- 15.1 The provision of webcasting would link to the Corporate Plan priorities with particular reference to 'living within our means' and an 'efficient and effective Council', ensuring transparency with our decision making process for the benefits of our residents.
- 15.2 Ensuring that there are greater opportunities for public engagement through webcasting links to the Wellbeing of Future Generations goals of a more equal Wales and a Wales of cohesive communities. This proposal would further support the ability of this council to involve communities in key decisions.

16 CONCLUSION

- 16.1 Through the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 Councils will be legally required to webcast meetings to strengthen local democracy and encourage public participation.
- 16.2 The provision of webcasting, has received cross-party support in the Council for the reasons set out, in particular for supporting positive engagement with the public going forward.

- 16.3 Further work will be necessary to consider amendments to the Council's Rules & Procedures and wider constitution to facilitate the introduction of webcasting into the democratic business of the Council.
- 16.4 A report on the way forward with future Committee meetings will also need to be reported to Cabinet and full Council.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

MAY 2021

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

ACCESS & ENGAGEMENT IMPROVEMENTS WITHIN DEMOCRACY



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

10th MAY 2021

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

INTERIM REPORT OF THE DIVERSITY IN DEMOCRACY WORKING GROUP

1. PURPOSE FOR THE REPORT

To seek Members agreement to approve the interim report presented by the Diversity in Democracy working group and the recommendations contained within.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. To consider the work of the Diversity in Democracy Working Group as outlined within its interim report
2. To approve the recommendations of the working group as outlined below:

Recommendation 1.

- To work collaboratively with the YEPS Service, Schools and Colleges in the run up to the 2022 Local Government Election to further promote and educate the importance of the youth vote and the democratic process. Utilising the opportunities for engagement and awareness raising and the educating of a 'role of a Councillor' through the welsh bacalaureate and citizenship lessons within schools.

Outcome: Young people are better educated in the democratic processes, how democracy relates to the provision of Services and the role of a Councillor. Young people have an understanding on the importance of voting.

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Recommendation 2

- To review the effectiveness of the voting awareness raising campaigns following the Senedd Elections and to build upon these campaigns ahead of the Local Government Elections 2022, ensuring wider partnerships arrangements are taken forward to allow engagement with wider audiences.

Outcome: To establish the percentage of first time youth voters who took part in the Senedd Elections and to build upon this number for future elections.

Recommendation 3

- To review the Council Websites 'Democracy pages' to promote the role of a Councillor with details and videos of local Members, promote how the work of a Councillor links in with everyday services taken forward by the Council and provide details and links of the different tiers of government to assist in increasing the understanding of democracy within RCT and Wales. To ensure that the page demonstrates the features available to Members – such as translation facilities, audio equipment within the Chamber, Hybrid meeting opportunities and promoting reasonable adjustments to prevent any perceived barriers for any future candidate

Outcome: Promoting and educating in respect of the role of a Councillor and the democratic process. Promoting the opportunities available to reduce any anticipated barriers

Recommendation 4

- To take forward the positive relations and opportunities to work with Town and Community Council's to ensure links with 'Democracy pages' are promoted on own website / social media platforms and for similar local 'role of a councillor' to be developed and promoted.

Outcome: Promoting and educating in respect of the role of a Councillor and the democratic process. Promoting the opportunities available to reduce any anticipated barriers

Recommendation 5

- To promote the remunerations and allowances that are available to Members on the Council's website and to candidates standing for Election by linking with the Council's Democracy page

Outcome: Promoting the opportunities available to reduce any anticipated barriers

Recommendation 6

- To promote the Councils democracy pages and the role of a Councillor to established groups, such as School Governors who are often already active within their local communities and could potentially look to become candidates at a future election.

Outcome: Promoting the opportunities available to reduce any anticipated barriers

Recommendation 7

- To liaise with the Council's **Employment, Education & Training** team to establish the opportunity for a 'Democracy stall' at a future Council Career Fair to further promote the role of a Councillor and how democracy works within RCT and Wales.

Outcome: Promoting the role of a Councillor and the opportunities available to reduce any anticipated barriers

Recommendation 8

- Members welcome the introduction of a Public Participation Strategy and welcome the opportunity to drive forward further public engagement in democracy by seeking the public's view on items for consideration at scrutiny meetings, ensuring work programmes are dealing with issues that matter to residents of the County Borough. As part of the duty of the Act and to engage the public in local democracy the Council will need to provide a constitution guide to be developed and promoted on the Council website which the working group also welcomes.

Outcome: Improved public engagement to better inform the democratic process

Recommendation 9

- To continue to address the works needed at the Council Chamber to ensure that the Chamber is Fully accessible.

Outcome: Fully accessible to reduce any barriers for any disabled Member

Recommendation 10

- Following the easing of lock down restrictions and when safe to do so take forward the opportunity for the promotion of 'open invites' to the Chamber for potential candidates so they can learn more about the role of a Councillor and work within a Council Chamber.

Outcome – Engagement opportunities and Promotion of the role of a Councillor and the work of the Council

Recommendation 11

- That the Member induction programme provides all Members with the skills and knowledge base to undertake their role. Ensure that a rolling programme of training is developed for each Member throughout their term of office and to provide the opportunity for mentoring for Newly Elected Members when requested.

Outcome – Members feel confident in performing their duties and have a wide knowledge base

Recommendation 12

- To undertake a diversity survey with Members which will provide a benchmark for future elections and allow the Council Business unit to review the support / barriers that may have been experienced by a Member during their term of office. The undertaking of such a review will help to deliver a positive and diverse environment for future Members to undertake their roles.

