



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: Julia Nicholls - Democratic Services (01443 424098)

YOU ARE SUMMONED to a hybrid meeting of **RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL** to be held on **WEDNESDAY, 15TH DECEMBER, 2021** at **5.00 PM.**

AGENDA

**Page
No's**

TIME	ITEM	PAGE(S)
5 Minutes	ITEM 1. DECLARATION OF INTEREST To receive disclosures of personal interests from Members in accordance with the Code of Conduct <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Members are requested to identify the item number and subject that their interest relates to and signify the nature of the personal interest; and2. Where Members withdraw from a meeting as a consequence of the disclosure of prejudicial interest they <u>must</u> notify the Chairman when they leave.	
10 Minutes	ITEM 2. ANNOUNCEMENTS	
5 Minutes	ITEM 3. MINUTES To approve as an accurate record, the minutes of the Extra-Ordinary Council Meeting held on the 24 th November 2021 at 3.30pm.	5 - 10
	OPEN GOVERNMENT:	

10 Minutes	<p>ITEM 4. STATEMENTS</p> <p>In accordance with Open Government Council Meeting Procedure Rule 2, to receive any statements from the Leader of the Council and/or statements from Cabinet Portfolio Holders:</p>	
20 Minutes	<p>ITEM 5. MEMBERS' QUESTIONS</p> <p>To receive Members questions in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.2.</p> <p>(N.B a maximum of 20 minutes shall be allowed for questions on notice.)</p>	11 - 20
	<p align="center">COUNCIL WORK PROGRAMME - FOR MEMBERS INFORMATION</p> <p>Council Work Programme 2021/22</p>	
	<p align="center">OFFICERS' REPORTS</p>	
15 Minutes	<p>ITEM 6. DIVERSITY IN DEMOCRACY</p> <p>To receive the report of the Service Director Democratic Services & Communications.</p>	21 - 28
15 Minutes	<p>ITEM 7. ANNUAL REPORTS 2020/21</p> <p>To receive a report from the Service Director Democratic Services & Communications.</p>	29 - 66
20 Minutes	<p>ITEM 8. NOTICE OF MOTION</p> <p>To consider the under-mentioned Notice of Motion standing in the names of:</p> <p>S. Bradwick, M. Forey, L. M. Adams, J. Barton, D. R. Bevan, H. Boggis, J. Bonetto, J. Brencher, A. Calvert, G. Caple, A. Crimmings, A. Davies-Jones, L. De- Vet, J. Edwards, J. Elliott, S. Evans, G. Jones, M. Fidler Jones, A. Fox, E. George, M. Griffiths, J. Harries, G. Holmes, G. Hopkins, R. Lewis, W. Lewis, C. Leyshon, A. Morgan, S. Morgans, M. A. Norris, D. Owen-Jones, S. Pickering, S. Powell, S. Rees, A. Roberts, J. Rosser, G. Stacey, M. Tegg, G. Thomas, W. Treeby, R. K. Turner, M. Webber, D. Williams, R. Williams, T. Williams, R. Yeo</p> <p>Banks should be an essential service in our communities, giving residents convenient access to their finances and allowing them to take care of their affairs. They are often situated in the heart of our town centres, in close proximity to other vital facilities and shops.</p> <p>The notice that Barclays are intending to close their branch at Victoria Square in Aberdare in March 2022 is the latest (potential) withdrawal of financial services from communities in Rhondda Cynon Taf and, should the plans go ahead, will have a detrimental impact, not just to our residents in accessing facilities, but also to</p>	

	<p>the vibrancy of our town centres. The Council has worked hard to make our town centres attractive and welcoming hubs of the communities they serve, especially after the exceptional difficulties faced by local traders over the past 18 months.</p> <p>Aberdare has already seen NatWest and HSBC withdraw their services from the town, whilst Treforest, Treorchy, Porth and Mountain Ash are among the other areas to have also seen banks close over recent years.</p> <p>The assurances provided by Barclays that Merthyr Tydfil and Pontypridd are the closest services will be scant consolation to many, with both journeys taking between 40 and 50 minutes each way.</p> <p>This Council wishes to record its opposition to the closure of Barclays Bank in Aberdare and resolves to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Request the Leader of the Council to write to the Head of Corporate Relations Wales and West and the Chief Executive of Barclays Bank to call for the plans to be reconsidered. • Requests that the Council seeks to ensure that the social benefits of maintaining a local banking presence in our communities forms part of our future relationships with the banking sector. 	
	<p>ITEM 9. URGENT BUSINESS</p> <p>To consider any items which the Chair, by reason of special circumstances, is of the opinion should be considered as a matter of urgency.</p>	

Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication

To: All Members of the Council

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RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Council held on Wednesday, 24 November 2021 at 3.30 pm

County Borough Councillors - Council Members in attendance:-

Councillor S Powderhill (Chair)

Councillor G Caple	Councillor S Bradwick
Councillor R Bevan	Councillor T Williams
Councillor A Crimmings	Councillor D Williams
Councillor G Davies	Councillor S Pickering
Councillor L De Vet	Councillor S Rees
Councillor M Forey	Councillor M Norris
Councillor M Webber	Councillor M Griffiths
Councillor A Roberts	Councillor M Weaver
Councillor G Holmes	Councillor L Walker
Councillor P Howe	Councillor K Morgan
Councillor R Yeo	Councillor P Jarman
Councillor G Thomas	Councillor A Morgan
Councillor M Adams	Councillor J Rosser
Councillor C Leyshon	Councillor J Brencher
Councillor W Owen	Councillor S Morgans
Councillor S Belzak	Councillor W Lewis
Councillor G Jones	Councillor W Jones
Councillor L Jones	Councillor J Harries
Councillor D Grehan	Councillor H Fychan
Councillor A Davies-Jones	Councillor J Davies
Councillor J Cullwick	Councillor J Edwards

Officers in attendance

Mr C Bradshaw, Chief Executive
Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication
Mr B Davies, Director of Finance & Digital Services
Mr P Mee, Group Director Community & Children's Services
Mr P Nicholls, Service Director Legal Services

Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board

Mr E Elias, Chair
Mr P Mears, Chief Executive
Mr K Kelechi Nnoaham, Director of Public Health
Mr G Dix, Director of Nursing
Mr G Robinson, Chief Operating Officer

78 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors, J

Barton, H Boggis, J Bonetto, A Calvert, A Chapman, A Cox, J Elliott, Sera Evans, S Evans, A S Fox, E George, E Griffiths, J Harries, G Hopkins, L Hooper, G Hughes, J James, K Jones, M Fidler Jones, R Lewis, M Powell, S M Powell, S Rees-Owen, G Stacey, E Stephens, W Treeby, M Tegg, S Trask, R Turner, E Webster, J Williams and R Williams.

79 Declaration of Interest

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, the following declarations were made pertaining to the agenda:

County Borough Councillor G Caple – “My son is a doctor at Prince Charles Hospital”

County Borough Councillor P Jarman – “I am a former member of Cwm Taf Morgannwg LHB”

County Borough Councillor R Yeo – “My wife works for Cwm Taf Morgannwg UHB in Prince Charles Hospital”

County Borough Councillor J Davies – “I work for Cwm Taf Morgannwg UHB”

County Borough Councillor L M Adams - “My wife is in receipt of an NHS pension having worked for the Health Board for 37 years”

County Borough Councillor M Forey – “I was an independent member on the Health Board for 3 years”

County Borough Councillor K Morgan – “ I am employed by the Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board”

80 Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board

The Chairman of the Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board, Mr Emrys Elias introduced himself and four members of the Executive team, Mr P Mears, Chief Executive, Dr Kelechi Noaham, Director of Public Health, Mr Greg Dix, Director of Nursing and Mr Gareth Robinson, Chief Operating Officer.

