



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

COMMITTEE SUMMONS

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

Meeting Contact: Emma Wilkins - 07385406118

YOU ARE SUMMONED to a **Hybrid** meeting of the **DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE** to be held on **MONDAY, 27TH SEPTEMBER, 2021** at **5.00 PM.**

AGENDA

**Page
No's**

1. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

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

Note:

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

2. MINUTES

To receive the minutes of the previous meeting of the Democratic Services Committee held on 6th September 2021.

3 - 6

3. SUFFICIENCY OF RESOURCES REPORT - STATUTORY 'OPINION' OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

To receive the report of the Head of Democratic Services confirming the provision of staff, resources, and accommodation available to support Members in their role.

- 7 - 22
- 4. COMMUNITY LIAISON COMMITTEE - SUPPORT PROVIDED TO RCT'S COMMUNITY & TOWN COUNCIL'S**
- To receive the report of the Head of Democratic Services providing Members with an overview of the support provided to Community & Town Council's within RCT, through the Community Liaison Committee.
- 23 - 30**
- 5. DIGITAL DEMOCRACY FUND UPDATE**
- To receive the report of the Head of Democratic Services providing Members with an update in respect of the Digital Democracy Fund.
- 31 - 38**
- 6. DIVERSITY IN DEMOCRACY WORKING GROUP**
- To receive an update report following the recent meeting of the Diversity in Democracy Working Group.
- 39 - 46**
- 7. MEMBERS TRAINING**
- To receive an update from the Head of Democratic Services providing Members with details of the forthcoming training available to Members.
- 47 - 52**
- 8. URGENT BUSINESS**
- To consider any items, which the Chairman, by reason of special circumstances, is of the opinion should be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency

Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication

Circulation:-

The Chair and Vice-Chair of the Democratic Services Committee
(County Borough Councillor L Hooper and County Borough Councillor M Webber respectively)

County Borough Councillors:

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

Christian Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the hybrid meeting of the Democratic Services Committee held on Monday, 6 September 2021 at 5.00 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 H Fychan	Councillor S Rees
Councillor E Stephens	Councillor G Jones
Councillor S Powderhill	

Officers in attendance:-

Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication

10 WELCOME AND ATTENDANCE

The Chair welcomed all Members and officers to the first hybrid meeting of the Democratic Services Committee and for the benefit of all Members and Members of the public confirmed the attendance of the Committee Members in the Council Chamber and those attending virtually.

11 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors W Jones and K Morgan.

12 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

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

13 MINUTES

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Democratic Services Committee on the 29th June 2021 were a true reflection of the meeting.

14 MATTERS ARISING

In respect of Minute 8 the Head of Democratic Services Committee advised Members that the report in relation to the 'Sufficiency of Resource's would be brought forward to a special meeting of the Committee later in the month and a

date for the meeting would be advised upon accordingly.

15 DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT 2020 - 2021

The Head of Democratic Services Committee presented the draft annual report to Members, which provided an overview of the work undertaken by the Committee over the 2020 – 2021 Municipal Year. The Head of Democratic Services commented on the work undertaken by the Committee over a short time period and the positive foundations already built upon with the webcasting provision that had been championed by the Committee.

The Vice Chair spoke on the draft report and on behalf of all Members, put on record the Committees thanks to the previous Chair, Councillor M Diamond for his work undertaken prior to retirement from office. The Vice Chair reflected on the work undertaken by the Committee and thanked the Head of Democratic Services and his team for the support provided to all Members.

The Chair advised Members that with Committee approval the Annual Report would be presented to a future meeting of the Council.

It was **RESOLVED** to note the contents of the annual report.

16 MEMBERS SURVEY RESULTS

The Head of Democratic Services provided Members with the feedback obtained from the Member Survey undertaken during April – May 2021 which captured information about the support provided to Members to assist them in undertaking their role.

Members were advised that 42 Members responded to the survey and the Head of Democratic Services thanked those Member for their responses to the survey, which helped identify any areas for improvement and recognised areas of good practice. Members were provided with an overview of the feedback which concentrated on hybrid and virtual meeting arrangements, support from the Council Business Unit, Members Portal developments, Member Training and Member facilities.

