



CYNGOR BWRDEISTREF SIROL
RHONDDA CYNON TAF
COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

GWŶS I GYFARFOD O'R CYNGOR

C.Hanagan
Cyfarwyddwr Gwasanaeth y Gwasanaethau Democrataidd a Chyfathrebu
Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Rhondda Cynon Taf
Y Pafiliynau
Parc Hen Lofa'r Cambrian
Cwm Clydach CF40 2XX

Dolen gyswllt: Emma Wilkins 07385406118

DYMA WŶS I CHI i gyfarfod hybrid o'r **PWYLLGOR Y GWASANAETHAU DEMOCRATAIDD** sy'n cael ei gynnal **DDYDD LLUN, 6 MEDI, 2021** am 5.00 PM

AGENDA

Tudalennau

1. CROESO A PHRESENOLDEB

2. DATGAN BUDDIANT

Derbyn datganiadau o fuddiannau personol gan Aelodau, yn unol â gofynion y Cod Ymddygiad.

Nodwch:

1. Mae gofyn i Aelodau ddatgan rhif a phwnc yr agendwm mae eu buddiant yn ymwneud ag ef a mynegi natur y buddiant personol hwnnw; a
2. Lle bo Aelodau'n ymneilltuo o'r cyfarfod o ganlyniad i ddatgelu buddiant sy'n rhagfarnu, rhaid iddyn nhw roi gwybod i'r Cadeirydd pan fyddan nhw'n gadael

3. COFNODION

Derbyn cofnodion o gyfarfod blaenorol Pwyllgor y Gwasanaethau Democrataidd a gafodd ei gynnal ar 29 Mehefin 2021.

**4. ADRODDIAD BLYNYDDOL DRAFFT Y PWYLLGOR
GWASANAETHAU DEMOCRATAIDD 2020 - 2021**

Derbyn Adroddiad Blynyddol Drafft y Pwyllgor Gwasanaethau Democrataidd, sy'n yn darparu manylion am waith y Pwyllgor yn ystod Blwyddyn y Cyngor 2020 - 2021.

7 - 22

5. CANLYNIADAU AROLWG YR AELODAU

Trafod adroddiad y Pennaeth Gwasanaethau Democrataidd, sy'n rhoi trosolwg i'r Pwyllgor o Arolwg yr Aelodau a gynhaliwyd yn ystod 2021.

23 - 30

6. CYFARFODYDD HYBRID - ADOLYGIAD O'R CYNNYDD HYD YMA

Derbyn adroddiad Pennaeth y Gwasanaethau Democrataidd, sy'n rhoi trosolwg i'r Aelodau o'r gwaith o gyflwyno cyfarfodydd hybrid yn raddol hyd yn hyn ac i roi cyfle i'r Aelodau adolygu'r trefniadau arfaethedig a gynigir wrth symud ymlaen gyda chyflwyno'r dull hybrid.

31 - 40

7. MATERION BRYD

Trafod unrhyw faterion sydd, yn ôl doethineb y Cadeirydd, yn faterion bryd yng ngoleuni amgylchiadau arbennig.

Cyfarwyddwr Gwasanaeth y Gwasanaethau Democrataidd a Chyfathrebu

Cylchreliad:-

(Y Cyngorwyr Bwrdeistref Sirol Y Cyngorydd L Hooper a
Y Cyngorydd M Webber – Cadeirydd ac Is-gadeirydd, yn y drefn honno)

Y Cyngorwyr Bwrdeistref Sirol:

Y Cyngorydd M Adams, Y Cyngorydd J Bonetto, Y Cyngorydd J Brencher,
Y Cyngorydd G Caple, Y Cyngorydd J Edwards, Y Cyngorydd H Fychan,
Y Cyngorydd K Morgan, Y Cyngorydd S Rees, Y Cyngorydd E Stephens,
Y Cyngorydd G Jones, Y Cyngorydd W Jones and Y Cyngorydd S Powderhill



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Democratic Services Committee held on Tuesday, 29 June 2021 at 3.00 pm.

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

Councillor L Hooper (Chair)

Councillor M Webber	Councillor M Adams
Councillor J Bonetto	Councillor J Brencher
Councillor G Caple	Councillor J Edwards
Councillor K Morgan	Councillor S Rees
Councillor G Jones	Councillor W Jones
Councillor S Powderhill	

Officers in attendance:-

Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication
Mrs E Wilkins, Council Business Manager

1 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

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

2 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors H Fychan and E Stephens.

3 WELCOME BY THE CHAIR

The Chair welcomed Councillor Will Jones to his first meeting of the Democratic Services Committee following the membership changes at the AGM.

4 MINUTES

It was **RESOLVED** to approve as an accurate record the minutes of the 10th May 2021.

5 TERMS OF REFERENCE

To assist new Members to the Committee and following on from Members requests through the personal development review process, the Head of Democratic Services provide Members with a brief PowerPoint presentation outlining the terms of reference of the Democratic Services Committee, its functions and also the work to be taken forward over the Municipal Year.

Members were reminded of the statutory responsibilities of the Committee

including the need to review the support and resources available to non-executive members of the council. The Committee were also responsible for ensuring personal development opportunities for Members and training.

The Head of Democratic Services referenced some of the key aspects of work that the Committee had been involved with, and the work needed to be taken forward over the Municipal year referencing the support of hybrid meetings and the work needed to be undertaken in respect of the Local Government Elections to ensure support was provided to new and returning Members.

The Chair welcomed the overview of the role of the Committee and the Committee **RESOLVED** to note the contents of the presentation.

6 HYBRID MEETINGS

The Head of Democratic Services provided Members with an update in respect of the introduction arrangements to enable the broadcasting of committee meetings and the ability to operate through a hybrid approach.

Members were referred to section 4 of the report which presented a proposed phased roll out of the hybrid approach to meetings, which would initially prioritise Cabinet, Democratic Services, Planning and Development and the Overview & Scrutiny Committee. Members were advised that the roll out would include a number of 'dress rehearsal' sessions before using the equipment in a formal setting, the creation of user-guides for the different systems to be accessed, one to one training sessions with Members as well as a video tutorial. Members were advised of the resource implications on the Council Business Unit to support the running of hybrid meetings in the future.

The Head of Democratic Services provided Members with a range of practicalities that needed to be addressed in respect of hybrid meetings and spoke of the potential options for online voting systems, queuing systems for speakers and the covid safety measures that needed to be addressed for those Members that wished to attend a meeting physically within the Council Chamber. The Head of Democratic Services referenced a recent meeting taken forward with Group Leaders in respect of the roll out of hybrid meetings and the positive support provided for the proposed roll out.

The Chair thanked the Head of Democratic Services for the report and agreed that there were a number of practicalities that needed to be overcome before a successful meeting could be taken forward and spoke of the positive changes within the Council Chamber to assist in facilitating such hybrid meetings to take place. The Chair advised Members that the demonstration of the system for the Democratic Services Committee would be 1.30pm on the 20th July and notification and diary markers would be circulated shortly.