Outcomes -Provide a benchmark of the diversity of Members within RCT

Recommendation 13

- To ensure Members are advised of the support available to them through the Council Business unit and the Head of Democratic Services – providing contact details at the earliest opportunity during the Member Induction. Ensuring Members are aware of the ‘Open Door’ policy of the Head of Democratic Services.

Outcome – Members feel supported during their role

Outcome Measure – Members Annual Survey

Recommendation 14

- To consider introducing a ‘statement of understanding’ for Members outlining their duties as a Councillor including the need to have mutual respect within the Council Chamber.

Outcome – A demonstration of mutual respect to other people with varying political opinions, show of working together for the benefit of its communities.

Recommendation 15

- That the Members Portal is utilised to provide Members with bitesize’ information in respect of ‘diversity within RCT’ to assist Members in their understanding and promotion of diversity within their wards and across the County Borough.

Outcome – Supporting Members to deliver for the needs of the communities

Recommendation 16

- To seek the participation of Group Leaders to champion the diversity expectations within the selection processes of their political parties and to encourage Group Leaders to promote the advice available to future candidates or individuals considering standing for office at the earliest opportunity.

Outcome – Opportunities for a more diverse range of candidates selected

3. INTERIM REPORT

- 3.1 At the Democratic Services Committee meeting on the 1st October 2020, Members considered the written statement from the Minister for Housing and Local Government on [phase 2 of the diversity in democracy programme](#). Following consideration of the statement and the action plan outlined within, Members resolved to take forward a working group to consider aspects of the plan in respect of diversity.
- 3.2 The Working Group consisted of:
County Borough Councillor M Adams (Chair); County Borough Councillor H Fychan (Vice Chair), County Borough Councillor M Webber (Equalities Champion), County Borough Councillor J Bonetto, County Borough Councillor J Edwards, County Borough Councillor E Stephens, County Borough Councillor S Powderhill, County Borough Councillor L Walker.
Community Councillor J. Turner Llanharan Community Council.
- 3.3 At its inaugural meeting on the 26th January 2021 the group confirmed its terms of reference and scope of its work.
- 3.4 The working Group have already identified a number of recommendations through its work done to date, although it is clear that their work will continue up to the Local Government Elections 2022 to ensure that a more diverse democratic environment is created within Rhondda Cynon Taf.
- 3.5 Producing this interim report for consideration by the Democratic Services Committee allows the recommendations already identified by the Working Group to be actioned.
- 3.6 A number of the recommendations identified by the working group involve awareness raising opportunities to future candidates, therefore the sooner such work commences the sooner such engagement with a wider range of diverse candidates can begin.
- 3.7 At its meeting on the 28th April, the working group agreed its interim report for consideration at the next meeting of the Democratic Services Committee.

4 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The work of the Diversity working group looks to improve the equality and diversity across the County Borough and the within the local democracy setting. The more representative of society and diverse our Councillors are the better understanding they will have of the needs of the local community and therefore are better equipped at carrying out their duties and responsibilities

5 CONSULTATION

- 5.1 Not applicable.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 6.1 There are no financial implications aligned to the recommendations. The awareness raising opportunities can be delivered through platforms already available to the Council.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 outlines a number of duties placed on Local Authorities in respect of the diversity agenda.

8. LINKS TO CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT.

- 8.1 The work of a Councillor is fundamental to the Council's Corporate plan, as Councillors are the mouthpiece for the communities that they serve.
- 8.2 Ensuring that there are greater opportunities for a more diverse democracy across RCT links to the Wellbeing of Future Generations goals of a more equal Wales and a Wales of cohesive communities.

9 CONCLUSION

- 9.1 Trying to achieve a diverse culture is challenging and the working 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.
- 9.2 As a Council we need to ensure that any perceived barriers are eradicated and instead celebrate and promote the rewarding experiences of becoming a Councillor.
- 9.2 If endorsed, the recommendations of the working group will look to be implemented as soon as possible, due to the need to try to engage as many potential candidates in the Local Government 2022 elections.

DIVERSITY IN DEMOCRACY

**The Interim Update Report of the Diversity in Democracy Working Group.
2021.**

Chairs Foreword – County Borough Councillor M Adams



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. If you value each person's differences, regardless of age, disability, ethnic background, gender identify, religion or belief, political persuasion, or sexual orientation then you are allowing each person to contribute their unique experiences, which can have an extremely positive impact on the work of a Council as a whole and the people that we serve. The more representative of society and diverse our Councillors are the better understanding they will have of the needs of the local community and therefore are better equipped at carrying out their duties and responsibilities.

However, trying to achieve this diverse culture is challenging and as a working group we 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. We need to ensure that any perceived barriers are eradicated and instead celebrate and promote the rewarding experiences of becoming a Councillor. We need to demonstrate the flexibilities of the Council to allow for a work life balance, which will further be enhanced through the potential for conducting hybrid meetings. We need to promote the remuneration available to Elected Members and the training opportunities and support provided, such as a carers allowance, so that any future candidate is aware of the support open to them. We need to engage with our communities and groups to educate and promote the democratic process to make it engaging to residents, who may feel inspired to attend and one day become that Councillor.

We recognise that Town and Community Councils provide a vital connection for communities into decision making and we need to work with our Community and Town Council colleagues to engage with potential candidates and support their elected members. It was therefore important as a working group looking at this issue that we had a Community Council representative as a member of the working group.

The work of the group is fast moving and already actions have been outlined as a response to the provisions in the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021 that will take forward the diversity agenda and the recent recommendations of the WLGA Council report. Our work will be ongoing until the 2022 Local Government Elections as we work to ensure that the Council achieves all it can to push the diversity agenda and develop a more diverse democratic profile. However, there are many things outside of our control and work will

need to be taken forward in conjunction with political parties and other stakeholders to push the agenda forward.