The Chair thanked the Head of Democratic Services for the report and spoke of the importance of gauging Members feedback to help the Council Business Unit to support Members in their role and reiterated his thanks to those Members that undertook the survey.

The Vice Chair spoke of the unprecedented 18months and the difficulties initially experienced by Members through the virtual working and the support provided by the Council Business Unit to support all Members in undertaking their commitments through attendance at meetings and supporting of residents. The Vice Chair highlighted the need for a directory to be provided to Members to assist them in their role, which had been identified by Members as a useful tool through the survey. The Vice Chair concluded her comments on the need for timely communication to Members to assist them in their role.

One Member commented on the importance of diversity within democracy and queried whether an exit survey would be undertaken with Members choosing not

to re-stand for election and with those that were unsuccessful in the next election, to establish if there were any barriers preventing Members from re-standing. The Head of Democratic Services confirmed that an exit survey was required to be undertaken and that this could include both categories' as identified by the Member.

Following discussions, it was **RESOLVED** to

1. Note the feedback obtained from the Member survey 2020/2021.
2. Progress the actions deemed appropriate arising from the feedback – completion and distribution of an officer directory.

17 HYBRID MEETINGS - REVIEW OF PROGRESS TO DATE

The Head of Democratic Services referred Members to his report which provided Members with an overview of the discussions and observations made at the hybrid demonstration meetings that had been conducted with Cabinet, Overview & Scrutiny Committee, Planning and Development Committee and the recent hybrid demonstration of the Democratic Services Committee.

The Officer referenced the timeline presented within the report and commented that with exception of the Planning and Development Committee the timeline continues to progress as identified. The Head of Democratic Services commented that due to the nuances of the Planning and Development Committee and its public engagement further demonstrations and working practices needed to be established.

The Chair welcomed the report and agreed with a staggered approach to the role out of the webcasting system and hybrid meeting approach. The Chair commented on the excellent progress made to date with the new way of working and thanked all Members that had attended the demonstration meetings for their constructive comments to provide a robust approach to hybrid meetings.

The vice chair commented on the safety measures that would continue to be put in place, to ensure the safety of Members, Officers and the public in respect of attendance at the Chamber, which would always remain under review as the approach to hybrid meetings was rolled out.

One Member commented on the public engagement with hybrid meetings and attendance at the Council Chamber and whether familiarisation sessions would be provided to the public going forward. The Head of Democratic Services commented on the need to take forward a Public Participation Strategy which would establish how the Council would further engage the public with the democratic process and spoke of potential video footage of the arrangements in the Council Chamber to assist any public speakers or attendees.

Members spoke of the benefits of the virtual meeting approach and the flexibility provided through the hybrid meeting approach. The Chair of Planning commented on the positive engagement with the public through the virtual attendance facility and welcomed the incremental approach to the hybrid meeting.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. To note the feedback obtained from the hybrid meetings and

- demonstrations outlined within the report
2. To progress any actions deemed appropriate as a result of the feedback and comments received as outlined within the report
 3. That the phased roll out of hybrid meetings as identified within the report be taken forward, subject to the delay of the planning and development committee for the reasons outlined within the report.

18 CLOSING REMARKS

The Chair commented on the momentous occasion for the Committee with its first hybrid meeting and spoke of the need to continue the momentum to date and to continue to develop good working practices for each of the Council's Committees.

This meeting closed at 5.40 pm

**CLLR L HOOPER
CHAIR.**



RHONDDA CYNON TAF

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

27th SEPTEMBER 2021

**SUFFICIENCY OF RESOURCES REPORT – STATUTORY ‘OPINION’ OF THE
HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES**

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To confirm the provision of staff, resources, and accommodation available to support Members in their role as set out within the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 (the “Measure”).

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that the Democratic Services Committee:

- (i) Notes the overall support available to elected Members, as set out within the report and the approaches be taken forward;
- (ii) Notes the view of the Head of Democratic Services, as set out within the report; and
- (iii) Agree that the proposed restructure advised upon within the report, the future levels of staff, accommodation and other resources are adequate at the present time and that a further report be presented to this Committee by the Head of Democratic Services on the sufficiency of resources for Members’ support following the Council’s Annual General Meeting in May 2022.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The Measure established the statutory requirement for Local Authorities to appoint a Democratic Services Committee to oversee the democratic services functions of the Council, ensuring that those functions are adequately resourced.