The Vice Chair spoke of the need to ensure Members were sufficiently supported through training and the safety measures that needed to be in place for those Members wishing to attend a meeting physically including the provision of lateral flow tests. The Vice chair also referenced the work of the Council Business Unit in procuring and developing the system and thanked the team for the work achieved to date. The Vice Chair commented upon the resource implications in respect of supporting each meeting which would need to be reflected in the Head of Democratic Services sufficiency and resources report.

Members commented on meetings going forward including aspects of the role of the chair, restricted numbers in physical attendance and the voting applications available for Members to pilot, with Members commenting that there may not be a 'one size fits all approach'.

Members referenced the role out of the initial virtual meetings approach at the start of the pandemic and the support provided by the Council Business Unit to assist Members in undertaking their role.

A Member queried the start times of meetings going forward and the need for 5pm to accommodate the public. The Head of Democratic Services referenced the need to potentially change the commencement times of some meetings in the first instance to ensure sufficient support was available within the Council Business Unit and ICT to support the role out of hybrid meetings, although the usual 5pm commencement times would resume once Members and Officers were familiar with the new way of working.

Following discussions it was **RESOLVED**:

- (i) To Agree the proposed roll out of the webcasting system and hybrid approach to Committee meetings;
- (ii) To agree the proposed approach to training and demonstrations of equipment for each of the Committees in respect of the new systems within the Council Chamber
- (iii) To note the pilot of the Modern.Gov hybrid Voting App to provide an inclusive approach to voting for all Members attending a hybrid meeting.

7 COUNCIL WEBSITE

The Council Business Manager provided the Committee with an overview of the recent changes to the Council website following the move to populate the pages through the modern.gov system in preparation for the webcasting of Committee meetings going forward.

Members were provided with details of the additional features on the website including the provision of a live calendar, Member attendance and training records and the layout of the pages including extra details regarding the decisions taken by Cabinet.

It was explained that further changes to the website would need to be taken forward to address the recommendations of the diversity working group and the promotion of public engagement in the democracy process. In addition, a future demonstration of the webpage in respect of the webcasting features on the website once developed would be provided.

Members thanked the Council Business Unit for the work undertaken and welcomed the features available on the website which assisted in improving transparency with Committee and decision making within the Council.

Members **RESOLVED** to note the overview.

8 DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME 2021 - 2022

The Head of Democratic Services referred Members to the draft work programme presented to Members and sought Members approval for the items

contained within.

The Vice Chair reiterated the comments previously noted during the Committees discussions in respect of hybrid meetings and the resource implications on the Council Business unit to support such meetings and suggested that the sufficiency and resources report be brought forward to the September meeting, to which Members agreed.

The Chair spoke of the work of the diversity working group and advised Members that the next date of the group would be the 9th September at 5pm.

Members **RESOLVED** to approve the work programme for the 2021-22 Municipal Year subject to bringing forward the Sufficiency and Resources report to the September Committee meeting.

9 MEMBERS PORTAL

The Head of Democratic Services and Council Business Manager advised Committee that phase one of the development stage of the Members Portal was now complete and the Head of Democratic Services welcomed Committee Members feedback on the system, following a trial of the system. Members were reminded of the functionality available within the system in respect of submitting questions to Council, Call In Forms and submitting declarations of Interest for Committee meetings, whilst the Head of Democratic Services acknowledged the further developments that were to be taken forward to the portal to provide Members with a tool to access useful information relating to their ward, accessing of e-learning modules and link to Committee agenda and related documents.

Members were advised that one to one training would be provided to Members on the portal and all feedback on the system would be welcome.

Members **RESOLVED** to note the update.

This meeting closed at 4.15 pm

**CLLR L HOOPER
CHAIR.**



DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE.

ANNUAL REPORT 2020 -2021

Foreword



This year has been another unprecedented year as the Committee embarked upon its virtual meetings settings, due to the covid 19 pandemic. The Committee have always been positive advocates for new ways of working as it has championed the provision of webcasting over the last 2 years and I'm pleased to see that Members of the Committee, like all Members of the Council embraced this new approach.

It has been a busy year for the Committee, even though it was a shorter than usual Municipal Year and I was pleased to be a part of the excellent work taken forward by the Committees Diversity Working Group. As Member Champion for diversity and inclusion, the work taken forward by my colleagues will not only benefit the Council in helping to promote the democracy agenda but will also create a diverse democracy that reflects Rhondda Cynon Taf. The working group have provided the Council with 16 recommendations to take forward in a short space of time ahead of the Local Government Elections and as a Committee we will continue to support the work and findings of the Group; it is however important to acknowledge that many of these matters are outside of the Council's control and require the support of political parties.

The move to virtual meetings has been a steep learning curve for all Members, a curve which however I am proud to say was supported by all. All members of this committee have recorded their thanks for the support afforded by the Council Business Unit and ICT during this period to enable all members to perform their role. This support will again play a key role as we embark on the next steps in digital democracy through the provision of hybrid meetings and webcasting. This is an exciting opportunity and one which the Committee eagerly awaits, due to the work undertaken by the Committee in supporting the provision of webcasting. The Committee have received regular updates in respect of implementation of the new system and we look forward to taking forward our first meeting using the equipment in the Municipal Year. As a Committee we will also be mindful of the resource implications that such meetings may now bring and will consider any such implications in the next sufficiency of resources report that is brought forward to the Committee in the Municipal Year.

This year has been unprecedented not just because of the pandemic. It is also a notable one following the resignation by former County Borough Councillor M Diamond. As a Committee we would like to thank former Councillor Diamond for his professional stewardship of the Committee and we all wish him a very happy retirement. I would also like to thank all Committee Members for their hard work and focus to ensure that the Council continues to provide sufficient support to its Members and as we now look to the future and potential support we can provide to new candidates ahead of the Local Government Elections.

I would also like to congratulate our newly elected Chair Cllr Lewis Hopper and I look forward to working with him over the course of this new municipal year.

County Borough Councillor M Webber.

Vice Chair.

MEMBERSHIP



Cllr M Webber



Cllr M Adams



Cllr J Brencher



Cllr J Bonetto



Cllr G Caple



Cllr J Edwards



Cllr H Fychan



Cllr G Jones



Cllr K Morgan



Cllr S Powderhill



Cllr S Rees



Cllr E Stephens



Cllr L Walker



Cllr M Diamond

MEMBER SUPPORT & RESOURCES.

In November 2020, and in accordance with the Measure and the Committee's agreed terms of reference the Committee considered its annual report in respect of Sufficiency of Resources. The Committee has a responsibility to keep under review the provision of staff, accommodation and other resources made available to the Head of Democratic Services, in order to ensure that it is adequate for the responsibilities of the post. The Head of Democratic Services in turn is responsible for making recommendations to the Committee to enable such determinations to be made.

Through his report the Head of Democratic Services was able to advise of the secure funding established in respect of the graduate positions:

- **Member's Researcher and Scrutiny Officer**
- **Democratic Services & Engagement Officer**

In addition funding for an additional position of a 'Senior Democratic and Scrutiny Officer' was also secured. The role has strengthened support and expertise available within the Unit taking forward the Council's joint scrutiny approach, outcome focused approaches to scrutiny and also to further support the Community Charter agreed at the Community Liaison Committee.