This interim report allows us to compile the work achieved to date and the recommendations we feel are necessary to positively start the engagement and educating of the democratic process within Rhondda Cynon Taf. We need to act now to reach out to potential candidates. We also need to continue our momentum of engaging with the youth voters through the voting awareness raising campaigns that have been taken forward for the Senedd elections as our young people are the mouthpiece and potential Councillors of the future.

Can I thank all the Members of the working group for their valuable contributions, especially my Vice Chair, Councillor Heledd Fychan. I would also like to thank officers for their attendance, especially the Council's Diversity and Inclusion Manager, representatives from the Youth Engagement & Participation Service and the Head of Democratic Services and his team.

Cllr. M.Adams.

Diversity in Democracy.

It is important for democratic institutions and public services to reflect the diversity of the population they represent and serve. A more diverse democracy means decision-makers with broader life-experiences and a greater understanding of the challenges faced by wider society. A diverse and more inclusive democracy leads to better engagement with individuals and communities, in turn leading to greater levels of confidence and trust and in turn better decision making and better governance. It is important that the people who make decisions on behalf of the people are in tune with and representative of their local communities, unfortunately this is not always the case.

The diversity agenda has been growing across all aspects of public life and it is important that we as a Council are committed to increasing diversity, which includes tackling the barriers which prevent an individual's active participation in local democracy.

The Welsh Government have been focusing heavily on the diversity agenda and following the evaluation of phase one of the Welsh Government's Diversity in Democracy work a number of key recommendations and actions have been derived, with such actions being addressed through the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. Further work by the WLGA Council has also strengthened the impetus for diversity actions to be considered and implemented now to allow any improvement in diversity within democracy for the Local Government Elections in 2022 and beyond.

In light of this work undertaken by the Welsh Government and the importance seen by not only the Democratic Services Committee but the Council as a whole of achieving diversity in democracy, the Democratic Services Committee established a working group to look in detail at the proposed actions that have come forward from the above mentioned evaluation, the opportunities and engagement which would benefit the future of diversity in advance of the 2022 local government elections to encourage participation as a principal authority and with both Community and Town Councils across the County Borough.

Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference agreed by the working group at its inaugural meeting are detailed below

"The Working Group will:

- Review the actions outlined within the Welsh Government Phase 2 Action Plan in relation to Diversity in Democracy in order to consider proposals to support these objectives;
- Consider what the Council can do to raise awareness and promotion of the role of Councillors, to reduce potential barriers to becoming a Councillor (County Borough / Community / Town) with the aim of encouraging future candidates from diverse backgrounds to come forward for Election.

Proposed Outcome from undertaking the review:

- To increase diversity within democracy at the local Government Elections 2022 and any future election.
- To reduce the barriers to attracting a more diverse pool of candidates
- To promote and raise awareness of the role of a Councillor and the work undertaken
- To consider Officer proposals to engage and support potential candidates
- To consider and comment upon engagement with 16 – 17 year old's in local government democracy.
- To consider proposals for the future training / information provided to Councillors in respect of diversity
- To inform discussions with Group Leaders ahead of the 2022 Local Government Elections

Membership of the Group

The membership of the group consisted of:

County Borough Councillor M Adams (Chair); County Borough Councillor H Fychan (Vice Chair), County Borough Councillor M Webber (Equalities Champion), County Borough Councillor J Bonetto, County Borough Councillor J Edwards, County Borough Councillor S Stephens, County Borough Councillor S Powderhill, County Borough Councillor L Walker.

Community Councillor J. Turner Llanharan Community Council.

Is there Diversity in Democracy? – Current Position.

People assume ‘diversity’ relates to the sex of a person or their ethnicity and this is generally how diversity is gauged, however *Diversity is more than gender or ethnic diversity; it is about different voices, not just different characteristics of people.*

There is no County Borough Council in Wales in which both sexes are equally represented. More often, women make up between 20 and 30% and sometimes less. The average age of councillors in Wales is around 60 and has remained stubbornly within that range for many years. The number of non-white councillors is miniscule even in areas of Wales with relatively large numbers of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic citizens.

The 2017 local elections saw small improvements in gender balance across Wales: 29% of all candidates were women (up by 1% from 2012); 28% of councillors elected were women (up 2% from 2012) and 32% of all newly elected members were women. The gender balance of cabinet members also remains low and lower than the proportion of women councillors at 27.5%. The age profile of councillors did not change significantly remaining proportionately older than the general adult population (47% of councillors were aged 60 years or older) and a higher proportion of councillors were retired (31%). Only 1.8% of councillors were black or ethnic minorities compared to 4.7% for the Welsh population. 16% of candidates and 11% of councillors stated that they had a disability, and there remain a range of challenges for disabled people participating in the democratic process. The report on the Local Government Candidates Survey 2017 provides further information about both candidates and elected councillors.

Diversity within Democracy RCT?

There is currently no quantified profile on the diversity of Members within the Council membership, which is something the working group are looking to address. However, when looking at the gender balance within the democratic structure there is the following:

- Of the Council’s current 73 Elected Members (2 vacant seats as at April 2021) **39** are **Male** and **34** are **Female**
- RCT Cabinet: 5 Men / 4 Women
- Chairs/Vice Chairs: 18 Women have been appointed as either a Chair/Vice-Chair
15 Men have been appointed as either a Chair/Vice-Chair

When looking at the age profile of Members it is recognised that the majority of Member are above 60.