Through the aid of Power point slides the Chief Executive of the Cwm Taf University Health Board., Mr Paul Mears, presented an overview of key matters under the following headings:

- Covid Update,
- Elective/ Planned Care Recovery Programme,
- Maternity & Neonatal Services

In addition to the matters included on the Power Point presentation, the Chief Executive advised on the current hospital visiting arrangements across all the hospital services which have been implemented in line with the National Guidance. He added that there is a red, amber and green status for visiting, currently the Cwm Taf University Health Board is adhering to the red status with restricted visiting although that is currently being reviewed as the transmission

rates within the hospital reduce. From a maternity perspective, visiting has continued with birth partners attending dating scans although visiting to post-natal wards has been restricted to mitigate transmission from external visitors to new mothers and babies.

The Chief Operating Officer also provided an update on the minor injury unit at Ysbyty Cwm Cynon which has experienced a sustainability issue as two of the four nursing staff are currently on long-term sick, therefore the service has been consolidated into Prince Charles Hospital so it can operate more effectively and consistently. It is hoped the unit will re-open in the New year when the staff will resume their duties.

The Leader of the Council thanked members of the Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board for their presentation and for their close working relationship with the local authority throughout covid-19 particularly within the social care sector which is under huge pressure. The Leader acknowledged the good will of everyone despite the short-term staff shortages and the difficulties experienced at the moment.

The Leader referred to the latest report from the Independent Maternity Oversight Panel which found major failings in over 20 cases and stated that he felt vindicated about speaking up at the time and felt he had been lied to with regards to the failings regarding those cases where a different outcome could have been achieved had it not been for the staff shortages and failures to report serious incidents. The Leader sought confirmation as to whether all the recommendations raised as a result of the review had been addressed. He commended the current leadership and executive team at the Cwm Taf University Health Board for the actions they have undertaken to address the issues.

The Chief Executive of the Cwm Taf UHB confirmed that the immediate 'make safe's' have all been actioned and he advised that the Independent Maternity Oversight Panel had been commissioned directly by the Cwm Taf UHB as they felt that the neonatal services were not functioning at the required level. He added that following the review there have been improvements to the clinical practice as there is now a full-time Pharmacist in place at Prince Charles Hospital to prescribe and support the neonatal unit and importantly there are better established links with the specialist centres in Cardiff and Swansea so that consultants and neonatal nurses can access specialist expertise and receive training and develop the necessary skills. Other recommendations will take longer to implement.

Councillor P Jarman asked the following questions:

-Initially, South Wales Police had taken an interest in the Maternity Services, is this still the case and is there is any indication that the neonatal services will be removed from Special measures?

-Can you clarify the situation with A&E in Prince Charles as it doesn't appear to be coping well with waiting times or the availability of beds?

The Chief Executive responded that the initial referral to South Wales Police had not been progressed. He acknowledged that some of the challenges at Prince Charles Hospital are due to the layout within the department and because of the flow of patients waiting for follow on placements to care homes or in other cases, palliative care, which is being reviewed, to free up space within the hospital. He

advised that staff are working very hard with recent input from with guidance and advice from Health Inspectorate Wales (HIW) but in the absence of a quick solution, the teams are trying to make the patient experience as good as it can be.

Other questions were asked as follows:

-How are Elective Surgery lists managed and are consultants being listened to?

-It was suggested that GP Practices in Aberdare are advising patients to go directly to A&E in Prince Charles Hospital as there are no appointments available within the GP practices.

-What steps are being taken to deliver vaccinations to vulnerable young people with autism or learning difficulties? Some of the experiences to date have not been satisfactory.

-There has been a recent BBC news story about 2,000 patients dying in hospital after catching the virus, what is the situation in Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board?

The Chief Executive of the Cwm Taf UHB advised that he would address the specific case about the GP Practice in Aberdare following the meeting and ensure a response is forthcoming to the individual Councillor, although he acknowledged the pressure that GP's are under at this time as they struggle to keep up with the demand. He responded to the issue of young people with autism/learning difficulties attending the vaccination centres and advised that communication has been circulated to ensure that arrangements are in place which are sensitive to the young people's needs, such as a separate room to administer the vaccine. He added that arrangements are now in place to ensure their experience is a satisfactory one.

In response to the national figures released regarding the deaths linked to covid in hospitals and identifying if the deaths were due to community acquired infection or catching covid whilst in hospital, the Chief Executive of the Cwm Taf UHB advised that they are working closely with Welsh Government to establish the data and would be sharing the findings with the families concerned and with key partner organisations such as the local authority.

In response to orthopaedic waiting lists, the Chief Operating Officer advised that patients coming in through the emergency pathway are operating normally within usual timescales. The Orthopaedic Consultants at Prince Charles Hospital are front and centre of the response to the elective recovery programme up to and including looking to build the capacity for delivering orthopaedic surgery in other hospital sites which can expand and catch up on the orthopaedic backlog more quickly.

Further questions were asked:

-What are you doing to work in partnership with the GP Practices?

-Are younger people receiving treatment ahead of older patients?

- Can you advise whether the handover arrangements within Maternity Services has improved?

The Chief Executive of the Cwm Taf UHB explained that there is much closer

working between GP's and the Health Board but there is no immediate solution to the challenges that Primary Care colleagues are facing. He added that it is crucial that patients have access to their GP's when they need it but there is room for the processes between hospital and GP to be more fluid. He recognised that there are also further ways in which the Health Board can remove some of the administrative elements of the GP's work to ensure their clinical time is better used.

The Chief Executive of the Cwm Taf UHB confirmed that there is no strategy in place which means that younger patients are treated ahead of older patients, the treatments are based on time waited, age is not a factor. In conclusion, the Chief Executive advised that there are processes in place for reporting complaints and incidents relating to Maternity Services and there have been changes made to the handover processes.

The Leader of the Council expressed his gratitude to the representatives of the Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board for attending and suggested that a return visit to Full Council would be arranged in the Spring next year to discuss elective surgery, Primary Care and the vaccine roll out.

Members were advised that any further questions should be addressed to the Cwm Taf University Health Board for a response.

This meeting closed at 4.40 pm

**Cllr S Powderhill
Chairman.**

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RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL

15 DECEMBER 2021

MEMBERS QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, DEMOCRATIC SERVICES & COMMUNICATION.

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To present the order of questions in respect of the Members Questions on Notice, following the amendment to the process agreed at the [Council AGM 2019](#).

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Receive the Questions and any supplementary questions proposed, as in accordance with the running order advised upon in 4.3 of the report, which should not exceed a 20-minute time period.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 As agreed at the Council AGM on the 15th May, 2019, Members agreed to amend Council Procedure Rule 9.2 in respect of Members Questions on Notice. A further amendment was made to Council Procedure Rule 9.2 at the Council AGM on the 26th May 2021 in respect of supplementary questions following expiry of the 20 minute time duration. [Council AGM 2021](#)

4. MEMBERS QUESTION ON NOTICE

- 4.1 The closing date for receipt of Members Questions on Notice to the Council Business Unit for the Council meeting on the 15th December 2021 was 5pm on the 2nd December 2021.
- 4.2 Thirty-two questions were received and put forward to the Council Ballot held on the 7th December 2021, to determine the running order of the questions at the Council Meeting.
- 4.3 The results of the ballot are outlined below:-