During the year due to the covid pandemic the Members Support Officer was seconded to the 'Track, Trace, Protect' team, to assist in supporting the Council's approach to the pandemic. This was a temporary 3-month secondment and the officer is now back in position continuing to support Members. Temporary cover arrangements through the Legal admin unit was sought to assist the Council Business Unit in the support provision needed during this period.

Looking forward, the Committee are already mindful of the resource implications that may be witnessed on the Council Business Unit with the administrating and support of webcasting arrangements and careful consideration will need to be provided for during the next report to Committee.

As a Committee we would like to thank the Head of Democratic Services and his team for the continued support provided to Members, as well as the ICT support that is provided and the countless other officers that assist Members with information sharing and gathering to assist us in undertaking our roles and supporting the people of RCT.

HYBRID / WEBCASTING

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. Since that date 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.

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.

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.

With the agreement of the Committee and endorsed by Cabinet and Council, the introduction of live webcasting will be rolled out on an incremental basis to allow for experience to be gained with the live system operations. It is intended to adopt the same incremental approach as was utilised for the roll-out of virtual meetings during the summer of 2020, with this approach initially prioritising Cabinet, Democratic Services Committee, Planning and Development and the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

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. 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. 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.

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. At the Council meeting in May, Members endorsed the recommendations of the Constitution Committee in respect of changes to the Council's Rules of Procedure which were adapted to permit the holding of hybrid meetings. In addition, due to the pandemic and current social distancing guidelines a covid safety measure guidance document has also been created to ensure the safety of both Members and Officers choosing to attend a hybrid meeting in the Council Chamber.

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. 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. A video tutorial has been created and shared with Members to assist them an introduction to the Chamber

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 and were successful with each of the bids to further strengthen the democratic process within RCT:

- 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)

During the year, Members of the Democratic Services Committee supported the rationale that smaller Council meetings that are undertaken virtually should continue to be held through a virtual meeting setting. The reason for such a proposal was 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.

Members agreed for a number of meetings to continue on the virtual meetings basis, with the appropriate flexibility being 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.

Democratic Services Committee have come along way with the introduction of webcasting arrangements within RCT, despite the delays witnessed by the Covid pandemic. The Council are in a positive position to commence its first round of demonstration meetings at the start of the Municipal Year with the intention of holding its first recorded meeting of the Cabinet in July. The Committee will closely monitor the roll out of the hybrid approach and review the arrangements as necessary to ensure the correct support is in place for Members and the public to access meetings through this new meeting environment. The Committee will also monitor the development work to be undertaken within Committee Room 1, to allow this meeting room to provide the functionality for hybrid meetings, as smaller committee room settings often lend itself better to some of the working of the smaller committees.

Like many Committees, the Democratic Services Committee have seen many positives with the virtual meetings approach and welcome the flexibility the hybrid meetings offer to Members and officers to suit their needs.

MEMBERS PORTAL

During the year Members were provided with a demonstration of the dedicated Members portal, which will allow Members greater flexibility and access to undertake their Elected Member role. The Portal currently allows Members to submit questions to Council, submit a 'Call In' form in respect of a Key Decision and the opportunity to complete Declaration of Interest forms relating to a meeting they have been present at. There is also the opportunity to access E-learning materials on the portal and key information documents, which again Members may find useful when undertaking their role.

The Portal, is a developing system and it is intended that the system will in time provide statistical information, compiled from the Council's customer reporting system ('The CRM'). Information on what issues are being reported, such as dog fouling or pot- holes, will be compiled on a ward by ward basis, alongside information on the resolution of these complaints. The new facility will also provide information on the latest business of the council being considered and matters such as planning applications which relate to that members electoral division. The current E-Learning modules available on the Portal are in their basic form and partnership working with the Council Business Unit and ICT is continuing in order to develop an e-learning module system which provides Members with full functionality and interaction in the e-learning module and demonstrate completed learning.

Due to Committees involvement in the development of the Portal, it is only right that Democratic Services Committee Members will test the system and provide feedback on its functionality. This feedback will ensure that the system is developed with the needs and requirements of the Members at its core, as it is the intention that the Portal becomes the 'go to place' for all Members when wanting to access information / report problems and get involved in the democratic process.

MEMBER TRAINING

The Democratic Services Committee is responsible for the training and development opportunities provided to Members by the Council Business Unit and receives reports in this respect as and when appropriate. A Report in respect of training was presented to Committee in March, which updated Members of the training completed 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.

Due to Covid pandemic, training and meetings of the Council were 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. One to one training through a virtual basis 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 of the Council have spoken highly of the support provided to them during this

period as the Council worked through the best options for Members and the undertaking of business to ensure the smooth running of the Council. It cannot go unnoticed the big change that such working necessitated for a lot of Members and the Committee would like to place on record its thanks to the attitudes and resilience of Members in undertaking this new approach to Committee meetings and engagement with constituents, for the safety of all.

As Members and Offices are now working comfortably on the virtual basis the Head of Organisational Development has resumed the PDR process and all Group Leaders and Independent Members were contacted during the year in respect of this process. Following the completion of the PDRs a meeting has been taken forward with the Head of Democratic Services to discuss how such training needs will be met. Due to the improved attendance at meetings, through the virtual meeting approach pre-council training has resumed with a training session in respect of the Council's Winter Maintenance plan taken forward in November and the Gypsy and Traveller Awareness training in January with Safeguarding training soon to be taken forward in June. Notably improved attendance figures were noted in comparison to the attendance within the Council Chamber. The Committee have also agreed a number of other training programmes to be taken forward for all Members including Mental Health & Wellbeing, Unconscious Bias, Pre-retirement information sharing and Emergency planning. These sessions will look to be held on standalone evenings within the Committee calendar to maximise attendance and where appropriate recordings of such training will be taken forward and made available on the Members Portal for future reference.

During January 2021 a questionnaire was undertaken with the Audit Committee Members and Co-opted Member to assist in informing a programme of development for the Committee. Officers are utilising the results of the survey to introduce a bespoke training programme for the Committee which will help equip Members in undertaking their roles on the Committee.

The Council have been recognised as providing a detailed and thorough Member Induction Programme, and with the Local Government Elections taking place in 2022, work will need to commence to ensure that the induction programme is still 'Fit for Purpose' to allow newly Elected Members to be supported from the very start.

Following the two by-elections in May, the Council Business Unit has already reviewed its induction information pack and has undertaken a range of training opportunities for the new Members, which will assist in the review of the Council's Member Induction Programme. Consideration will need to be given as to how Member inductions are taken forward following the Local Government Elections, in respect of new ways of working with virtual platforms (as recently witnessed in the Senedd with virtual Member Inductions) and the need to be mindful of any potential covid restrictions that may still be in place. Details of the induction programme will be presented to the Committee during the next Municipal Year.

MEMBERS WELLBEING

The welfare and mental health of Members is crucially important and Members need to be aware of the support that is available to them if they wish to utilise through the Council's Occupational Health service.