Age Group	No. Of Members
18 – 30:	4
31-40:	8
41 – 50:	12
51-60:	19
60+:	30

In light of the above information RCT Council favours well in comparison to many other Local Authorities with its gender balance ratio. However, there is still lots the Council must do to attract other diverse candidates in coming forward and engaging within the democratic process.

What are the barriers to democracy?

The role of a councillor is stimulating, rewarding and regarded as a privilege by many. The role however is a challenging and demanding one and is not one that should be considered lightly; it is a complex and demanding role, which requires a significant time commitment and can therefore have implications on people's family lives and work-life balance. It can impact on a professional career and on an individual's income and future financial security. It is also a role that can expose individuals (and their families) to regular personal criticism, insults and even threats, particularly through social media.

A number of studies have been compiled to look at the barriers to democracy with such studies highlighting:

- Child care and other caring responsibilities
- Time-commitment and meeting times
- Public criticism and online abuse
- Public's understanding of local government and the role and responsibilities of councillors and the Council itself is limited therefore portraying a political and organisational culture
- Remuneration and Employment
- Role models and incumbency

Members of the Group agreed with the above barriers and also considered the following as potential barriers within RCT:

- Disability access
- Technical / Digital Barriers
- Language Barriers
- Support and guidance for independent candidates

Members of the group spoke of their personal barriers to becoming a Councillor and it was considered important that such examples are highlighted to potential candidates to illustrate how those barriers can be broken down and the rewards that are brought by pursuing the role of a Councillor.

How can we improve? – *The Work and Findings of the Working Group.*

The Working Group have been focused with their work and are clear that their work will be an ongoing process to ensure that a more diverse democratic environment is created within Rhondda Cynon Taf. Their work has included aspects of awareness raising for the forthcoming Senedd Elections and the longer-term work that is needed for the Local Government Elections in 2022. It is important to emphasise that the Working Group were aware that some aspects of the diversity agenda were outside its remit and that of the Council and such areas needed to be taken forward by political parties and other stakeholder groups. The Working Group do however plan to meet with Group Leaders as part of their work to promote the actions needed to be taken forward, due to the important role that they play. The Working Group will look to seek the participation of Group Leaders to champion the diversity expectations within the selection processes of their political parties and also assist by promoting the advice available to future candidate or individuals considering standing for office at the earliest opportunity.

The Working Group were also conscious of the need to include Community and Town Councils within its work as it appreciates the role fellow colleagues play within the communities that they serve.

Awareness Raising – the Right to Vote.

Members felt it was crucial that as part of their work they look to promote the right to vote to the newly enfranchised 16 -17 year olds, who for the first time will be able to vote in the Senedd Elections and will be able to vote in the 2022 Local Government Elections Wales. Members also addressed the need to focus not only on the youth vote but also widen the campaign to engage with any disenfranchised voters. Awareness raising campaigns have also been undertaken by the Welsh Government and Electoral Commission and such materials have been promoted to youth groups within RCT via the YEPS service, as well as the service taking forward its own awareness raising campaign.

Welsh Government HWB resources – [Vote 16](#) ; [PleidLais /Voice2Vote](#) ; [Raise yourvoice](#)

The Welsh Government provided numerous resource materials to promote and help educate new young voters. The Voice2Vote resources pack developed by the Welsh Government included online resources aimed at young people aged 13 and over in Wales which brought to life why young people should vote. The vote16 resources provided online videos and access to events and activities that could be undertaken to again educate young people on the importance of voting and also how to vote. Dissemination of these materials were provided to YEPs and work by the Council was being undertaken in respect of dissemination to Schools. Due to the Covid Pandemic and the lockdown restrictions and closure of schools the dissemination within schools was not as productive as previously anticipated. However, going forward, with the easing of restrictions it is anticipated that future work with schools can be taken forward ahead of the Local Government Elections. The Working Group were keen for opportunities to still be made available for such engagement and awareness raising through the welsh baccalaureate and citizenship lessons.

Electoral Commission - [Welcome to your Vote](#)

The Electoral Commission have created a new set of educational resources for newly enfranchised 16 and 17 year olds in Wales, who are preparing to cast their votes for the first time. The tools, designed for use in classrooms and with youth groups across Wales, were intended to help young people who are voting for the first time at the Senedd elections. The handbooks, videos and quizzes cover three key topics – what you can vote for, campaigning and how to vote, - and aim to demystify the voting process for young voters.

YEPs – #Isityourfirsttime Voting Campaign.

The working group were pleased to welcome representatives from the YEPs service who advised of the positive engagement undertaken to date in respect of the awareness raising within young people in the County Borough on their rights to vote and the importance and impact of their vote. Their campaign 'isityourfirsttime' which was led by the young people has been pushed through a number of platforms via the service (facebook, twitter, snapchat, Instagram, ticktock), including use of the YEPs tv live (an online programme dedicated to the voting campaign). Members were advised that the youth Members were the mouthpiece to promoting the campaign to their peers and positive engagement had been received. In addition youth workers based within schools and colleges were also assisting with promoting the campaign message.

Youth Decide – RCT Council Campaign.

The Council's Communications Team in discussion with the working group developed a number of social media infographics highlighting the importance of the youth vote which was disseminated through the Council's social media platforms. A social media video entitled 'Don't leave yourself on mute' was also taken forward. It is suggested that the work done to date on these campaign materials be reviewed following the Senedd Election to ensure they are fit for purpose for the 2022 Local Elections. It is anticipated that a collaborated approach could be taken forward with Schools and YEPs to assist in the development of the campaign materials to ensure young people can relate to the messages within.

(Details and examples of the social media posts can be found in appendix 1 of the report.)

Diversity Action Plan – Council Driven Actions.