Number	Corresponding Question
1	<p>Question from County Borough Councillor A. Cox to the Cabinet Member for Education & Inclusion Services County Borough Councillor J Rosser:</p> <p>"What preparations are CBS RCT making for the proposed introduction of free school meals for all primary pupils in Wales"</p>
2	<p>Question from County Borough Councillor G. Holmes to the Leader of the Council, County Borough Councillor A. Morgan:</p> <p>"The Welsh Government has announced that families on low income and qualifying benefits will receive £100 to help them with their utility bills this winter. Can the Council Leader provide further information on this and how many householders do we think will benefit from this in RCT?"</p>
3	<p>Question from County Borough Councillor R. Williams to the Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure and Heritage Services, County Borough Councillor A. Crimmings:</p> <p>"Can the Cabinet Member update on recycling figures so far this year and confirm whether we are still on course to meet the Welsh Government targets?"</p>
4	<p>Question from County Borough Councillor G. Caple to the Leader of the Council, County Borough Councillor A. Morgan:</p> <p>"Will the Leader please make a statement on how this Council is working with Trivallis and other social housing providers to deliver environmental improvements?"</p>
5	<p>Question from County Borough Councillor R. Yeo to the Deputy Leader of the Council, County Borough Councillor M. Webber:</p> <p>"Can the Deputy Leader update on the graduate and apprenticeship programme in terms of the numbers and in to what professions they have joined?"</p>
6	<p>Question from County Borough Councillor G. Stacey to the Cabinet Member for Adult Services and the Welsh Language, County Borough Councillor G. Hopkins:</p> <p>"Can the Cabinet Member provide an update on what work the Council is doing to assist with delayed discharge from hospital?"</p>

7	<p>Question from County Borough Councillor G. P. Thomas to the Leader of the Council, County Borough Councillor A. Morgan:</p> <p>“Can the Council Leader outline what bids have been and are planned to be made to the Welsh Government for upgrading culverts and flood alleviation schemes?”</p>
8	<p>Question from County Borough Councillor S. Rees to the Leader of the Council, County Borough Councillor A. Morgan:</p> <p>“Will the Leader please make a statement on the Council’s budget planning ahead of the next financial year?”</p>
9	<p>Question from County Borough Councillor P. Jarman to County Borough Councillor M. Norris, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services:</p> <p>“Please will you make a statement on the main function areas that your portfolio is accountable and responsible for?”</p>
10	<p>Question from County Borough Councillor G. R. Davies to the Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure and Heritage Services, County Borough Councillor A. Crimmings:</p> <p>“A wnech chi ddatganiad ar cyflesterau chwareon ym Mhen uchaf y Rhondda Fawr?”</p> <p>“Can you make a statement on sports facilities in the upper Rhondda Fawr area?”</p>
11	<p>Question from County Borough Councillor D. Owen-Jones to the Leader of the Council, County Borough Councillor A. Morgan:</p> <p>“What implications does the recent Welsh Government announcement to pause major roadbuilding schemes in Wales have for Rhondda Cynon Taf?”</p>
12	<p>Question from County Borough Councillor D. Grehan to the Cabinet Member for Stronger Communities, Wellbeing and Cultural Services County Borough Councillor R. Lewis:</p> <p>“All yr aelod perthnasol o'r cabinet rhoi diweddariad ar y cynlluniau sydd ar gyfer cynyddu'r nifer o bwyntiau gwefru ceir trydan trwy'r sir, a pha gynlluniau penodol sydd ar gyfer strydoedd tai teras?”</p> <p>“Can the relevant Cabinet Member give an update on the plans in place for increasing the number of electric vehicle charging points available in the county, and what specific plans are there for streets with terraced houses?”</p>

13	<p>Question from County Borough Councillor L Walker to the Cabinet Member for Education & Inclusion Services County Borough Councillor J Rosser:</p> <p>“Can the Cabinet Member for Education & Inclusion Services update me on the proposed site for the New 21st Century Special school in Rhondda Cynon Taf “</p>
14	<p>Question from County Borough Councillor A. S. Fox to the Deputy Leader of the Council, County Borough Councillor M. Webber:</p> <p>“How is this Council supporting the local Armed Forces community?”</p>
15	<p>Question from County Borough Councillor R. Turner to the Leader of the Council, County Borough Councillor A. Morgan:</p> <p>“Will the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Highways please give an update on the latest position with regards to the Llanharan Footbridge?”</p>
16	<p>Question from County Borough Councillor J. Edwards to the Leader of the Council, County Borough Councillor A. Morgan:</p> <p>“Can the Leader please give an update on the improvement works to the culverts in Ynyshir, particularly above Heath Terrace?”</p>
17	<p>Question from County Borough Councillor S. Morgans to the Cabinet Member for Environment, Leisure and Heritage Services, County Borough Councillor A. Crimmings:</p> <p>“Will the Cabinet Member make a statement on the Council's investment in outdoor leisure facilities?”</p>
18	<p>Question from County Borough Councillor H. Boggis to the Leader of the Council, County Borough Councillor A. Morgan:</p> <p>“The Welsh Labour Government has stated as part of the cooperation agreement they plan to expand Free School Meals to all primary pupils following their manifesto commitment to review Free School Meals in the May elections. Can the Leader tell Members how many more children will benefit from this in RCT?”</p>

19	<p>Question from County Borough Councillor E. Griffiths to the Cabinet Member for Stronger Communities, Well-being and Cultural Services, County Borough Councillor R. Lewis:</p> <p>Mae hi bellach yn wybyddus i bawb fod anadlu awyr gwenwynig yn effeithio ar iechyd corfforol a meddyliol. Mae awyr llygredig yn ysylltiedig ag asthma, sgiliau gwybyddol gwanach, gor-dewdra ag anhwylderau a chyflyrrau meddyliol fel ADHD.</p> <p>All yr Aelod o'r Cabinet ar faterion Cymunedau Cadarn, Llesiant a Gwasanaethau Diwylliannol roi diweddariad am yr hyn mae'r Cyngor yn ei wneud o ran asesu lefelau llygredd awyr mewn amser 'go iawn' tu allan i bob ysgol yn Rhondda Cynon Tâf?</p> <p>It is now well recognised that breathing toxic air negatively impacts physical and mental health. Air pollution is associated with asthma, poorer cognitive function, obesity and mental disorders and conditions such as ADHD.</p> <p>Can the Cabinet Member for Stronger Communities, Well-being and Cultural Services provide an update on what action the Council is taking to assess real time air pollution levels around every school in RCT?</p>
20	<p>Question from County Borough Councillor S. Bradwick to the Leader of the Council, County Borough Councillor A. Morgan:</p> <p>"Can the Leader of the Council provide an update on the progress of flood alleviation scheme bids for the forthcoming year please?"</p>
21	<p>Question from County Borough Councillor J. Elliott to the Leader of the Council, County Borough Councillor A Morgan:</p> <p>"Can the Council Leader please provide an update on the various flood schemes planned and ongoing across RCT, including for the Cwmbach ward?"</p>
22	<p>Question from County Borough Councillor J Williams to the Leader of the Council, County Borough Councillor A. Morgan:</p> <p>'Will you make a statement on tip safety in the County?'</p>
23	<p>Question from County Borough Councillor Sheryl . Evans to the Deputy Leader of the Council, County Borough Councillor M. Webber:</p> <p>"Can the Deputy Leader provide an update on the Council's apprenticeship and graduate programmes, including the number of new places created since 2017 and could there be an overview of the recent awards the Council received in relation to this scheme?"</p>