Although the remote attendance at Committee meetings brings a number of benefits for Members and greater flexibility with work / life balance, it has also produced a number of unintended consequences, such as Members feeling isolated. It was apparent that the informal, net working discussions by Members in advance of a physical meeting at the Council Chamber was lacking. To try and alleviate this situation the Council Business Unit, following support from the Democratic Services Committee facilitated a number of 'virtual coffee morning's' for Members. Such sessions provided Members with the opportunity to come together, chat and share experiences, which we hoped has boosted Members wellbeing during the covid restrictions. The sessions have been run on different days and times of the week to try and provide opportunities for all Members to attend. They have also provided opportunity for informal updates and a number of positive outcomes have come forward from such sessions, as well as hopefully supporting Members Wellbeing:

- Members discussed the higher rate of nuisance and cold calling through the lockdown period – A fact sheet assisting Members with how to deal with such calls was provided to Members.
- Social Media – Members discussed the increase use of social media through the pandemic and sought assistance in the best way to deal with social media enquiries – A number of infographics were created and shared with Members to help direct residence to some key Council services. In addition links were provided to some infographics for Members to utilise to support civility online / social media.
- Following on from this an Officer from the Council's communication team provided Members at a further coffee session with a presentation on good practice examples of social media accounts.
- Council Website Changes – At the last coffee session, Members were provided with an overview of some of the changes to the Council website and the Council Committee pages due to the need to utilise the Modern Gov system to link with the Council website to facilitate the webcasting recordings of the Council going forward. This was an opportunity that may not have naturally been made available to all Members, which was well received.
- Members Portal – Members in attendance at the last coffee session were also provided with a demonstration of the Members Portal, as this had only previously been provided to the Democratic Services Committee. This was again well received with a number of Members asking to be included in the pilot of the system along with the Democratic Services Committee Members.

It is intended that this provision of supported is continued to ensure the wellbeing of Members.

DIVERSITY WORKING GROUP

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 its fullest potential for the benefit of its residents. If you value each person's differences, regardless of political persuasion, gender, age, ethnic background, disability or sexual persuasion 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 our Councillors are the better understanding they have of the needs of the local community and therefore are better equipped at carrying out their duties and responsibilities.

During the Municipal Year the Committee formed a working group, following consideration of the Minister for Housing and Local Government Statement in respect of 'phase two of the diversity in democracy programme Action Plan' to look at the diversity agenda within democracy and to see what actions they could take forward to make RCT a more diverse democratic landscape. The work of the working group has been fast moving and already actions have been outlined within the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act that look to take forward the diversity agenda and the recent recommendations of the WLGA Council report.

The work of the group will be ongoing until the 2022 Local Government Elections as Members work to ensure that the Council achieves all it can to push the diversity agenda and develop a more diverse democratic profile. However, it is noted there are many things outside of its control and work will need to be taken forward with political parties to also help push the agenda forward.

It cannot be underestimated that trying to achieve a diverse culture is difficult and the working group have already in a short period of time identified potential barriers that may dissuade members of the public to stand for election. It is important to ensure that any perceived barriers are eradicated and instead celebrate and promote the rewarding experiences of becoming a Councillor. The working Group have noted the importance of demonstrating the flexibilities of the Council to allow for a work life balance, which will further be enhanced through the hybrid meetings. The Council need to promote the remuneration available to Elected Members and the training opportunities and support provided so that any future candidate is aware of the support open to them. Engagement with 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, will also be pivotal to the work needing to be taken forward.

The Working Group recognised that Town and Community Councils provide a vital connection for communities into decision making and the need to work with our Community and Town Council colleagues to engage with potential candidates. It was therefore important as a group that Community Council representatives were included within its membership.

As part of the Working Groups terms of reference it also included engagement with 16 – 17 year old's in local government democracy, ahead of the Senedd Elections. The working group considered campaigns by the YEPS service (developed by young people) and the Council's own awareness campaign to engage with first time voters. Due to the covid 19 pandemic much of the engagement wanting to be taken forward with schools was inhibited due to the lockdown and home learning requirements and the educational focus when schools did return. However, the group intend on taking these engagement opportunities forward when appropriate.

In May 2021 the Working Group produced its [interim report](#) which was endorsed by the Democratic Services Committee and later supported by full Council. This interim report with 16 recommendations allowed the group to compile the work achieved to date and the recommendations it felt were necessary to positively start the engagement and educating of the democratic process within Rhondda Cynon Taf. It is important that as a Council we act now to reach out to potential candidates. The Council also need to continue the 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 mouth piece for the future.

At the Council meeting in May, Members considered and supported the work of the diversity working group and also welcomed and work of the WLGA in respect of Diversity. At this meeting the Council endorsed the declaration of becoming a '[Diverse Council](#)', one of the first Council's in Wales to sign and support such a declaration, which will further strengthen the work and role of the Democratic Services working group.

INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL FOR WALES (IRPW)

The annual meeting of the IRPW with the Chairs of Democratic Services Committee and the Heads of Democratic Services was held remotely on 27th October 2020 to discuss the Draft Annual Report for 2021/22 and proposed determinations in relation to Elected Members.

The Head of Democratic Services and the Chair of the Democratic Services Committee participated in discussions on the report including: the schedule of remuneration; reimbursement of the Cost of Care and personal safety of Elected Members. The IRPW urged Democratic Services Committees to take steps to encourage and facilitate greater use of the remuneration framework so that Members are not financially disadvantaged in undertaking their roles.

The Democratic Services Committee itself looked at the draft report of the IRP to ensure Members were afforded the opportunity to comment on the proposals set out in the draft annual report and to allow their representations to be taken into account by the IRPW under the requirements of the Local Government Measure 2011. Members were keen for the cost of care allowances to be highlighted to Members and to future prospective candidates that may stand for election in the 2022 Local Government Elections.

The final IRPW report for 2021/22 was published in February 2021 and a report will be submitted to Council in May 2021 setting out the key determinations for approval.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT & ELECTIONS WALES ACT 2021

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

It was therefore important during the year that the requirements of the Act and how the Council intended to respond to its requirements were discussed at the Democratic Services Committee. It was clear that this substantive piece of legislation would 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.

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.

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. As a Committee we will receive regular monitoring updates on the provisions within the Act to ensure that as a Council we are proactively working to address the requirements ahead and to offer support to our colleagues in Town and Community Councils.

LOOKING AHEAD.

The Democratic Services Committee have a number of projects still to complete during the next Municipal Year, with the need to continue its momentum with the work of the diversity working group and to ensure that the recommendations agreed to date are implemented. In addition to this it will be important that these recommendations provide measurable outcomes, which the Committee will closely monitor.

The Committee welcome the phased roll out of the Webcasting arrangements across the Council Committee meeting calendar and will look to support both Members and Officers in this role out. It will be important that an incremental approach is taken forward and that we take forward arrangements that are most appropriate to each of the Committees. Consideration will need to be given to potential hybrid voting options and a trial of various voting options will need to be considered by the Committee. It will also be important that we ensure that the public are engaged in our hybrid meetings and the webcasting approach to promote the democracy agenda.