3.2 The Council’s Democratic Services Committee was established at the Council’s Annual General Meeting in May 2012.

3.3 The Council, through its Democratic Services Committee must appoint an officer as the statutory Head of Democratic Services. This Officer, who is

afforded statutory protection, is responsible for determining the appropriate level of support and facilities to enable members to effectively discharge their role as part of the democratic processes of the local authority.

- 3.4 The Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales state in their 2019-2020 Annual Report that it is the responsibility of the Council, through its Democratic Services Committee, to provide support based on an assessment of the needs of its Members.
- 3.5 In accordance with the Measure and the Committee's agreed terms of reference 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 and the discharge of democratic functions. The Head of Democratic Services in turn is responsible for making recommendations or confirming a statutory opinion to the Committee, to enable such determinations to be made, This function was introduced to ensure that sufficient resources are available to non-executive members and for members to effectively perform their democratic role.
- 3.6 At the Council's twenty third annual general meeting, Members considered the review undertaken in respect of Overview and Scrutiny 'Fit for the Future' and agreed that the Terms of Reference for each of the scrutiny Committees be reviewed and refined to assist in the WAO recommendations for the Council to 'strengthen the support for scrutiny, including scrutiny capacity and Member training'.
- 3.7 Positive changes continue to be progressed in respect of the Council's scrutiny arrangements. Despite the challenges presented during the previous Municipal Year through the Covid pandemic, and the initial suspension of meetings during April 2020, the Council's updated approaches to scrutiny continue to enhance committee's ownership of their work programmes and strengthen governance arrangements within the Council.
- 3.8 The current available resources are provided within the report below. Members are reminded that the Council Business Unit supports Democratic, Scrutiny, Executive & Regulatory functions and Members' Support Services. In addition, the service leads to two Joint Scrutiny Committees. The service also supports the Council's Mayoralty.
- 3.9 A Survey of Members views on the support provided by the Unit was undertaken in April 2021, with the results reported at the Democratic Services Committee on the 6th September. The feedback provided a positive endorsement of the current support provided to members and demonstrated recognition of the improvements delivered over the course of the last year.

4. RESOURCE IMPROVEMENTS PREVIOUSLY REPORTED

- 4.1 The changes introduced in 2018, significantly enhanced the support available to all members, through the amalgamation of two previously separate teams.

The improvements in capacity made at this time have not only enhanced the support available to non-executive members, but additionally they have supported improvements in the governance arrangements of the local authority and have progressed the recommendations of the [‘fit for the future’](#) review undertaken by the Wales Audit Office.

- 4.2 In addition to these changes, the need to provide research support for non-executive members was identified as a weakness in the provision of services provided by the Head of Democratic Service as part of this report in 2018. As a result, resources were secured to fund a graduate position to provide this function to non-executive members. The Graduate placement and the supporting funding concluded in August 2020. In recognition of the value this important role provided to non-executive members, permanent funding support was secured for this additional post and the graduate placement was established as a permanent position within the service last autumn. This position will continue to provide a scrutiny research resource for Non-Executive Members to support their scrutiny responsibilities and their wider elected member roles.
- 4.3 In recognition of the increasing demands placed upon the unit through the ‘Fit for future’ recommendations, funding was also provided corporately for an additional position of a ‘Senior Democratic and Scrutiny Officer’. Members will be aware that this position was advertised at the end of 2019, with the successful candidate taking up this role in early 2020. 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 leads delivery of the Community Charter, agreed at the Community Liaison Committee in April 2020. This role also takes responsibility for the Joint Overview & Scrutiny Arrangements for the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal (CCRD), which the Council receives funding from the CCRD programme office to perform.
- 4.4 At the end of 2019 the Head of Democratic Services approved for the Unit to utilise a further resource going forward through a second Graduate Officer from within the wider Directorate, to respond to increasing business demands. The post was re-focused from the Corporate Policy & Engagement Team, to concentrate upon a number of service improvements areas, including the Members Portal and the project management of the webcasting provision recently introduced. This second additional role has provided valuable support to the Unit and has offered further beneficial learning opportunities to the Graduate Officer concerned. As a result of the important work this role has undertaken, and in addition to the responsibilities generated by the creation of the Members Portal and the broadcasting of meetings, corporate funding was also secured to make this position a permanent role in 2020. Further responsibilities have been aligned to this role going forward, which will support the Council Business Unit to plan and prepare for the 2022 local government elections, including preparation of the member induction arrangements. This role is also responsible for supporting greater participation and diversity in these elections. The Council received funding from Welsh Government to support the focus of this role upon encouraging participation of 16 and 17 year olds in the