24	<p>Question from County Borough Councillor J. Brencher to the Leader of the Council, County Borough Councillor A. Morgan:</p> <p>“Can the Leader update on PPE supplies and if we have stock available should the country see an increase in cases due to the new variant?”</p>
25	<p>Question from County Borough Councillor J. Barton to the Leader of the Council, County Borough Councillor A. Morgan:</p> <p>“What action can the Council take to improve road safety and reduce speeding traffic in local communities?”</p>
26	<p>Question from County Borough Councillor M. Griffiths to the Leader of the Council, County Borough Councillor A. Morgan:</p> <p>“Can the leader update on budget discussions with the Welsh Government in his role as WLGA Leader?”</p>
27	<p>Question from County Borough Councillor W. Treeby to the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services, County Borough Councillor C. Leyshon:</p> <p>“Can the Cabinet Member provide an update on the Santa Appeal and the huge generosity shown by residents and businesses?”</p>
28	<p>Question from County Borough Councillor A. Roberts to the Cabinet Member for Stronger Communities, Wellbeing and Cultural Services, County Borough Councillor R. Lewis:</p> <p>“Will the Cabinet Member please make a statement on the Council’s work with Voluntary and Third Sector organisations in Rhondda Cynon Taf?”</p>
29	<p>Question from County Borough Councillor S. M. Powell to the Cabinet Member for Stronger Communities, Wellbeing and Cultural Services, County Borough Councillor R. Lewis:</p> <p>“How is this Council progressing plans for the introduction of Electric Charge Points throughout Rhondda Cynon Taf?”</p>
30	<p>Question from County Borough Councillor T. Williams to the Leader of the Council, County Borough Councillor A. Morgan:</p> <p>“Can the Leader provide an overview of the works completed to date to help protect residents of Bronallt Terrace in Abercwmboi from flooding, and can the Leader also outline whether further measures can be taken?”</p>

31	<p>Question from County Borough Councillor W. Lewis to the Leader of the Council, County Borough Councillor A. Morgan:</p> <p>“With the change in working practices due to the pandemic what is the Council doing to support co-working spaces?”</p>
32	<p>Question from County Borough Councillor J. Bonetto to the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, County Borough Councillor M. A. Norris:</p> <p>“Can the Cabinet Member please outline the latest position on the Taff’s Well Thermal Spring project, in light of the good progress made to deliver the improvements to Ffynnon Taf Primary School?”</p>

4.4 At the Council meeting a maximum of 20 minutes shall be allowed for Questions on Notice. Any questions that are not dealt with in this time limit shall fall. Any questions on notice not answered will need to be resubmitted to the Proper Officer for the next full Council meeting in accordance with these rules.

5. CONSULTATION / INVOLVEMENT

5.1 The amendments to the Council Procedure Rule in respect of Members Questions was considered and agreed at the Council’s AGM 2019 and AGM 2021, following consultation with the Constitution Committee.

6. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The amendment to the Council procedure rule taken forward at the Council AGM, allows the opportunity for more Members to ask a question at Council

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no financial implications aligned to this report.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

8.1 The report has been prepared in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.2.

9. LINKS TO THE COUNCILS CORPORATE PLAN / OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES.

9.1 The opportunity for Members to propose questions at Council meetings allows Members to receive information which potentially detail the Council priorities. It also embraces the Future Generations Act as all work and decisions taken by Council seek to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of the County Borough.

10. CONCLUSION

- 10.1 Detailing the procedure for Members Questions on Notice assists in transparency for both Members and for public engagement.

Other Information:-

Relevant Scrutiny Committee – Overview & Scrutiny Committee

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL

15 DECEMBER 2021

**REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, DEMOCRATIC SERVICES &
COMMUNICATION.**

Item: MEMBERS QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Background Papers

[Council AGM 2019.](#)

[Council AGM 2021](#)

Officer to contact: Emma Wilkins, Council Business Unit

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RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL

15th DECEMBER 2021

DIVERSITY IN DEMOCRACY

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES & COMMUNICATION.

1. PURPOSE FOR THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Members with a draft Diversity Declaration for comment and approval, following the decision taken by the Council at its [extra-ordinary meeting](#) to become a Diverse Council.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that Council:

- 2.1 Consider and comment on the draft 'Diversity Declaration' attached as appendix A and subject to Members comments agree to take forward the declaration as the formal pledge of the Council to becoming a Diverse Council.

3. DIVERSITY IN DEMOCRACY

- 3.1 As reported at the Extra Ordinary Council meeting on the 26th May, 2021 the diversity agenda has been growing across all aspects of public life and it is important that Rhondda Cynon Taf Council are committed to increasing diversity, which includes tackling the barriers which prevent an individual's active participation in local democracy.
- 3.2 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.
- 3.3 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 were 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.

- 3.4 In light of the 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 Working Group also considered 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.
- 3.5 A report of the working group was considered by Council at the extra-ordinary meeting where Members endorsed the recommendations presented.
- 3.6 In addition, Council also considered the report of the WLGA Council in respect of 'Diversity in Democracy'.
- 3.7 The WLGA report recognised the diversity work already under way locally but called for concerted and ambitious local action. Through its report and resulting actions it asked Councils to prioritise action locally, promoting the take-up of members' allowances and progressing 'Diverse Council' declarations, to provide a clear, public commitment to improving diversity. The report included an 'outline' Declaration to:
- Provide a clear, public commitment to improving diversity;
 - Demonstrate an open and welcoming culture to all;
 - Consider staggering council meeting times and agreeing recess periods to support councillors with other commitments; and
 - Set out an action plan of activity ahead of the 2022 local elections.
- 3.8 It was suggested that Councils may however wish to undertake further action or commitments within their Declarations according to local priorities.
- 3.9 A draft 'Diverse Declaration' for Rhondda Cynon Taf Council is attached as Appendix A to this report for Member's consideration and subsequent approval.

4 ACTIONS GOING FORWARD.

- 4.1 The Actions outlined within the WLGA Council report have been added to the Action plan already developed by the Democratic Services Committee working group in respect of work already identified by the Council in respect of diversity.
- 4.2 Timely progress reports and updates will be provided to the Democratic Services Committee to ensure delivery of the actions.
- 4.3 Work will need to be taken forward with Group Leaders of the Council to strengthen the diversity outcomes that are anticipated and to ensure all ways possible of achieving a greater diverse RCT is achieved.

5 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS INCLUDING SOCIO ECONOMIC DUTY

- 5.1 The work of the Democratic Services Committee Diversity working group and the WLGA looks to improve the equality and diversity across the County Borough and 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.

6 WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The Council proactively supports promotion and provision of the Welsh language within the democratic process and will continue to promote the opportunities available through its diversity agenda.

7 CONSULTATION

- 7.1 Democratic Services Committee – [10th May 2021](#).
- 7.2 Group Leaders meeting – 1st December 2021

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 8.1 The awareness raising opportunities and promotion of the role of a Councillor to future candidates can be delivered through platforms already available to the Council.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

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

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

- 10.1 The work of a Councillor is fundamental to the Council's Corporate plan, as Councillors are the mouthpiece for the communities that they serve.
- 10.2 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.

11 CONCLUSION

- 11.1 Trying to achieve a diverse culture is challenging and the Council through the Democratic Services Committee have already identified potential barriers that may dissuade members of the public to stand as a candidate for election.
- 11.2 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.
- 11.3 The Diversity Declaration will be a further positive step forward to illustrating the changes that the Council would like to make to ensuring diversity within the Council.

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RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL - DRAFT DIVERSITY PLEDGE

Rhondda Cynon Taf Council recognises that Diversity within Local Government creates 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. As a Council we therefore commit to being a Diverse Council.