As a Committee we will trial the Members Portal and provide positive feedback to ensure the Portal does become a place that Members go to, to access and obtain information, engage in the democratic process and report problems on behalf of constituents. This 'one stop shop' will hopefully assist Members going forward.

In addition to the above it important that we continue to monitor Member's training, not only for this coming Municipal Year but that we as a Council are well equipped to support potential new candidates in the run up to the Elections and Elected Members following the Local Government Election. We need to make sure that we have done all that is possible to make any Member, newly elected or long standing, easier by providing them with the information and support necessary to equip them in undertaking the positive and rewarding role of a Councillor.

Appendix

Terms of Reference for the Democratic Services Committee

- Carry out the local authority's function of designating the Head of Democratic Services;
- Keep under review the provision of staff, accommodation and other resources made available to the Head of Democratic Services, in order to ensure that it is adequate for the responsibilities of the post;
- Make reports to the full Council in relation to these matters;
- The Democratic Services Committee may require Members and officers of the Council to attend before it to answer questions such Members and Officers having a duty to comply with but are not obliged to answer any questions which they would be entitled to refuse to answer in court proceedings in England and Wales. The Democratic Services Committee may invite other persons to attend meetings of the Committee;
- The Democratic Services Committee must meet at least once in every calendar year.
- The Chair of the Democratic Services Committee must secure that meetings are held in accordance with the requirements set out in these terms of reference;
- The Democratic Services Committee must consider any report or recommendation sent to its Members any report prepared by the Head of Democratic Services under Section 9(1)(h) of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 at a meeting held not more than three months after copies of the report are first sent to Members of the Committee;
- The Democratic Services Committee must as soon as practicable after it has prepared a report or made a recommendation under Section 11(1)(c) of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 arrange for a copy of it to be sent to each Member of the Council who is not a Member of the Committee;
- The Democratic Services Committee will have overall responsibility for deciding what should be regarded as reasonable training and development opportunities as part of its function of providing support to Members to carry out their functions. In addition to the list set out below, the Democratic Services Committee may add some policy areas for which training is considered essential, such as planning or licensing:
 - Induction
 - Role and functions of the Executive, the Council and its Officers
 - Overview and Scrutiny
 - Information Technology
 - Code of Conduct

- The role of a Councillor as a local Member
- Public Engagement
- Equality and Diversity training
- The agreed training and development opportunities will be contained within a published development strategy; The WLGA's Charter for Member Support and Development ("the Charter") will be used for guidance purposes in maintaining the award of the "Advanced Charter";
- The Democratic Services Committee will propose the appropriate level of funding to be made available for the purchase of external training, should there be the case that the reasonable training and development needs of the Council cannot be met in-house

Tudalen wag



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

6th September 2021

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

MEMBER SURVEY – CONSIDERATION OF FEEDBACK

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of the report is to provide Members with the feedback obtained from the Member survey undertaken during April - May 2021 which has captured information about the support provided to Members to assist them in undertaking their role and identify areas where the Council Business Unit can improve or change current arrangements.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that the Democratic Services Committee:

- (i) Consider the feedback obtained from the Member Survey 2020/2021 as outlined within the report; and
- (ii) Progress any actions deemed appropriate as a result of the feedback and comments received as outlined within the report.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 As part of the statutory responsibilities of the Head of Democratic Services, the Council is required to survey the views of its Members in relation to the calendar of meetings and the provision of support and resources to non-executive members.

3.2 In view of this requirement the Head of Democratic Services in consultation with the Democratic Services Committee has made arrangements for a bilingual survey to be conducted on an annual basis. In March 2019 Members of the Committee agreed to the drafting of the survey, which has been adapted over the last 2 years to recognise changes in working practices, such as virtual meetings and going forward hybrid meetings.

4. MEMBERS SURVEY 2021

- 4.1 In advance of the 2021/2022 Municipal Year the Council sought the views of Members in areas not statutorily required to ensure that the Council continues to provide the appropriate support to all Elected Members.
- 4.2 The outcome of the survey has informed the calendar of meetings that was agreed at the Council AGM held on the 26th May 2021 and has enabled the Chairs to make an informed decision in respect of timing of future meetings.
- 4.3 The survey was initially conducted in April 2021 but due to an initial low response the deadline was extended for another week into May to ensure all Elected Members had the opportunity to submit their views.
- 4.4 Overall 42 Members completed the questionnaire, general responses to the survey were positive with further details listed below.

5. TIMINGS OF MEETINGS

- 5.1 Members were asked to provide their preferences of start times for each of the virtual Council Committees as well as indicate their preference for Committee start times (if different) when taken forward through a hybrid approach. In general the consensus is for the start times to remain at 5pm.
- 5.2 This view was considered at the Council AGM on the 26th May 2021 during consideration of the Calendar of Meetings when Members agreed that in the majority Committees would commence at 5pm.
 - In total over 80% of the respondents cited 5.00pm as their preferred starting time for Council (83%) and other committees currently commencing at 5pm. In respect of Planning and Development Committee Members preference indicated the continuation of the 3pm Committee meeting start time (58%).
- 5.3 Some additional individual comments in respect of start times of Committees were noted by responders:
 - Councillors who work, and members of the public who are interested in attending meetings, would have difficulty attending meetings that are earlier than 5pm;
 - 4pm start times would be better in winter months
 - Due to the 5pm start times, many of these meetings finish very late, therefore earlier start times of 4.30pm would be better suited.
 - full council should be held at 6PM - this would allow councillors with 9-5 jobs to attend, without the need for their employer to give time off. Though the legislation is there to allow 'reasonable time off' to do council duties, this is very subjective

- The Committee times are fair and work well, particularly as Cttees are currently undertaken virtually and the times will benefit hybrid working
- On balance continuation of current starting times seems appropriate and beneficial to Councillors with other employment
- 5pm is better for councillors who are working and those with childcare commitments / grandparents' duties

6 HYBRID MEETINGS

- 6.1 As Members will be aware the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021, provides the opportunity to take forward hybrid meetings, which will provide further flexibility to Members in undertaking their role. 100% of respondents advised that they were confident in accessing virtual Council meetings through the zoom platform. This is a positive position and thanks are given to all Members for embracing this new way of working. This also holds the Council in good stead for moving forward to Hybrid meetings
- 6.2 During the survey 88% of members indicated that a hybrid approach would be their preferred choice.
- 6.3 83% of Members agreed that some of the Council's smaller Committees should continue as standalone virtual Committees, a decision recommended by the Democratic Services Committee during its meeting in May. (Subject to caveat arrangements)
- 6.4 The survey also took the opportunity to discuss Members approaches and conduct within virtual meetings, highlighting the future intention of live streaming meetings. 91% of Members responded that a Members etiquette policy was needed going forward to ensure appropriate conduct at all committee meetings was adhered to.
- 6.5 Some specific comments in respect of Hybrid meetings were made by individual members:
- A hybrid approach would be welcome especially for those Councillors who have a longer travel time to the Council Offices than others.
 - It offers flexibility and is more inclusive to all members.
 - Should try to go back to hold meetings in the chamber as soon as possible - I think there is more debate and discussion during them, and also allow members to socialise more (within and outside the chamber)
 - it is very useful and beneficial to be able to access Council meetings when away from home.
 - At home you are not always able to control your surroundings especially with young children around
 - With the use of IT - hybrid meetings will be of benefit to Elected Members
 - It is important that protocols are in place to ensure that Members' etiquette and behaviour is acceptable and appropriate.
 - The present Council Constitution, Standing Orders and the Code of Conduct should be robust enough to ensure that appropriate conduct is observed by

every Member - Training on the Code of Conduct and the Constitution is the cornerstone so that Members are properly equipped to engage appropriately

- I don't believe the overarching members code of conduct was written with virtual/hybrid meetings in mind and a more specific policy would be appropriate so all members know precisely what is expected of them during meetings.