In September 2020, the Minister for Housing and Local Government provided an update on the 'Phase Two - Diversity in Democracy Programme Action Plan' developed by the Welsh Government. A number of the actions outlined by Welsh Government have been included within the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act and will therefore naturally be taken forward by the Council as part of the Acts legislative requirements i.e Public Participation Strategy / webcasting requirements / hybrid meetings. The Working Group however utilised this key document and identified what actions would be driven by Welsh Government and those that could be taken forward by the Council to improve democracy within the Council. The actions outlined by Members resulted in a detailed 'Council Driven Action Plan' which resulted in a number of recommendations that could be taken forward in the first instance. Such areas highlighted by Members included work on the Council website to include videos and details of the 'life of a councillor', work to be taken forward in the Council Chamber to ensure accessibility and promotion of translation facilities. Another suggestion by Members

was the promotion of the Role of a Councillor through the RCT jobs fair. Members were keen to promote such advantages and opportunities to promote the work of a Councillor and to prevent any potential barriers that may be perceived by a prospective candidate.

The Action Plan of the Working Group is attached as Appendix 2 of the report.

Diversity & Inclusion Events – The working Group have utilised the knowledge and experience of the Council’s Equalities and Inclusion Manager who has provided details of the diversity and inclusion work of the Council’s Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) team to support the Council in fulfilling its responsibilities under [equalities law](#). This provided much valuable information to the group and it was noted that Elected Members should be proactively involved in the programmes and events supported and promoted by the Council.

Social Media and Standards & Ethics - Disrespectful Behaviour– Members of the group spoke passionately about their role as a Councillor highlighting both the positives and negatives that can come with the role. Often Members are subject to disrespectful behaviour, especially through Social Media. It was highlighted that further training would be taken forward with Members in respect of social media, providing Members with what ‘was and wasn’t’ acceptable behaviour for Members to contend with. It was also noted that on occasions, in the heat of debate the Council Chamber could potentially see moments of disrespectful behaviour towards Members of different political persuasions. Members felt strongly that such behaviour was unnecessary and could often be seen as a barrier to promoting the role of a Councillor. It was discussed that the open-door policy of the Head of Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer needed to be further promoted so that Members felt assured that they could report any such behaviour. A mutual respect policy or a statement of understanding could be developed for all Members to sign up too outlining their duties as a Councillor including the need to have mutual respect within the Council Chamber was suggested as a way forward.

Members Support – Ensuring Member’s mental health is more important now than ever as Members balance the demands of work life balance and their role as a Councillor during the Covid Pandemic and as the Council and residents of RCT recover from it . New demands have been placed on Members as they learn new ways of working to ensure they can fulfil all of their roles as a Councillor and are still able to meet the needs of their constituents. Further promotion of the ‘Time to Talk’ campaign to Members and the opportunities and support that Members can access through the Council’s Occupational Health Service needs to be taken forward for Elected Members. Working Group Members also discussed how the promotion of such services should be promoted to future candidates, and as picked up during their work in the Action Plan, the opportunities for reasonable adjustments should also be highlighted.

Members Training – Members of the Working Group are aware of the amendments being made to the Induction Curriculum Framework for Candidates and New Members in Wales for the Local Elections 2022 which is being developed by Local Authorities working with the WLGA. This framework outlines the curriculum for the induction of members in Wales leading up to and following the local elections in 2022. It sets out the suggested local and national

activities to support potential and new members. It is not designed to be prescriptive as the needs of each Council and Councillor are different. It should however provide a guide for what should be considered when developing local programmes. The Framework is being designed to fit with the *Development Framework for Members*, a competency framework for members which provides more information about the subjects which should be covered in both induction and ongoing member development. It also fits with the *Wales Charter for Member Support and Development* and takes account of the legislative requirements for members including those set out in the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 and the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

Following the delivery of an induction programme, further development for councillors should be informed by an annual personal development reviews (PDRs). Members of the Working Group were keen for aspects of diversity to be included in the framework and the Induction programme for RCT that would further be developed for all Members following the 2022 Local Elections. Members are keen for 'Unconscious Bias' to be taken forward as a training module as well as training on the menopause and social media. In addition the group discussed Members receiving timely 'bitesize' information in respect of 'diversity within RCT' which could be presented through the Members portal to assist Members in their understanding and promotion of diversity within their wards and across the County Borough.

Future Open days – Members felt it would be beneficial to take forward open day events at the Council Chamber (when covid restrictions allows) to allow potential candidates to have a feel for the Council Chamber and to learn more about the role of a Councillor and work within a Council Chamber. With the new ways of working Members will be able to attend Council meetings remotely or through a hybrid setting, which allows Members further flexibility and balance of other commitments. The provision of webcasting and the live streaming of meetings will also help to promote public participation in the democratic process and hopefully engage with future candidates. Such webcasting recordings provide a powerful demonstration of democracy and part of the role of a councillor and raise awareness of the work of the Council.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Through its initial findings the Working Group have developed a range of interim recommendations which will assist in promoting the diversity agenda, which they put forward to the Democratic Services for consideration. There is still further work for the Working Group to address, but it is felt timely that the work done to date is reported on and the suggested recommendations are considered to allow for them to be actioned if agreed. To assist in the Committees deliberations the recommendations also seek to illustrate the potential outcome such a recommendation would have so that its impact could be easily demonstrated and measured if successful.

Recommendation 1.

- To work collaboratively with the YEPS Service, Schools and Colleges in the run up to the 2022 Local Government Election to further promote and educate the importance of the youth vote and the democratic process. Utilising the opportunities for engagement and awareness raising and the educating of a 'role of a Councillor' through the welsh baccalaureate and citizenship lessons within schools.