We agree to

- Provide a clear public commitment to improving diversity in democracy through the work, policies and services we provide.
- Demonstrate an open and welcoming culture to all, promoting the highest standards of behaviour and conduct as reflected in the Members Memorandum of Understanding
- Encourage the continuation of the 'Member Equalities Champion' role within the Leaders Cabinet.
- Encourage representation from under-represented groups in high profile, high influence leadership roles within the Council whenever possible.
- Set out a local Diverse Council Action Plan ahead of the 2022 local elections, which shall include:
 - a) The appointment of Diversity Champions for each political group on the council to work with each other and the local party associations to encourage recruitment of candidates from underrepresented groups.
 - b) Encourage and enable people from underrepresented groups to stand for office through the provision of activities such as mentoring and shadowing programmes and information and learning events for people interested in standing as official candidates
 - c) Proactive engagement and involvement with local community groups and partner organisations supporting and representing under-represented groups, including work with the Council's Community Development Officer and wider team, to promote the role of a Councillor with the 3rd sector and voluntary groups within the County Borough.
 - d) The updating of the Council website to ensure that it displays relevant information, including details surrounding remuneration and support provisions available to assist any future candidate in standing for election.
 - e) The taking forward of a Council video promoting the role of a Councillor and providing information surrounding support available to Elected Members
 - f) Promotion of the role of a Councillor at Council Job and Career Fairs.
 - g) A commitment to ensuring that all members and candidates complete the Welsh Government candidates' and councillors' survey distributed at election time.
 - h) To take forward improved equality monitoring of Members

- i) Working with Diversity Champions to encourage each political group to set ambitious targets for candidates from under-represented groups at the 2022 local elections
 - j) The development and promotion of new ways of working for members, including the provision of hybrid meeting opportunities and eLearning platforms which will assist and encourage all candidates and those from underrepresented groups to stand for office.
- Continue working towards the standards for member support and development set out in the *Wales Charter for Member Support and Development*.
- Continue to demonstrate a commitment to a duty of care for Councillors by:
 - a) providing access to counselling services for all councillors through the Councils Occupational Health Service and Cari Wellbeing Service;
 - b) Promoting the general open-door policy for Members to contact the Head of Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer for any concerns
 - c) having regard for the safety and wellbeing of councillors whenever they are performing their role as councillors and ensuring that all Members are aware of the safety provisions in place for Members through the Council Business Unit in partnership with the Community Safety Partnership and South Wales Police;
 - d) taking a zero-tolerance approach to bullying and harassment by members including such harassment through social networks, and to assist Members with the production of infographics to illustrate acceptable behaviour and flyers to provide to constituents advising them of how they can contact Members going forward.
 - e) Providing training and learning opportunities to support Members in undertaking their role.
 - f) Surveying Members annually on the support arrangements available to allow the Council to review and address any improvements that could be taken forward to further support Members in their role.

To continue to provide flexibility with the undertaking of Council Business by

- Continuing the 'Annual Survey of Members' to review the commencement time of Council Meetings, which is reported to the Annual General Meeting.
- Continuing to promote and support the hybrid meeting arrangements taken forward by the Council to allow Members and Officers flexibility in attending meetings physically at Council Offices or through the virtual meeting platform.
- Continuing the agreed practice of providing recess periods during school holidays to support councillors with caring or work commitments.
- Promoting the welsh language provision available to all Members at Council meetings
- Sufficient provision of ICT equipment and support to allow a Member to undertake their role effectively.
- Encourage all members take up the allowances and salaries to which they are entitled, particularly any reimbursement for costs of care, so that all members

receive fair remuneration for their work and that the role of member is not limited to those who can afford it.

- Encourage Members to discuss reasonable adjustments to assist them in undertaking their role.
- Encourage the take up of provisions available to Members in respect of broadband allowances and mobile phone provision to assist Members in undertaking their role.

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RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL

15th DECEMBER 2021

ANNUAL REPORTS 2020/21

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND COMMUNICATION.

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Council with the Annual Reports of the following Committees for the Municipal Year 2020/21:
- Democratic Services Committee
 - Audit Committee

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Council:

- 2.1 Note the Annual Reports for the Democratic Services Committee and Audit Committee (which are attached to the report at Appendix 1 and 2 respectively).

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The need to provide Council with an update in respect of the work of the Committees during the Municipal Year 2020/21.

4. BACKGROUND

4.1 Democratic Services Committee

- 4.2 The Annual Report of the Democratic Services Committee, provides a summary of the role and work of the Committee undertaken in the 2020/2021 Municipal Year.

- 4.3 The draft Annual report was presented to and endorsed by the Democratic Services Committee at its meeting held on the [6th September 2021](#)

4.4 **Audit Committee**

4.4 The draft Annual Report of the Audit Committee was presented to the then Governance & Audit Committee on the [12th July 2021](#), providing a summary of the work undertaken over the 2020/21 Municipal Year.

4.5 The Governance & Audit Committee approved the annual report and its presentation to Full Council.

4.6 The report is attached as Appendix 2 to the report.

5. **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not needed because the contents of the reports are for information purposes only.

6. **CONSULTATION**

6.1 There is no consultation required for this report. Consultation on the reports was undertaken at each of the Committee meetings referenced.

7. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)**

7.1 There are no financial implications aligned to this report.

8. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED**

8.1 The report has been prepared in accordance with Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council's constitution.

9. **LINKS TO THE COUNCILS CORPORATE PLAN / OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES/ FUTURE GENERATIONS – SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.**

9.1 The work of all Committees of the Council encompasses all of the Councils priorities and provision of an Annual report allows the Committee to highlight the work undertaken and items for future consideration in line with the corporate priorities.

9.2 The work of the Committees also takes forward the principals and wellbeing goals of the Well-being and Future Generations Act, linked to each of the Committees' Terms of Reference.

10. **CONCLUSION**

- 10.1 The Annual reports outline the work of the Committees undertaken in the 2020/2021 Municipal Year and have been approved by each Committee for presentation to Full Council.

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Democratic Services Committee Annual Report 2020-21



RHONDDA CYNON TAF

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Looking Ahead

Appendix - Terms of Reference for the Democratic Services Committee



Cllr M Webber

Vice Chairperson of the Democratic Services Committee

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 acknowledged 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.**

Members Of The Democratic Services Committee



Cllr L. M. Adams



Cllr J. Bonetto



Cllr J. Brencher



Cllr G. Caple



Cllr M. Diamond



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. Webber
(Vice Chair)

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.

Hybrid / Webcasting

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.

Diversity Working Group

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 as 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.

Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council

Audit Committee

Annual Report 2020/21



RHONDDA CYNON TAF

1. | INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 A key component of good governance for all organisations is to have in place an Audit Committee. Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council complies with this requirement and the **Terms of Reference** for its Audit Committee, as included within the Council's Constitution, is set in line with the Local Government Measure 2011 and the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. The responsibilities of Audit Committee, as required by the above legislation, is included at Appendix A.
- 1.2 2020/21 has been an unprecedented year, with the Covid-19 pandemic having a widespread impact on the delivery of Council services, local communities and wider society. Audit Committee was mindful of this backdrop in setting its workplan for the year on **5th October 2020** and also of the need for robust and proportionate oversight of the Council's governance, internal control and risk managements to be in place. This translated into an approach where Audit Committee focussed on its core responsibilities:
- Reviewing the draft financial statements and monitoring management action in response to the issues raised by external audit;
 - Scrutinising and be satisfied with the Council's Annual Government Statement, to demonstrate how governance supports the achievement of objectives, and monitor management action in-year to further improve arrangements;
 - Monitoring the Council's internal audit function in terms of overseeing independence, objectivity, performance and professionalism, through the regular reporting of performance and finalised audit assignments;
 - Considering the effectiveness of the authority's risk management arrangements;
 - Considering reports and recommendations of external audit in respect of the Council; and
 - Supporting the ongoing development and effectiveness of Audit Committee.
- 1.3 Section 2 of this report summarises the work delivered by Audit Committee during 2020/21 and Section 3 presents the outcome of the self-assessment against the CIPFA publication 'Audit Committees - Practical Guidance for Local Authorities & Police 2018 Edition' (from herein the CIPFA Guidance).