6.6 In respect of the above comments, Democratic Services Committee have always championed the flexibility hybrid meetings will bring to Members, allowing Members to choose the meeting setting and environment more suitable to them. A phased approach to Hybrid meetings is now being taken forward, with a positive hybrid meeting of the Cabinet taken forward during July 2021 and demonstrations of the system conducted for Overview & Scrutiny Members, Planning and Development Committee Members and a demonstration scheduled for the Democratic Services Committee in September.

6.7 The introduction of a multi location policy has been recommended by Welsh Government following the introduction of hybrid meetings. It has been suggested that this policy is taken forward by the Democratic Services Committee once guidance by Welsh Government is provided in respect of hybrid meetings.

7. COUNCIL BUSINESS UNIT

7.1 Members were complimentary of the support provided to Members by the Council Business Unit with 100% of responses advising they were happy with the support provided with committee support, scrutiny, general member support provision, Member updates and research facilities.

7.2 When asked to provide further comments in respect of the support provision and to identify any gaps, the following comments were made:-

- An updated Officer Directory; and
- Useful to have advance notice of ward related events

7.3 In respect of the above comments, the following actions are proposed:-

- Publish an up to date Office information to reflect recent key officer changes, potentially as part of a future members portal;
- To assess the possibility of Member updates and ward specific updates through the Members Portal, linking with the Council website Newsfeed.

8. MEMBERS' PORTAL

8.1 During the 2020- 2021 Municipal Year the Democratic Services Committee received a demonstration of the Members Portal. A demonstration was also provided at a recent 'coffee morning session' which all Members were invited to attend. These demonstrations provided Members with the opportunity to gain an understanding of its functionality and purpose as well as view its

potential to provide future E-Learning training modules and become a 'One Stop Shop' for logging enquiries and reporting issues in respect of Members' individual wards.

- 8.2 In time, the portal can be further developed to incorporate interactive sections and offer a whole host of information, messages and links to other useful sites. The Democratic Services Committee will continue to be instrumental in progressing the Members' Portal and will receive regular demonstrations of the function as it develops.
- 8.3 The survey asked Members for any further developments they may like to see being taken forward within the Members Portal.
- Council Directory
 - Progress of issues raised by Members on behalf of Constituents
 - Planned road closure information

9. MEMBER TRAINING

- 9.1 Members training needs are actioned following a Members PDR with the Head of Organisational Development, discussions at Committee settings or through requests to the Head of Democratic Services. Members PDRs are taken forward in confidence with the training requirements alone shared with the Head of Democratic Services to allow these requests to be actioned.
- 9.2 90% of respondents advised that they were content with the level of training provided.
- 9.3 Further comments in respect of training included:
- The provision of bespoke training should be highlighted to Members
 - List of training opportunities available should be shared with Members
 - Verifiable training to ensure attendees learn from training sessions
- 9.4 Members are reminded that any training requested will always be accommodated, whether through a bespoke package of training provided by an external provider, a one-to-one session with an internal officer of the Council or general training provision with invites to all Members.
- 9.5 A full package of training opportunities is provided to Members during a Members induction and work is currently being undertaken in respect of this package of training for the forthcoming elections, to ensure it is fit for purpose. This information will be shared with the Committee and Group Leaders. However, regular promotion of this information will be taken forward throughout each Municipal year following Member's suggestions.

10 MEMBERS FACILITIES

- 10.1 Members were asked to comment on the facilities made available to Members within the Council Headquarters in respect of meeting room provision, private

rooms for each political party and the Council Chamber. The majority of Members responded that they were satisfied with the facilities at the Council Headquarters. Private meeting rooms for each of the political groups and independent Member are available in Block C of the Pavilions for Members to utilise.

- 10.2 As Members will be aware work has been undertaken over recent months in the Council Chamber for the provision of the webcasting facility. The webcasting provision has progressed to assist the digitalisation of the Chamber, to support the broadcasting of committees in the future, and to continue delivering the Council's 'paper-light approach' to committee management and importantly to enhance access opportunities.
- 10.3 Members were also supportive of reviewing the current arrangements following the covid pandemic and the positive move to virtual working.

11 ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

- 11.1 Members were surveyed on what additional requirements they would like to receive from Democratic Services over the next 12 months to enable them to continue to carry out their roles effectively. Many Members commented that they are content with the level of support they currently receive. Below are a few additional comments which will be addressed by the Council Business Unit team:-

- Research opportunities to support projects
- Pre-retirement course for those choosing not to re-stand for Election
- Appropriate support with any changing technology developments.

- 11.2 In response to the above, Members are reminded that a dedicated Member's research resource is available for Members to access within the Council Business unit following successful funding gained by the Head of Democratic Services. This research opportunity has been promoted through the Democratic Services Committee, Scrutiny Committees and through the Members updates. Going forward further promotion of this important research opportunity will be promoted through the Members Portal and the Council website and Members are encouraged to utilise the research tool whenever necessary.

- 11.3 Pre-retirement courses have been arranged and will be taken forward in September, with an open invite to all Members.

- 11.4 As with virtual working any changes to digital technology for Members will be fully supported by the Council Business Unit and colleagues within ICT.

12. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 The results of the survey allow for each Member to submit their comments and suggestions into the work of the Council Business Unit and provide valuable insight into the needs and support for each Member. The report encourages the

authority to examine the way that business is conducted to ensure the equality of access and involvement of all Councillors.

13. CONSULTATION

13.1 Members Survey 2020 - 2021.

14. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

14.1 Any financial implications aligned to the suggestions put forward by Members will be considered as and when taken forward.

15 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

15.1 None

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

16.1 The work of all Councillors is fundamental to the work of the Council and subsequently the delivery of the Corporate Plan, hence ensuring Members are fully supported in undertaking their roles is important to the work of the Council overall.

16.2 Ensuring all Members are supported and have equal access to support and development links to the future generations well being goals of a more equal Wales and a Wales of cohesive communities.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

September 2021

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

BACKGROUND PAPERS – none.

.