2022 local government elections. This funding has offset the initial salary costs for this post.

- 4.5 During the last Municipal 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 were sought to assist the Council Business Unit to deliver the support provision needed during this period, and as Head of Democratic Services I would like to place on record my thanks to the Director of Legal Services for assisting the Unit at this time.
- 4.6 To assist the Council Business Unit in delivering support to all Members through both the medium of Welsh and English, in 2019 two dedicated translation officer posts were secured, in order to provide dedicated support to the unit on behalf of Members. This arrangement provides the Unit with prompt and timely translations which importantly frees up capacity for the Council Business Unit to focus upon supporting members and the democratic functions of the authority. During this period however the work 'generated' by the Council Business Unit has significantly increased. In recent months a further translation officer has been recruited to this team to assist in the demands placed upon the unit through the democratic processes.
- 4.7 The support to the Mayor is also provided through the Council Business Unit, and the Officer's time is split with Legal Services. It is anticipated that with the lightening of covid restrictions, the role of the Mayor and deputy Mayor may increase and we will need to be mindful of the support implications this may have on the Officer providing this support moving forward. Furthermore the Mayoral support Officer is currently deployed to other duties within the Council, supporting the Council's response to the pandemic.
- 4.8 Members will be aware of the Statutory direction now in place for the Head of Democratic Services to be a Chief Officer. The Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication is already a member of the Council's Senior Leadership Team. As a result the profile of scrutiny and the needs of members, to support the democratic functions of the council, has been significantly enhanced in recent years. It is important to place on record the support which has been provided corporately over the last three years, which has enabled the creation of this additional capacity for members and the appropriate level of resource to progress major enhancements in how services are delivered.

As Head of Democratic Services I would like to place on record my thanks to the Senior Leadership Team of the Council for their support and recognition of the important role the service plays and for providing the appropriate resources to elected members and the democratic functions of the Council over the last three years.

- 4.9 The Council Business Unit has always worked to a high standard and has always supported Members to undertake their roles, whether through

supporting members constituency role or through their role within Committees. This support is also offered to our co-opted Members and joint committee members across up-to ten local authorities. The work and practices of the Council Business Unit has been recognised by Wales Audit Office as 'good working practice' although we recognise there are always opportunities to adapt ways of working to achieve better outcomes.

5. LOCAL GOVERNMENT & ELECTIONS ACT (WALES) 2021 – NEW WAYS OF WORKING

5.1 As Members will be aware, the ability to undertake hybrid meetings has been made available to the Council through the Local Government & Elections Act 2021. In addition to the hybrid approach the Council have implemented webcasting infrastructure within the Council chamber which will assist with both the hybrid approach to meetings and future live streaming and webcasting of meetings.

5.2 The use of this equipment to run a successful hybrid meeting involves additional support from the Council Business Unit to effectively facilitate the meeting and support members during proceedings. Currently, through the standalone virtual approach taken forward by zoom, it can take up to 3 officers to support a full Council meeting.