Outcome: Young people are better educated in the democratic processes, how democracy relates to the provision of Services and the role of a Councillor. Young people have an understanding on the importance of voting.

Outcome Measure: Survey of young people following such engagement / Registration drive/campaign to increase numbers of 16 and 17 year olds on the register.

Recommendation 2

- To review the effectiveness of the voting awareness raising campaigns following the Senedd Elections and to build upon these campaigns ahead of the Local Government Elections 2022, ensuring wider partnerships arrangements are taken forward to allow engagement with wider audiences.

Outcome: To establish the percentage of first-time youth voters who took part in the Senedd Elections and to build upon this number for future elections.

Outcome Measure: Number of first-time youth voters on the Electoral Register

Recommendation 3

- To review the Council Websites 'Democracy pages' to promote the role of a Councillor with details and videos of local Members, promote how the work of a Councillor links in with everyday services taken forward by the Council and provide details and links of the different tiers of government to assist in increasing the understanding of democracy within RCT and Wales. To ensure that the page demonstrates the features

available to Members – such as translation facilities, audio equipment within the Chamber, Hybrid meeting opportunities and promoting reasonable adjustments to prevent any perceived barriers for any future candidate

Outcome: Promoting and educating in respect of the role of a Councillor and the democratic process. Promoting the opportunities available to reduce any anticipated barriers

Outcome Measure: Website page viewing figures

Recommendation 4

- To take forward the positive relations and opportunities to work with Town and Community Council's to ensure links with 'Democracy pages' are promoted on own website / social media platforms and for similar local 'role of a councillor' to be developed and promoted.

Outcome: Promoting and educating in respect of the role of a Councillor and the democratic process. Promoting the opportunities available to reduce any anticipated barriers

Outcome Measure: Website page viewing figures

Recommendation 5

- To promote the remunerations and allowances that are available to Members on the Council's website and to candidates standing for Election by linking with the Council's Democracy page

Outcome: Promoting the opportunities available to reduce any anticipated barriers

Outcome Measure: Website page viewing figures

Recommendation 6

- To promote the Councils democracy pages and the role of a Councillor to established groups, such as School Governors who are often already active within their local communities and could potentially look to become candidates at a future election.

Outcome: Promoting the opportunities available to reduce any anticipated barriers

Outcome Measure: Website page viewing figures, survey of candidates.

Recommendation 7

- To liaise with the Council's Employment, Education & Training team to establish the opportunity for a 'Democracy stall' at a future Council Career Fair to further promote the role of a Councillor and how democracy works within RCT and Wales.

Outcome: Promoting the role of a Councillor and the opportunities available to reduce any anticipated barriers

Outcome Measure: Number of people who engage at the event

Recommendation 8

- Members welcome the introduction of a Public Participation Strategy and welcome the opportunity to drive forward further public engagement in democracy by seeking the public's view on items for consideration at scrutiny meetings, ensuring work programmes are dealing with issues that matter to residents of the County Borough. As part of the duty of the Act and to engage the public in local democracy the Council will need to provide a constitution guide to be developed and promoted on the Council website which the working group also welcomes.

Outcome: Improved public engagement to better inform the democratic process

Outcome Measure: webcasting viewing figures / more public engagement within the democratic process

Recommendation 9

- To continue to address the works needed at the Council Chamber to ensure that the Chamber is Fully accessible.

Outcome: Fully accessible to reduce any barriers for any disabled Member

Outcome Measure – Disabled Participants (members of the public) / Elected Members are able to engage at meetings in the Chamber

Recommendation 10

- Following the easing of lock down restrictions and when safe to do so take forward the opportunity for the promotion of 'open invites' to the Chamber for potential candidates so they can learn more about the role of a Councillor and work within a Council Chamber.

Outcome – Engagement opportunities and Promotion of the role of a Councillor and the work of the Council

Outcome Measure - Attendance at the event

Recommendation 11

- That the Member induction programme provides all Members with the skills and knowledge base to undertake their role. Ensure that a rolling programme of training is developed for each Member throughout their term of office and to provide the opportunity for mentoring for Newly Elected Members when requested.

Outcome – Members feel confident in performing their duties and have a wide knowledge base

Outcome Measure – Members annual survey / Members PDR process

Recommendation 12

- To undertake a diversity survey with Members which will provide a benchmark for future elections and allow the Council Business unit to review the support / barriers that may have been experienced by a Member during their term of office. The undertaking of such a review will help to deliver a positive and diverse environment for future Members to undertake their roles.

Outcomes -Provide a benchmark of the diversity of Members within RCT

Outcome Measure – Survey responses

Recommendation 13

- To ensure Members are advised of the support available to them through the Council Business unit and the Head of Democratic Services – providing contact details at the earliest opportunity during the Member Induction. Ensuring Members are aware of the 'Open Door' policy of the Head of Democratic Services.

Outcome – Members feel supported during their role

Outcome Measure – Members Annual Survey

Recommendation 14

- To consider introducing a 'statement of understanding' for Members outlining their duties as a Councillor including the need to have mutual respect within the Council Chamber.

Outcome – A demonstration of mutual respect to other people with varying political opinions, show of working together for the benefit of its communities.

Outcome Measure – Number of formal or informal complaints received in respect of Members behaviour

Recommendation 15

- That the Members Portal is utilised to provide Members with bitesize' information in respect of 'diversity within RCT' to assist Members in their understanding and promotion of diversity within their wards and across the County Borough.

Outcome – Supporting Members to deliver for the needs of the communities

Outcome Measure – Members annual survey

Recommendation 16

- To seek the participation of Group Leaders to champion the diversity expectations within the selection processes of their political parties and to encourage Group Leaders to promote the advice available to future candidates or individuals considering standing for office at the earliest opportunity.