2. | WORK DELIVERED IN 2020/21

- 2.1 The CIPFA Guidance identifies 'Core Functions' of an Audit Committee along with what it refers to as possible 'wider functions' of an Audit Committee.
- 2.2 The Core Functions are set out below (capital and bold text headers) and the work delivered in support of these core functions is summarised under each.
- 2.3 BE SATISFIED THAT THE AUTHORITY'S ASSURANCE STATEMENTS, INCLUDING THE ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT, PROPERLY REFLECT THE RISK ENVIRONMENT AND ANY ACTIONS REQUIRED TO IMPROVE IT, AND DEMONSTRATE HOW GOVERNANCE SUPPORTS THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE AUTHORITY'S OBJECTIVES**
- 2.3.1 Legislation requires the Council to prepare an Annual Governance Statement (AGS). The Draft AGS for 2019/20 was reported to Audit Committee at its meeting on the **20th July 2020** and concluded that the 'Council's governance arrangements operated effectively, ensured business was properly conducted and publicly demonstrated the proper use of resources in the delivery of Corporate Plan priorities'. Audit Committee endorsed the 2019/20 AGS and recommended its certification by the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive for inclusion with the Council's 2019/20 Statement of Accounts.
- 2.3.2 During 2020/21 the Committee monitored the extent of progress made by the Council to implement the agreed proposals for improvement set out within the 2019/20 AGS, and this update was reported to Audit Committee on **1st February 2021**.
- 2.3.3 The draft AGS for 2020/21 is to be presented to the 12th July 2021 Audit Committee and sets out, amongst other things, confirmation that all agreed 2019/20 proposals for improvement have been implemented.
- 2.4 IN RELATION TO THE AUTHORITY'S INTERNAL AUDIT FUNCTIONS:**
- **OVERSEE ITS INDEPENDENCE, OBJECTIVITY, PERFORMANCE AND PROFESSIONALISM**
 - **SUPPORT THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE INTERNAL AUDIT PROCESS**
 - **PROMOTE THE EFFECTIVE USE OF INTERNAL AUDIT WITHIN THE ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK**
- 2.4.1 As set out in the 2019/20 Audit Committee Annual Report, from the 1st April 2019 the Council's Internal Audit Service transferred to a regional Internal Audit Service, led by the Vale of Glamorgan Council and comprising four local authorities: Bridgend County Borough Council, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council and Vale of Glamorgan Council.

2.4.2 The Covid-19 pandemic required Council Services to quickly adapt and implement changes to service delivery arrangements to ensure continued provision of essential frontline services during 2020/21. A similar approach was also applied by the Internal Audit Service, whereby an **Interim Risk Based Audit Plan 2020/21** was compiled taking into account: an updated assessment of keys risk; revised service delivery arrangements in place across the Council; and Covid-19 specific functions undertaken by the Council, for example, administration of a range of financial support for businesses and free school meal payments to eligible families, a number of which being administered on behalf of Welsh Government. The Interim Risk Based Audit Plan was reported to and approved by Audit committee on **20th July 2020** and the Head of the Regional Internal Audit Service outlined that the plan would need to be flexible to respond to changing circumstances and events that may occur (e.g. future 'waves' of the coronavirus, ability to access staff and evidence to obtain assurance around internal controls in place, Covid-19 related staff absences).

2.4.3 During the year, Audit Committee received Internal Audit performance updates, including how the Service was adapting and undertaking audit work remotely, and details of all finalised audit assignments; this suite of information enabled Members to consider the effectiveness of the Internal Audit process for 2020/21.

2.4.4 A key part of Audit Committee's role is to support the Council's Internal Audit Service to remain independent, assess whether it has adequate resources available to it and to monitor the performance and quality of work delivered throughout the year. The Internal Audit Service fulfilled this requirement through its Internal Audit Charter¹, that was presented to and approved by Audit Committee on **5th October 2020**, and provided the Committee with information to assess the independence of the Internal Audit Service.

2.5 MONITOR THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE CONTROL ENVIRONMENT, INCLUDING ARRANGEMENTS FOR ENSURING VALUE FOR MONEY, SUPPORTING STANDARDS AND ETHICS AND FOR MANAGING THE AUTHORITY'S EXPOSURE TO THE RISKS OF FRAUD AND CORRUPTION

2.5.1 Summary reports of finalised audit assignments were reported to Audit Committee during the year to assist the Committee in forming an opinion on the overall control environment in place within the Council for 2020/21. The results of Internal Audit's work is brought together at the end of each financial year in the form of **Internal Audit Annual Report**, and for 2020/21 the Annual Report concludes that (subject to approval by Audit Committee on 12th July 2021):

*Taking into account the results of the internal audit reviews completed during 2020/21, the recommendations made and considering other sources of assurance the Head of Internal Audit's annual opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's framework of governance, risk management and internal control for 2020/21 is **'Effective with a small number of areas identified for improvement'**. No significant cross-cutting control issues have been identified that would impact on the Council's overall control environment. The weaknesses that have been identified are service specific.*

¹ Internal Audit Charter - a formal document that establishes the Internal Audit Service's position within the organisation, including the nature of the Head of Internal Audit's functional reporting relationship with the Board (i.e. the Council's Audit Committee).

2.5.2 Consistent with the above conclusion, there were:

- No areas identified during the year where the standard of internal control / governance arrangements were insufficient and required improvement; and
- No follow-up reviews have been requested by Governance and Audit Committee to be built into the 2021/22 Annual Audit Plan.

2.5.3 With regard to the risks of fraud and corruption:

- At the 2nd November 2020 Audit Committee meeting, the Council's Service Director – Pensions, Procurement and Transactional Services provided an overview of the National Fraud Initiative, along with an update on the work delivered by the Corporate Fraud Team. This update provided assurance on the Council's arrangements to tackle potential fraud and covered the internal control environment that supports this area. The Anti-Fraud Annual Report for 2020/21 is to be reported to the 12th July 2021 Audit Committee for consideration / approval.
- At the **26th April 2021** Audit Committee, the Whistleblowing Annual Report 2020/21 was reported to Audit Committee. The overall conclusion, as set out in the 2020/21 Whistle-blowing Annual Report, was that 'the Council's whistleblowing arrangements are appropriate'.

2.6 CONSIDER THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE AUTHORITY'S RISK MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS AND THE CONTROL ENVIRONMENT, REVIEWING THE RISK PROFILE OF THE ORGANISATION AND ASSURANCES THAT ACTION IS BEING TAKEN ON RISK-RELATED ISSUES, INCLUDING PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS

2.6.1 The work-plan for 2020/21 built on the work undertaken in the previous year and continued to widen the coverage of governance and risk management through:

- AGS – the continuation of in-year and year-end progress updates to Audit Committee on the implementation of proposals for improvement.
- A programme of Strategic Risk Register updates to Audit Committee commenced to improve Committee Members' understanding of the strategic risks facing the Council and the arrangements in place to manage / mitigate such risks. During the year, 2 updates were presented to Audit Committee: Delivery of the 21st Century Schools Programme (1st February 2021) and Workforce Planning – 22nd March 2021), and further updates will be built into the 2021/22 workplan as part of Governance and Audit Committee's work in understanding and reviewing the Council's risk profile.
- A Learning and Development plan compiled and reported to Audit Committee on the **1st February 2021**, following an on-line training needs assessment questionnaire completed by Audit Committee Members. The feedback has identified risk management as an area requiring on-going support and as such has been built into the Committee's Learning and Development Plan for 2021/22.

2.7 REVIEW THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS, EXTERNAL AUDITOR'S OPINION AND REPORTS TO MEMBERS, AND MONITOR MANAGEMENT ACTION IN RESPONSE TO THE ISSUES RAISED BY EXTERNAL AUDIT

- 2.7.1 At the **20th July 2020** Audit Committee, the Head of Finance – Education and Financial Reporting presented the certified draft 2019/20 Statements of Account for the Council and the Rhondda Cynon Taf Pension Fund². At the 5th October 2020 Audit Committee meeting, Audit Wales provided a verbal update on the progress on the audit of the draft Statements of Account for 2019/20 and informed the Committee, amongst other things, that to date no significant areas of concern had arisen for the Committee to be made aware of in relation to the audit of the draft Statements of Account.
- 2.7.2 The Council and Pension Fund audited Statement of Accounts for 2019/20 were subsequently reported to and approved by full Council on the **25th November 2020**, following completion of the external audit process, with both sets of Accounts being issued with unqualified opinions by Audit Wales (i.e. clean bills of health). Following on, at the **1st February 2021** Audit Committee, Audit Wales presented the 'Audit of Accounts Report Addendum' that set out two recommendations arising from the 2019/20 audit process. Both recommendations were accepted by the Council and Management agreed for the recommendations to be implemented by 1st April 2021.