5.3 The use of the webcasting equipment and running of hybrid meeting requires the following:

- *Advance set up of the Chamber prior to the Committee – Logging Members and Officers into the microphone system. Running a test of the system which includes checking microphones are working / camera angles are appropriate / virtual audio sound and vision is working / translation is working.*
- *Advance set up of the agenda on the webcasting system – this allows for agenda stamping to be conducted during the meeting so that the webcasting recording provides further engagement to the public and its viewers by allowing them to skip to specific agenda points in the meeting.*
- *At the meeting at least one Council Business Officer needs to be in attendance on zoom for those attending virtually. This officer will admit people into the meeting, Rename Members as required, set translation, share any presentation needed, lower hands and advise the Chair and Officers within the Chamber of those indicating virtually if they would like to speak on an item.*
- *At least one Council Business Officer will need to run the webcasting and microphone system. This involves commencing recording, pausing recording for confidential items, comfort breaks, agenda stamping the items as the meeting progresses and importantly managing the speaker queuing system whilst also liaising with colleagues on zoom to advise the chair of the virtual queue. Some of these aspects need to be run simultaneously and therefore is a crucial role in the production of hybrid and webcasted meetings.*

- *A Democratic Services officer is required to be within the Chamber to take minutes and actions arising out of the meeting. This is in addition to the attendance of a senior scrutiny officer and/or a legal officer to advise the Chair and to respond to the course of proceedings.*
- 5.4 Members of the Democratic Services Committee have already recognised the additional demand and resources needed to facilitate hybrid meetings and have championed this point at meetings of the Committee, and at Council and Cabinet, when considering the developments made with webcasting. The view that additional resources were to be required was also formally recorded at the June Committee meeting.
- 5.5 The service has once again been fortunate to receive funding to secure an apprentice webcasting role within the Council Business Unit to assist the team with the successful running of the webcasting facility moving forward (this funding was forthcoming following the 2020/21 sufficiency of resources report considered by members in November 2020.) This is a 2-year apprenticeship programme with a qualification at the end of the process for the apprentice. It is envisaged that the apprentice will also be involved in the developments with the Modern Gov system as well as developments with the Members Portal. Interviews for the apprentice were taken forward during June and the successful post holder commenced the role in September.
- 5.6 The Local Government & Elections Act (Wales) 2021 places additional responsibilities upon the service, many of these being a statutory requirement to fore fill. These include:
- *Providing the opportunity for scrutiny to consider all key decisions being considered. (This will significantly increase the reporting requirements to committees)*
 - *Formalised support arrangements to our colleagues in Town and Community Councils. Strengthened support arrangements have been provided to Community and Town Councils of the Borough, especially as they took forward their virtual arrangements and we continue to provide this support as these Councils embark upon their own hybrid meeting journey.*
 - *A requirement to enhance public participation requirements, including the production of a public participation strategy annually.*
 - *Duty to make petition scheme and record and report responses to such matters*
 - *Electronic broadcasting of meetings*
 - *The ability for members to attend a meeting virtually*
 - *A requirement to promote diversity*
 - *Direction in respect of the information and reporting requirements to the Council's Overview & Scrutiny Committees*
- 5.7 The Council Business Unit continues to support two Joint Scrutiny Committees – Cwm Taf PSB Joint overview and Scrutiny Committee plus the City Deal Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Local Government and Elections Wales Act will place similar requirements upon these two committees. The department also provides administration support to the Cwm Taf PSB itself.

5.8 In light of the additional demands to be placed upon the service (as referenced above), the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee have formally recognised the need for additional resources for the Council Business Unit. The Democratic Services Committee supported the request that the statutory sufficiency of resources report be brought forward to a September meeting for consideration to address these resource implications.

6. **STAFFING RESOURCE PROVIDED TO NON-EXECUTIVE MEMBERS**

6.1 The resource available within the Council Business Unit currently consists of 8 Officers and the utilisation of 3 dedicated Welsh Translation Officers from within the Translation team and is led by the Service Director - Democratic Services and Communication (Statutory Head of Democratic Services)

6.2 In addition to the business demands described above, Members will be aware that one member of the team is currently on maternity leave. By the end of this calendar year an additional two members of the team will be on maternity leave, removing a total 3 post holders from the team for up-to 12 months, as we enter an extremely busy period in the run-up to and following the local elections in May 2022.

6.3 Members will be disappointed to learn that a long-standing Member of staff within the Council Business Unit has left the team for a new role outside the Council in August. Our thanks go forward to this hard-working officer and we wish them well with their new employment. .

6.4 The introduction of the apprentice role within the Unit will strengthen the position of the team and reduce the pressures facing support officers, to allow them to effectively continue their dedicated support roles with each of their committees and to Elected Members. However, I am mindful that the apprentice will need to be released for University placement for one day a week and will need continued support from team members.