Outcome – Opportunities for a more diverse range of candidates selected

Outcome Measure - Survey of candidates standing for election.

Voting Awareness Raising Campaign.

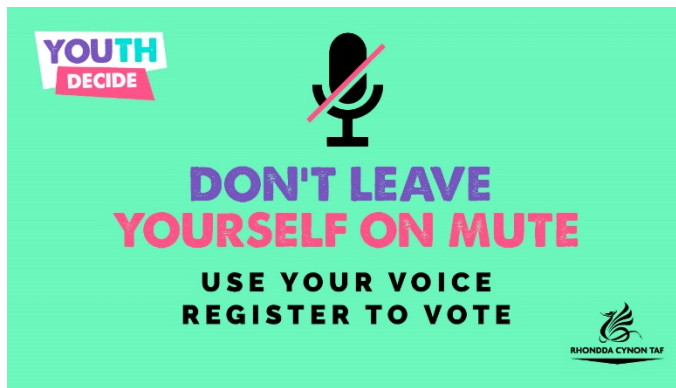
RCT Youth Vote Campaign.

Video Campaign 'Don't leave yourself on mute' - <https://youtu.be/sHVJuNbwM5U> (english)

<https://youtu.be/sHVJuNbwM5U> (cymraeg)

Social Media Posts





YEPs Service - Voting Awareness Campaign.

Facebook and Instagram platforms: Search [#yepsisthisyourfirsttime](#)

Other videos shared



4 reasons to vote -
english.MOV



4 reasons to vote -
welsh.MOV



history of the senedd
- english.MOV



History of the senedd
- welsh.MOV



How to vote -
english.MOV



How to vote -
welsh.MOV



Intro to voting -
English.MP4



Intro to voting -
Cymraeg.MP4



Register to vote -
english.MOV



Register to vote -
welsh.MOV

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Action Plan - Council Focused

The plan has been drafted to illustrate the Welsh government overall objectives and then a combination of Welsh Government derived actions for Local Authorities to drive forward and actions that have been proposed following Members comments.

Objective 1: Increase understanding of different tiers of government in Wales, the role each plays in society and how they operate.	
Potential Actions for the Council	Proposed Way Forward
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dissemination of Welsh Government educational resources to accompany the extension of the franchise to 16 and 17 year olds in Wales • Guidance and workshop setting with 16 and 17 year olds regarding Democracy in Wales • Social Media campaign to engage with youth voters • Review the 'Council Business' page on the Council website providing information on how the Council works and the different tiers of government. 	<p>Resources have been developed by WG and have been disseminated through YEPs. Work is now being undertaken with dissemination to Schools.</p> <p>There is the opportunity to establish whether the materials could have a web-based platform within these youth areas, such as using the Wicked website other social media platforms?</p> <p>Opportunity to link to the Council web page of 'becoming a Councillor' promoting the educational resources that are available.</p> <p>Workshops have already been taken forward through YEPS through a variety of different platforms promoting the extension of the voting franchise. Such engagement is to be taken forward with schools although this has been delayed due to the Covid pandemic. The Head of Democratic Services and Consultation and Engagement Officer have recently met with the Director of Education & Inclusion to discuss the best way forward with potential democracy events being taken forward via zoom / team platform with schools by consultation team.</p> <p>There is a need to take forward a social media campaign to engage with youth voters, raising awareness of the importance of voting and how democracy can affect their lives. Work is currently being undertaken by the Council Communications team, with the campaign being piloted with youth groups to test its effectiveness. The campaign will be brought before Members at the next meeting of the group. A need to focus on the wider opportunities with the campaigns and not focus solely on young people. Working and linking</p>

	<p>with wider partnerships going forward with such engagement and awareness raising could achieve this wider audience.</p> <p>The Council website holds details of 'Council Business', Councillor details and election results however there is opportunity to review this area and provide details and links of the different tiers of government to assist in increasing the understanding of democracy.</p> <p>To take forward a review and evaluation following the forthcoming Senedd elections to establish if the awareness raising campaigns had been successful and areas for further improvements.</p>
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<p>Objective 2: Increase engagement with the public to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • raise awareness of the role and activities of the Council provide clarity about how the public can better inform local decision making; • build greater community cohesion through a greater presence at community events, creating and building upon community networks. 	
Potential Actions	Proposed Way Forward
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting the role of a Councillor and the work of the Council • Publication of Council's constitution and constitution guide to increase public engagement • Produce a Public Participation Strategy • Conducting Hybrid Council meetings and webcasting at the Council Chamber to promote local decision making. 	<p>The WLGA are currently revising the content of the 'become a Councillor' website to include videos and pen portraits of Members across different welsh authorities. This revised content should be completed by March 2021. There is opportunity to promote the 'Become a Councillor website' by linking with the Council webpage. In addition there is an opportunity to take forward a local 'RCT Councillors' video message with Members highlighting the positives of a role of a Councillor identifying potential barriers that might have been identified to standing for election and the opportunities to overcome such barriers. There is a need to promote how the work of a Councillor links in with everyday services taken forward by the Council and again there is the opportunity for this to be demonstrated through the 'Council' webpages, with this in turn being illustrated during the youth engagement sessions to strengthen the connection of how people's votes can impact on the work of the Council. Following the Covid regulations, meetings of the Council are undertaken virtually and recordings of which</p>

