



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE
Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Democratic Services Committee held on Tuesday, 29 June
2021 at 3.00 pm.

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

Councillor L Hooper (Chair)

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

Officers in attendance:-

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

1 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

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

2 APOLOGIES

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

3 WELCOME BY THE CHAIR

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

4 MINUTES

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

5 TERMS OF REFERENCE

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

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

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

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

6 HYBRID MEETINGS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Following discussions it was **RESOLVED**:

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

7 COUNCIL WEBSITE

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

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

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

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

Members **RESOLVED** to note the overview.

8 DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME 2021 - 2022

The Head of Democratic Services referred Members to the draft work

programme presented to Members and sought Members approval for the items contained within.

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

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

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

9 MEMBERS PORTAL

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

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

Members **RESOLVED** to note the update.

This meeting closed at 4.15 pm

**CLLR L HOOPER
CHAIR.**