6.5 To strengthen capacity and resources moving forward a new Grade 10 role has been created within the team, to support the scrutiny functions of the Council. This post has recently been advertised with the recruitment process due to be completed early next month. The recruitment of an additional GR10 role will support the delivery of our service responsibilities over this immediate period and would enhance our ability to maintain the momentum of improvement achieved over the last three years.

6.6 Recruitment to the vacant scrutiny post currently within the team has provided the opportunity to refocus resources further to respond to the challenges identified. An internal recruitment process has already been undertaken to provide the opportunity for three of the departments existing GR8 roles to be considered for this senior GR9 role, allowing the successful officer to develop their skills going forward

- 6.7 Appropriate cover-arrangements will provide the opportunity for existing members of the team to temporarily 'act-up' during the maternity leave of key officers, gaining experience performing at a more senior level.
- 6.8 However, to respond to the immediate resource challenge presented by the maternity leave of three team members over the next twelve months, two temporary GR8 roles will be created potentially utilising the talent pool of the Council through a secondment opportunity or once again utilising the skills available through the Council's graduate scheme over a 12 month period.
- 6.9 Through the good practices performed by the Council, the Head of Democratic Services has been approached by the Programme Director of Cardiff Capital Region City Deal to provide support and guidance to their Committee functions. Funding will be made available by City Deal to provide such administration. This responsibility provides an excellent opportunity for staff to develop their skills base, which will in turn enhance the support they are able to provide to this local authority. This involvement would be a positive one in anticipation of the introduction of Corporate Joint Committees in January 2022. This responsibility, will of course require additional capacity, which would be funded by the CCRD programme office, but would equally require the expertise and guidance of senior members of the team to effectively perform this responsibility. To accommodate this additional responsibility, it is proposed to create an additional role within the Unit to take this work forward and provide further additional capacity. Subject to confirmation on this proposed arrangement, a recruitment process will be taken forward in the coming weeks to appoint this additional role.
- 6.10 The enhancement in resources reported above will enable the directorate to effectively discharge current and future statutory requirements. The recruitment of an additional GR10 will seek an individual with previous local authority experience performing a scrutiny or governance role to compliment the skills set of the existing team. The recruitment of two temporary GR8 roles will enable the department to support any shortfall in resources available to members during the maternity period of three team members. In preparing this report I have discussed the potential future resource requirements of the service with the Council's Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer.
- 6.11 The dedicated translation support provided to the Council Business Unit has proven to be very successful and invaluable to the service provided to Members.
- 6.12 **As Head of Democratic Services, I am of the view that the additional capacity created within the team has been sufficient to support the improvements undertaken over the last three years. Moving forward, the additional statutory requirements placed upon Democratic Services and the capacity requirements created by hybrid working and live broadcasting of meetings, will create the requirement for further capacity within the team moving forward. The creation of an additional GR10 role, in addition to the role of the Webcasting Apprentice, will provide sufficient**

capacity to meet these challenges and will enhance further the expertise available to support members within the service. The temporary secondment opportunities will also provide the necessary support arrangements as outlined within the report.

7. ACCOMMODATION

- 7.1 Accommodation to support the work of Members is based at the Council Headquarters, Clydach Vale and has been in place since Local Government Reorganisation in 1996. Private offices are available for political groups represented on the Council, within the Council Headquarter base, which allows Members easy access to the team within the Council Business Unit and at the same time allows Members to undertake work in privacy with the availability of telephone and IT facilities.
- 7.2 **As Head of Democratic Services I am of the view that there is sufficient private office capacity for all political groups within the Council Headquarters. However, I have identified the need to reflect on the best arrangements for members and Officers of the Council Business Unit - post Covid-19 - to build upon agile working and the progress made with virtual meeting arrangements over the last eighteen months.**
- 7.3 This is identified as action for the next twelve months. It is acknowledged that the balance members adopt between normal face-to-face interaction and the new agile way will need to be appreciated and factored into future arrangement planning. Members will note an improvement on this position following a reduction in the number of political groups, where the Head of Democratic Services had previously determined that availability of this provision was insufficient.
- 7.4 The Member's library situated at the Council Headquarters within Pavilion F, continues to be underutilised, and this provision may therefore need to be reviewed in the coming year, alongside the Council's own review of accommodation requirements, and the introduction of the members portal. Equally our wider longer-term aspiration for a paperless-approach questions the future purpose of this provision (The Portal will provide the ability for members to access key information, documentation and publications on-line, in a digital format.)
- 7.5 **As Head of Democratic Services I will continue to review this provision over the coming twelve months to determine the appropriate accommodation provision to effectively support members, in-line with the wider context of agile/home-working arrangements currently being supported by the Council. Our accommodation requirements remain appropriate to maintain our WLGA advance level Charter.**
- 7.6 Democratic Services Committee have played a positive role in the developments of the Council Chamber, and as reported at the last meeting the enhancements to the Council Chamber are now complete. This has included a