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

6TH SEPTEMBER 2021

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

HYBRID MEETINGS – REVIEW OF PROGRESS TO DATE

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of the report is to provide Members with details of the meetings undertaken during July – August in respect of the roll out of hybrid meetings and webcasting and to provide the opportunity for committee to review the progress made to date, and determine future arrangements.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that the Democratic Services Committee:

- (i) Consider the feedback obtained from the hybrid meetings and demonstrations undertaken as outlined within the report;
- (ii) Progress any actions deemed appropriate as a result of the feedback and comments received as outlined within the report.
- (iii) Consider whether any changes need to be made to the Phased Roll out approach to hybrid meetings as previously agreed by the Committee and detailed within section 3 of the report.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 On the [29th June](#), Members of the Committee considered a report in respect of the introduction arrangements to enable the broadcasting of committee meetings and the ability to operate through a hybrid approach.
- 3.2 At the meeting Members positively supported the arrangements discussed in respect of a phased roll out of the hybrid approach with a series of mock demonstration meetings for the Democratic Services Committee, Overview & scrutiny Committee and the Planning and Development Committee with a planned hybrid meeting of the Cabinet during the month of July.
- 3.3 The proposed roll out of hybrid meetings agreed by this committee is outlined below:

Next Steps	Outcome	Scheduled	Progress:
Briefing on new arrangements to Cabinet members and officers	To familiarise Cabinet & SLT with the new operation arrangements for webcast and hybrid meetings	Late June/early July	Complete
Briefing on the new arrangements to members of the Democratic Services Committee (DSC)	To familiarise the DSC with the new operation arrangements for webcast and hybrid meetings	September	6 th September. To be completed
Briefing on new arrangements to Overview & Scrutiny Committee (O&S) members	To familiarise O&S members with the new operation arrangements for webcast and hybrid meetings	July	Complete
Broadcast meeting of Cabinet	Utilise the Public-I infrastructure to webcast a Cabinet meeting including hybrid attendance	July	Complete
Briefing on new arrangements to Planning & Development (P&D) Committee members	To familiarise P&D members with the new operation arrangements for webcast and hybrid meetings	August	Complete
Broadcast meeting of Democratic Services Committee (DSC)	Utilise the Public-I infrastructure to webcast a DSC meeting including the ability for hybrid attendance	September	Date confirmed: 6 th September following Hybrid demonstration
Broadcast meeting of Planning & Development Committee	Utilise the Public-I infrastructure to webcasting a P&D meeting including the ability for hybrid attendance	September	Potential Date 4 th November (this date will be reviewed and brought forward if appropriate)
Broadcast meeting of Overview & Scrutiny	Utilise the Public-I infrastructure to webcast a O&S meeting including the ability for hybrid attendance	September	Date confirmed 21 st September
Review progress to date	DSC to review progress and feedback from members	September	
Wider briefing on new arrangements to all members,	Subject to review To familiarise members not already briefed on	September	

including committee by committee engagement	new ways of working (including specific session for Chairs & Vice-Chairs)		
Wider committee roll-out	Subject to review work towards Implementing webcasting and hybrid arrangements across all functions	September	

4 HYBRID MEETINGS

4.1 During the months of July and August the following mock demonstration meetings were undertaken:

- 12th July – Cabinet
- 19th July – Overview & Scrutiny Committee
- 20th July – Democratic Services Committee
- 24th August – Planning & Development Committee

4.2 Unfortunately, due to a low confirmed turn out of attendees the mock demonstration for the Democratic Services Committee was postponed until September, after the August recess.

4.3 On the 20th July the Cabinet undertook its first hybrid meeting. This meeting was also webcast although not live streamed. A link to the recording for this meeting can be found [here](#).

4 REVIEW OF THE PROGRESS MADE TO DATE

5.1 At both the Cabinet Hybrid meeting and the demonstration meetings there was a good mix between those Members that attended the meeting virtually, through the zoom platform and those that physically attended the Chamber, adhering to the strict covid safety measures in place.

5.2 In preparation for all meetings the following requirements were necessary

- a) Due to Covid Safety Measures, Member and Officer attendance at the Council Chamber was required in advance to ensure no more than the allowed 26 capacity was adhered to.
- b) A seating plan was provided in advance to Members and Officers to ensure social distancing requirements and to assist attendees when entering the Chamber with the one-way system. This seating plan was also clearly provided on the door of the Chamber.
- c) The Circulation of a Committee meeting Covid Safety Measure document was provided to ensure all Members and Officers were aware of the safety measures needed to be undertaken prior / during and after the meeting.

- d) Lateral Flow tests were provided to all Committee Members and Officers for them to utilise if they so wished.
 - e) A Video tutorial of the new Chamber layout was circulated to all Committee Members to again assist them with the new layout prior to the meeting. <https://youtu.be/5uqVqGxDv9g>
 - f) Instruction sheet in respect of the new Microphone system was provided for those Members in attendance at the Chamber
 - g) Zoom invite details as per the usual process to those Members attending virtually.
- 5.3 The Mock demonstration meetings allowed Members to utilise the new equipment available in the Chamber, for all Members to see how best to engage in the meetings, for Chairs to gain a better understanding of how to ensure all Members felt included in the meeting, for all Members to test the translation system and for general comments and feedback to be provided.
- 5.4 As illustrated in the webcast hybrid meeting of the Cabinet, the recording allowed interaction with the agenda items discussed at the meeting and highlighted the names of the Members and officers that spoke when using the Chamber facilities. This interaction is not able to be demonstrated for those Member attending the meeting virtually.
- 5.5 The feedback detailed in appendix 1 was obtained by Members during the meetings and following the meeting.
- 5.6 Also being developed are advice and protocols to support good practice moving forward with the implementation of these new working arrangements.
- 5.7 During the August recess the mutli location policy guidance note has been published by Welsh Government. It will be important for us to reflect on this document to ensure that the practices that we have in place adhere to the guidance.

6 FUTURE ARRANGEMENTS

- 6.1 Following the review of the work undertaken to date in respect of hybrid meetings, it is considered that the Council is in a positive place going forward and has made steady progress with the introduction of the hybrid meeting approach. Member engagement has been instrumental to the progress made to date, allowing where possible equipment to be refined to suit the Committees needs.
- 6.2 It is important that this momentum of the introduction of hybrid meetings is not lost and it is proposed that the planned phased roll out as previously suggested is continued, subject to the delay to the roll out of Planning and Development Committee, due to the special requirements needed for the Committee to undertake each meeting - presentation sharing / public speakers and to allow both Members and Officers to become comfortable with the new way of working. At each point, the familiarisation of members and their confidence in conducting their role through a hybrid approach should remain the determining factor for

confirming progress to a formal committee meeting under these new arrangements.

- 6.3 The resource implications on the Council Business unit to support hybrid meetings has been noted (this point will be considered through the Head of Democratic Services' sufficiency of resources statutory report) and further supports the need for the incremental approach to the roll out of hybrid meetings to continue as planned.
- 6.4 Voting arrangements will continue to be explored in advance of facilitating a full Council meeting, where an agreed approach will need to be arrived at to secure the smooth running of this meeting.
- 6.5 In respect of the covid safety measures in place within the Council Chamber and the limited capacity it is suggested that the Council continue a cautious approach with the easing of restrictions from Welsh Government. The Council will still therefore continue to promote the covid safety measures in place which include the reduced capacity in the Council Chamber and the confirmed attendance arrangements in advance of meetings to ensure that these measures are adhered too.