2.8 CONSIDER THE REPORTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF EXTERNAL AUDIT AND INSPECTION AGENCIES AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR GOVERNANCE, RISK MANAGEMENT OR CONTROL

- 2.8.1 At the **26th April 2021** Audit Committee meeting, an update was reported on the progress made to date by the Council to implement proposals for improvement reported by Audit Wales in its Annual Audit Summary 2020 (the Annual Audit Summary 2020 being reported to full Council on 10th March 2021). Following Audit Committee's consideration of the progress update, the Committee determined that there were no matters of a governance, internal control or risk management nature that require further action or attention by Audit Committee nor any matters at this stage to be referred to the Council's scrutiny committees.
- 2.8.2 With regard to possible wider functions of an audit committee, as set out within the CI{FA Guidance, this covers, for example, considering governance, risk or control matters at the request of other committees.
- 2.8.3 At the 5th October 2020 Audit Committee, following the Committee's consideration of finalised audit assignments, further information was requested on the areas of Governor Vacancies, Safeguarding and School Attendance. The Council's Director of Education and Inclusion Services provided an update to the 2nd November 2020 Audit Committee and following consideration of the information, Audit Committee referred the matter of school attendance and 6th form attendance to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee for further review. It is noted that the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee will provide feedback to Audit Committee in 2021/22.

² 20th July 2020 Audit Committee – the Committee also considered the certified draft 2019/20 Statement of Accounts for the Central South Consortium Joint Education Service Joint Committee and the certified draft 2019/20 Annual Return for the Llwydcoed Crematorium Joint Committee

3. | SELF-ASSESSMENT AGAINST THE CIPFA PRACTICAL GUIDANCE FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES & POLICE 2018 EDITION

- 3.1 The self-assessment checklist included within the CIPFA Guidance has been completed and has been based on the Audit Committee arrangements in place during 2020/21 and from a review of the information reported to Audit Committee over this period. The self-assessment is set out at Appendix 1B and also includes the results of previous years self-assessments for information purposes.
- 3.2 The 2020/21 self-assessment process demonstrates that the Council's Audit Committee has made good progress to implement the proposals for improvement reported in 2019/20 and has also identified a small number of new proposals for improvement to further reinforce the existing arrangements in place.
- 3.3 An update on the progress made to implement proposals for improvement reported in 2019/20 and also new proposals for improvement are set out in Table 1.

Table 1 – 2019/20 Self-Assessment Progress Update and 2020/21 Self-Assessment Proposals for Improvement

Good Practice Questions		2019/20 Self-Assessment				2020/21 Self-Assessment			
		Yes	Partly	No	Response & Proposal for Improvement	Yes	Partly	No	Progress made since 2019/20 and 2020/21 Proposal for Improvement
12b.	<p><u>MEMBERSHIP AND SUPPORT</u></p> <p>Has an effective audit committee structure and composition of the committee been selected?</p> <p>This should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> an appropriate mix of knowledge and skills among the membership 		<		<p>Learning and development has continued during 2019/20 in line with the Committee's terms of reference and agreed work-plan for the year. This has been supported through Members having a broad range of knowledge and experience overall (e.g. specific Members having scrutiny committee responsibilities) that has complemented the work of Audit Committee during the year.</p> <p>Work also commenced to compile an approach to enable the knowledge and skills of the Committee to be assessed, as referenced at the 3rd February 2020 Audit Committee, and will be shared with the Committee in 2020/21. Thereafter, the assessment process will commence and will be progressed in parallel with the Wales Audit Office Project – Rhondda Cynon Taf Audit Committee Support and Development.</p> <p><u>Proposals for Improvement</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete the skills assessment for Members of Audit Committee; and Agree a refreshed programme of learning and development (informed by the skills assessment exercise) and incorporate into the Audit Committee annual work-plan. 				<p><u>2019/20 Update</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Skills assessment of Audit Committee Members – COMPLETED and reported to Audit Committee on 1st February 2021. Agree a refreshed programme of learning and development – COMPLETED and agreed by Audit Committee on 22nd March 2021 (and will be incorporated into the Committee's 2021/22 workplan. <p><u>NEW Proposal for Improvement (2020.21)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As part of the on-going support and development of Audit Committee, the 2021/22 Workplan and Learning and Development Plan should be updated to reflect the work needed in preparation for the implementation of the requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 (for example, the Governance and Audit Committee's new responsibilities in respect of performance assessment and complaints handling).

Good Practice Questions		2019/20 Self-Assessment				2020/21 Self-Assessment			
		Yes	Partly	No	Response & Proposal for Improvement	Yes	Partly	No	Progress made since 2019/20 and 2020/21 Proposal for Improvement
16	<p><u>MEMBERSHIP AND SUPPORT</u></p> <p>Has the membership of the committee been assessed against the core knowledge and skills framework and found to be satisfactory?</p>			✓	<p>As noted for 12b above.</p> <p><u>Proposals for Improvement</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete the skills assessment for Members of Audit Committee; and • Agree a refreshed programme of learning and development (informed by the skills assessment exercise) and incorporate into the Audit Committee annual work-plan. 				<p>Completed – see 12b ‘2019/20 Update’ for details of action taken.</p>
19	<p><u>MEMBERSHIP AND SUPPORT</u></p> <p><u>Good practice question</u></p> <p>Has the Committee obtained feedback on its performance from those interacting with the Committee or relying on its work?</p>				Not Applicable			✓	<p>Due to the need to prioritise reporting arrangements during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Audit Committee Annual Report 2019/20 was not reported to full Council. It is noted however that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ordinarily the Audit Committee Annual Report would be reported to full Council (i.e. the 2018/19 Annual Report was presented to the Council Annual General Meeting in May 2019); and • The 2019/20 Audit Committee Annual Report was published, reviewed and agreed by Audit Committee at its meeting on 20th July 2020.

Good Practice Questions		2019/20 Self-Assessment				2020/21 Self-Assessment			
		Yes	Partly	No	Response & Proposal for Improvement	Yes	Partly	No	Progress made since 2019/20 and 2020/21 Proposal for Improvement
									<u>NEW Proposal for Improvement (2020/21)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An agreed version of the Audit Committee Annual Report 2020/21 should be reported to full Council to enable opportunity for feedback to be provided on the performance of Audit Committee.
21	<p><u>EFFECTIVENESS OF THE COMMITTEE</u></p> <p>Does the committee engage with a wide range of leaders and managers, including discussion of audit findings, risks and action plans with the responsible officers?</p>			N/A		✓		<u>NEW Proposal for Improvement (2020/21)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Progress updates in relation to Audit Wales recommendations are reported to Audit Committee annually. It is recommended that updates on the progress being made by the Council to implement Audit Wales recommendations are timetabled within the Governance and Audit Committee Workplan for 2021/22 at mid-year and year-end intervals (or in line with specific requirements). 	
23	<p><u>EFFECTIVENESS OF THE COMMITTEE</u></p>		✓		The Committee has undertaken specific work, in line with its Terms of Reference, to add value to the operations of the Council – for example:				<u>2019/20 Update</u> Audit Committee continues to take steps to improve the impact of its work, for example, undertaking a training needs assessment