	<p>are published on the Council website. Such recordings provide a powerful demonstration of democracy and part of the role of a councillor and raise awareness of the work of the Council.</p> <p>Opportunity to work with Town and Community Council's to ensure links with 'Becoming a Councillor page' are promoted on own website / social media platforms and for similar local 'role of a councillor to be developed' and promoted.</p> <p>To push to a wider audience and engagement, Members could be encouraged to utilise own media platforms to promote the role of a Councillor - through Member blogs / 'day in the life of'.</p> <p>There is an opportunity to take forward promotion of the role of a Councillor and democracy at future Career Fairs taken forward by the Council.</p> <p>In addition to this, potential virtual workshops within school settings could be taken forward to raise awareness of the role of a Councillor 'what do you do?' so young people have an understanding from a young age.</p> <p>There is a need and duty to build upon the public participation strategy already in place within the Council in respect of Public participation at meetings. The current strategies should be reviewed and updated in accordance with future hybrid meeting protocols.</p> <p>A number of Council Committees require lay members within its membership and the Council will need to take forward the further duty placed upon it to widen the future 'Audit & Governance' Committee lay membership, with the Chairmanship of this Committee taken forward by a lay member. The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee utilise the knowledge and experience of parent Governors on its Committee, as statutory required. Many of the Council's Members are or have been Parent Governors. Linking in with Governor support on the role of Councillors and the co-</p>
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	<p>opted / lay person membership could be considered to engage with potential future candidates. Scrutiny working groups have also previously benefitted from engaging with stakeholders during reviews to strengthen their work and resulting recommendations. There is the opportunity to drive forward further public engagement in democracy by seeking the public's view on items for consideration at scrutiny meetings, ensuring work programmes are dealing with issues that matter to residents of the County Borough.</p> <p>There will be a need to take forward webcasting of Council meetings as specified within the Act and the opportunity of hybrid meetings. Ensuring that the Council Chamber is DDA compliant is currently being taken forward. There is a duty to ensure the availability of translation facilities for Members to conduct Committee meetings bilingually. The Council have recently purchased new equipment to provide an improved audio feed and purchase of additional screens to assist with the running of meetings. Such improvements will potentially remove any barriers that might have prevented a future Candidate from standing at election.</p> <p>The Council Constitution provides guidance on how the council operates, how decisions are made and the procedures which are to be followed to ensure these are efficient, transparent and accountable to local people. As part of the duty of the Act and to engage the public in local democracy the Council will need to provide a constitution guide to be developed and promoted on the Council website.</p>
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Objective 3: Increase awareness of the role of councillors, the contribution they make to society and how to become a councillor	
Potential Actions	Proposed Way Forward
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promoting the role of a Councillor and the work of the Council 	Affording new Members with the opportunity to take forward a Mentoring scheme to assist new Councillors undertake their roles.

	<p>Following the easing of lock down restrictions and when safe to do so take forward the opportunity for the promotion of 'open invites' to the Chamber for potential candidates to they become familiar with part of their future role.</p> <p>Promotion of the role of a Councillor could be circulated to established groups, such as School Governors who are often already active within their local communities.</p> <p>Taking forward potential (virtual) workshops within school settings that could be taken forward to raise awareness of the role of a Councillor 'what do you do?' so young people have an understanding from a young age.</p>
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Objective 4: Increase confidence of councillors that they are valued, expectations placed on them are fair and that their remuneration levels appropriately reflect the work undertaken

Potential Actions	Proposed Way Forward
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure appropriate training and support is in place to support Councillors in their role to give confidence in what they do. • To provide the opportunity for mentoring of newly elected members • Ensure Members are provided with suitable electronic devices and training on such devices to support them in their role. • Advise of the remuneration available • Promotion of the 'role of a Councillor' • To survey Members during and at the end of their term of office • To promote the 'open door policy' for all Members to seek support from the Head of Democratic Services and the Council Business Unit. 	<p>Ensure that the Member induction programme is fit for purpose and provides all Members with the skills and knowledge base to undertake their role. Ensure that a rolling programme of training is developed for each Member throughout their term of office. The Head of Democratic Services works closely with the Head of Organisational development to ensure Members are supported through training opportunities and as such there is no limit on the training budget available to Members.</p> <p>To provide the opportunity for mentoring for Newly Elected Members. Head of Democratic Services to liaise with WLGA regarding the mentoring programme.</p> <p>As previously agreed, to work with Members and ICT to establish the most suitable device for Members rather than a 'one size fits all' approach. To provide reasonable adjustments as advised upon. To ensure Members are provided with suitable training on such devices to assist them going forward.</p>

	<p>To promote the reasonable adjustments that the Council can offer Elected Members to assist them in undertaking their role confidently.</p> <p>To promote the remunerations that are available to Members on the Council website and to candidates standing for Election by linking with the Council Business page.</p> <p>To review the support / barriers that may have been experienced by a Member during their term of office. Such a review will help the Council going forward to resolve any issues to assist Members in their role.</p> <p>To ensure Members are advised of the support available to them through the Council Business unit and the Head of Democratic Services – providing contact details at the earliest opportunity during the Member Induction.</p>
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Objective 5: Greater respect and support for those standing for and securing elected office in Wales.

Potential Actions	Proposed Way Forward
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place a duty on political group leaders to promote high standards of conduct • Social Media training to be provided to Members and offer of such training to future candidates 	<p>opportunity for the working group to take forward discussions with Group Leaders to promote the code of conduct within their parties.</p> <p>Social Media training to be delivered to Members through the Member Induction programme and built upon during a Members term of office.</p> <p>Further training to Members on aspects such as unconscious bias and menopause training and the need to ensure the training opportunities delivered to Council staff are also provided to Members. Ensuring this training is also delivered to town and community Councillors.</p> <p>Undertaking a Members survey to gauge Members feedback on actions that needed to be addressed and training opportunities available was identified as a positive step forward to trying to deliver a positive and diverse environment for Members to undertake their roles</p>