7 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY

- 7.1 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.

8 WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The developments within the Council Chamber and webcasting infrastructure will further strengthen the welsh language within the democratic process. Members of the public will be able to live stream meetings or watch pre-recorded meetings and choose the floor language used. ie When Members / Officers converse at a meeting through the medium of welsh they can either choose to hear these discussions in welsh or the alternative of the English translation, which is currently unavailable through the current zoom recordings.

9 CONSULTATION

- 9.1 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.

- 9.2 Promoting public engagement in the democratic processes, including webcasting, has also been discussed in the recently introduced meeting between the Chief Executive and Political Group Leaders, which the Head of Democratic Services attends.

10 FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 10.1 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.

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

- 11.1 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.
- 11.2 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.

12 CONCLUSION

- 12.1 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.
- 12.2 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.
- 12.3 The Council has made good progress with the introduction of hybrid meetings in a short period of time. It is proposed that this progress is maintained through the phased roll out approach previously agreed by the Committee.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972
AS AMENDED BY
THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985
RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE
September 2021
REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

BACKGROUND PAPERS – none.

Appendix 1

Feedback, observations and good working practices in respect of Hybrid meeting approaches.

1. Members attending the Chamber:

- a) Members welcomed the new layout of the Chamber – light and welcoming environment. Increased space to allow for accessibility requirements. Provision of charging points for Member's devices. Good viewing access to the hybrid screens.
- b) Microphone system was easy to utilise. Members felt comfortable with the audio level of the microphones in the Chamber and were happy to adjust the sound level for the translation. Members liked that the system indicated who was speaking on the microphone panel system.
- c) Members felt that the green and red indicator system on the microphones could be confusing at first.
- d) Members were happy with the audio and visual feed coming through from those Members attending virtually, although the audio level at the planning demonstration had dropped and officers have since corrected this problem with the service providers
- e) The location of the virtual display on the Screen within the Chamber was questioned as to whether this needed to be displayed in the bottom right rather than top right.
- f) Occasion where the 2nd camera angle picked up on a speaker, with this view partially blocked by the attendee sat in front.
- g) The Chair's felt it was helpful to have an indication of the speaker list displayed on the microphone unit, illustrating those Members wishing to speak.
- h) Members requested a short time period to allow for the placing of headsets within the Council Chamber to hear the translation
- i) Members queried whether additional screens could be made available within the Chamber
- j) Members queried whether the screens in the Chamber could display the virtual feed only, rather than both the virtual and chamber display, as it was felt the Chamber display was not necessary.
- k) As Members get use to the hybrid meeting approach and the potential for meetings to take longer than previous to allow for the new way of working it was suggested that improved agenda management be taken forward to prevent meetings from becoming unduly lengthy.
- l) Queries where raised in respect of public attendance at the Chamber.

Going Forward

- m) Members are reminded that they can adjust the height of the microphone to suit their own requirements, although it is advised that Members do not speak closely into the microphone system to prevent any interference on the audio feed of the recording. A test of the microphones within the Council Chamber

will be provided prior to the formal commencement of all hybrid meetings to allow Members and Officer to feel comfortable with the microphone levels.

- n) Members need to wait a few seconds before their microphone is activated to allow for cameras to adjust to the new position.
- o) Work needs to be taken forward by the Council Business Unit to ensure the camera angles are accurate for each seat within the Council Chamber.
- p) The virtual display of the zoom attendees has been modified following Member discussions. Further discussions are ongoing to see if the Chamber view can be removed from the Chamber screen, however currently this is the view that is pushed to the live stream for recordings, hence why both the Chamber and Virtual feed are necessary.
- q) Members need to ensure that they turn off their microphone when they have finished speaking to allow the camera to adjust to the next speaker or to take the view back to the default meeting view.
- r) A display pad is to be procured for the Committee Chairs to utilise during the meeting to allow the Chair to manage the speaker list within the Council Chamber rather than this being managed by the Council Business Unit, following direction from the Chair.
- s) Members wishing to utilise the translation facilities are reminded to advise the Chair when commencing their address that they would like to converse in welsh to allow Members sufficient time to access headphones.
- t) Discussions will be taken forward with the service provider regarding the size of the screens and placement of screens within the Chamber and the costs associated will need to be considered.
- u) At the Council AGM Members agreed to allocate a published indicative time-allocation to agenda items of business tabled for consideration at a Full Council meeting. It is suggested that similar arrangements may need to be taken forward with Planning and Development Committee meetings, to ensure agenda's are not overloaded. This indicative duration would not be prescriptive and flexibility would continue to be available to the Chair, to enable them to respond to the flow of the debate and representations made by members to contribute. Identifying an indicative time for each items seeks to provide focus when determining business and is aimed at promoting the smooth discharge of business when broadcasting commences.

2 Members Attending Virtually

- a) No difference was noticed by Members or Officers attending the meeting virtually, as same process utilised as previous through the zoom platform.
- b) Members were happy with audio feed coming through from the Chamber although it was noted that if an attendee in the Council Chamber spoke without their microphone on or spoke to the side of the microphone then no audio would come through.
- c) Although the visual feed was good from the Council Chamber, Members were unaware of who was actually in attendance within the Chamber, unless that Member / Officer spoke at the meeting.

- d) Members felt included in the meeting with appropriate interaction between virtual and physical members, due to the role and participation of the Chair.
- e) The use of 'spotlighting' of virtual members was tested during one demonstration meeting and it was established that this view was unnecessary. Members preferred the gallery view and a switching to speaker view when a member attending virtually spoke on an item.
- f) Members queried whether the default view of the Chamber could be reviewed – current view is of the top table

Going Forward

- g) For the benefit of the Members in attendance and the public viewing the meeting the Chair will commence all hybrid meetings by listing the Members in attendance, in both the Chamber and virtual attendance.
- h) The Council Business Unit will, whenever possible, change the virtual display between gallery view and speaker view throughout the meeting to allow the public to view all Members attending virtually and to also assist the Chair by illustrating who had indicated to speak through the raised hands function, whilst also allowing the virtual speaker to be seen on screen when called forward to contribute to the meeting
- i) Work will be taken forward in respect of the Chamber default view, however it is felt that the default of the top table is the better option, as other camera angles would only pick up partial views of the Chamber which may not be accommodated with Members

3 Other General Points to Be Considered

- a) Going forward, the hybrid meetings will be synced to the Mod Gov system to allow for further interaction with the business being considered through the agenda item stamping and Member interaction – linking to Member's profile on the website. Unfortunately, the linking to Member's profile will not be linked when a Member who has attended virtually is speaking at the meeting.
- b) It will be for each Committee Chair to establish the best approach for hybrid meetings, and how they ensure virtual attendees are included in the meeting and the speaker list is equally distributed.
- c) How Public speakers will attend and contribute at the Chamber will need to be considered. Currently, due to covid safety measures only Members and Officers are attending meetings at the Chamber.
- d) Consideration will need to be given to the recording of voting during hybrid meetings to ensure accuracy of recording and publication of the decision taken for those viewing the meeting.