Good Practice Questions		2019/20 Self-Assessment				2020/21 Self-Assessment			
		Yes	Partly	No	Response & Proposal for Improvement	Yes	Partly	No	Progress made since 2019/20 and 2020/21 Proposal for Improvement
	<p><u>Good practice question</u> Has the committee evaluated whether and how it is adding value to the organisation?</p>				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviewing and approving a local code of corporate governance; Reviewing and challenging the AGS; and Monitoring the implementation of recommendations made by the Wales Audit Office (from an internal control perspective). <p><u>Proposal for Improvement</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using one area of the Audit Committee's Terms of Reference, pilot an approach to evaluating the impact of its work (with the aim of learning lessons and developing an approach to evaluate other areas of the Committee's work). 		✓		<p>and agreeing a learning and development plan and referring specifics matters for more in-depth review to the Council's Scrutiny function.</p> <p>This area will be an on-going action as part of the Audit Committee's development and completion of the self-assessment process for 2021/22.</p>

- 3.4 Subject to a version of the Audit Committee Annual Report 2020/21 being agreed, the proposals for improvement (as per Table 1) will form the basis of an action plan that will be led and managed by the Governance and Audit Committee during 2021/22. The action plan will be a living document to ensure account is taken of any relevant changes, for example, in service delivery, strategic risks and Audit Committee's on-going responsibilities.

4. | CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 During 2020/21 the Council's Audit Committee has reviewed and challenged a wide range of topic areas, including the work of Internal and External Audit.
- 4.2 From a review of the coverage of Audit Committee's work and oversight during the year, as set out in Section 2, it is considered that the Committee has delivered its Workplan and responsibilities in line with its Terms of Reference.
- 4.3 The Annual Report also sets out, in Section 3 / Appendix 1B, the results of the self-assessment undertaken against the checklist included within the CIPFA Guidance. The outcome of this process demonstrates that the Council's Audit Committee has made good progress to implement the proposals for improvement reported in 2019/20 and has also identified a small number of new proposals for improvement to further reinforce the existing arrangements in place.

Appendix 1A

RESPONSIBILITIES OF AUDIT COMMITTEE IN LINE WITH THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (WALES) MEASURE 2011 AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND ELECTIONS (WALES) ACT 2021

Chapter 2, section 81 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011

Local authorities to appoint audit committees

- 4.0 A local authority must appoint a committee (an “Audit Committee”) to—
- a) review and scrutinise the authority's financial affairs,
 - b) make reports and recommendations in relation to the authority's financial affairs,
 - c) review and assess the risk management, internal control and corporate governance arrangements of the authority,
 - d) make reports and recommendations to the authority on the adequacy and effectiveness of those arrangements,
 - e) oversee the authority's internal and external audit arrangements, and
 - f) review the financial statements prepared by the authority.
- 5.0 A local authority may confer on its Audit Committee such other functions as the authority considers suitable to be exercised by such a committee.
- 6.0 It is for an Audit Committee to determine how to exercise its functions.

Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021

Council Performance Arrangements

- (i) To consider the Council's draft Annual Performance Self-Assessment report and if deemed necessary may make recommendations for changes to the Council.
- (ii) To receive the Council's finalised Annual Self-Assessment report in respect of a financial year as soon as reasonably practicable after the end of that financial year.
- (iii) At least once during the period between two consecutive ordinary elections of councillors to the Council, consider the independent Panel Performance Assessment report into which the Council is meeting its performance requirements.
- (iv) To receive and review the Council's draft response to the report of the independent Panel Performance Assessment and if deemed necessary may make recommendations for changes to the statements made in the draft response to the Council.

Complaints Handling

- (i) To review and assess the Council's ability to deal with complaints effectively.
- (ii) To make reports and recommendations in relation to the Council's ability to deal with complaints effectively.

Self-assessment of good practice

Good practice questions		2018/19 Self-Assessment			2019/20 Self-Assessment			2020/21 Self-Assessment		
		Yes	Partly	No	Yes	Partly	No	Yes	Partly	No
Audit committee purpose and governance										
1	Does the authority have a dedicated audit committee?	✓			✓			✓		
2	Does the audit committee report directly to Full Council?	✓			✓			✓		
3	Do the terms of reference clearly set out the purpose of the committee in accordance with CIPFA's Position Statement?	✓			✓			✓		
4	Is the role and purpose of the audit committee understood and accepted across the authority?	✓			✓			✓		
5	Does the audit committee provide support to the authority in meeting the requirements of good governance?	✓			✓			✓		
6	Are the arrangements to hold the committee to account for its performance operating satisfactorily?	✓			✓			✓		
Functions of the committee										
7	Do the committee's terms of reference explicitly address all the core areas identified in CIPFA's Position Statement? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • good governance • assurance framework, including partnerships and collaboration arrangements • internal audit • external audit • financial reporting • risk management 		✓		✓			✓		

Good practice questions		2018/19 Self-Assessment			2019/20 Self-Assessment			2020/21 Self-Assessment		
		Yes	Partly	No	Yes	Partly	No	Yes	Partly	No
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> value for money or best value counter fraud and corruption supporting the ethical framework 									
8	Is an annual evaluation undertaken to assess whether the committee is fulfilling its terms of reference and that adequate consideration has been given to all core areas?	✓			✓			✓		
9	Has the audit committee considered the wider areas identified in CIPFA's Position Statement and whether it would be appropriate for the committee to undertake them?	✓			✓			✓		
10	Where coverage of core areas has been found to be limited, are plans in place to address this?	N/A			N/A			N/A		
11	Has the committee maintained its advisory role by not taking on any decision-making powers that are not in line with its core purpose?	✓			✓			✓		
Membership and support										
12	Has an effective audit committee structure and composition of the committee been selected? This should include:									
a.	separation from the executive	✓			✓			✓		
b.	an appropriate mix of knowledge and skills among the membership		✓			✓		✓		
c.	a size of committee that is not unwieldy	✓			✓			✓		
d.	consideration has been given to the inclusion of at least one independent member (where it is not already a mandatory requirement)	✓			✓			✓		

Good practice questions		2018/19 Self-Assessment			2019/20 Self-Assessment			2020/21 Self-Assessment		
		Yes	Partly	No	Yes	Partly	No	Yes	Partly	No
13	Have independent members appointed to the committee been recruited in an open and transparent way and approved by the Full Council?	✓			✓			✓		
14	Does the chair of the committee have appropriate knowledge and skills?	✓			✓			✓		
15	Are arrangements in place to support the committee with briefings and training?	✓			✓			✓		
16	Has the membership of the committee been assessed against the core knowledge and skills framework and found to be satisfactory?			✓			✓			
17	Does the committee have good working relations with key people and organisations, including external audit, internal audit and the Chief Finance Officer?	✓			✓			✓		
18	Is adequate secretariat and administrative support to the committee provided?	✓			✓			✓		
Effectiveness of the committee										
19	Has the committee obtained feedback on its performance from those interacting with the committee or relying on its work?			✓	✓					✓
20	Are meetings effective with a good level of discussion and engagement from all the members?	✓			✓			✓		
21	Does the committee engage with a wide range of leaders and managers, including discussion of audit findings, risks and action plans with the responsible officers?	✓			✓				✓	
22	Does the committee make recommendations for the improvement of governance, risk and control and are these acted	✓			✓			✓		

Good practice questions		2018/19 Self-Assessment			2019/20 Self-Assessment			2020/21 Self-Assessment		
		Yes	Partly	No	Yes	Partly	No	Yes	Partly	No
	on?									
23	Has the committee evaluated whether and how it is adding value to the organisation?		✓			✓			✓	
24	Does the committee have an action plan to improve any areas of weakness?	✓			✓			✓		
25	Does the committee publish an annual report to account for its performance and explain its work?	✓			✓			✓		

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