remodel of the chamber layout making better use of the space available and providing new furniture that provides USB charging points and increased desk space. A dedicated translation booth has also been installed which will allow Translation officers better viewing of the whole chamber and a soundproof booth to enhance the audio received by Members. With the support of Welsh Government funding, further enhancements are to be undertaken to the committee room within Pavilion A, including the introduction of broadcasting technology and similar associated improvements.

- 7.7 The service has identified the importance of continuing the positive difference virtual arrangements have provided in terms of member attendance and engagement, and also to allow us to positively respond to the ambitions of the Welsh Government in terms of public participation and diversity within local government in Wales.

8. **MEMBERS TRAINING**

- 8.1 A report highlighting the training opportunities to Members was presented to Democratic Services Committee in March, where Members were complimentary of the training provided, especially in respect of the digital advancements needed to access zoom meetings.

- 8.2 At the Democratic Services Committee meeting in March, Members agreed a training programme going forward in respect of 'Pre Council Training'. To accommodate all Members the training agreed within this programme will, where possible be run as a 5pm standalone session, with the recording of the training provided on the Members Portal for future reference. Positive feedback has been received from members on the introduction of these sessions.

- 8.3 Training has also been provided by the Council Business Unit at the start of the new municipal year, during June, for scrutiny Members and Co-opted Members, with a training session run for each of the Committees, to remind new and old members to the committee (following changes to membership at the AGM) of the Committees Terms of Reference, general good practice with scrutiny and providing an opportunity for related Senior officers to discuss emerging priorities for the service area to assist Members with their future discussions surrounding work programmes. Refresher training was also provided to Planning and Development Committee which was tailored to consider aspects of planning as requested by the Chair and training in respect of Licensing. Training has also been taken forward with the three newly elected Members. Refresher Code of Conduct training is always available to Members on a one to one basis as and when requested, with advice on hand from the Council's Monitoring Officer and Head of Democratic Services.

- 8.4 The opportunity for Members to undertake a confidential Personal Development Review (PDR) was extended via the Group Leaders earlier in the year. The outcomes of the PDR's will inform the Member Development Programme (and future E-Learning modules) and can, where required, provide an understanding in matters such as corporate governance, statutory requirements and service

related areas. Some of this training will be taken forward on a one to one basis, or where appropriate on an all member invite basis.

8.5 The Council Business unit will shortly commence work on the draft Member Induction Programme to be taken forward following the Local Government Elections. This programme will be shared with Group Leaders and the Democratic Services Committee for comment. This work will again require a significant amount of resource from the Council Business Unit as we work to ensure we deliver an induction programme that is fit for purpose for all Members.

8.6 **As a result of the breadth of learning and development support provided to members over the last twelve months, the identified actions arising from the Members PDR process, and comments received through the Members Statutory Annual Survey, as the Head of Democratic Services I am content that the training support available to members is sufficient**

9. DIGITAL SUPPORT

9.1 Through the new ways of working imposed on the Council through the covid pandemic and the now statutory required hybrid approaches to meetings the provision of ICT equipment to Members is now more important than ever.

9.2 All Members have been equipped with a digital device to allow them to undertake their Elected Member role and to attend Committee meetings via the zoom platform, with appropriate training provided to each Member through the Council Business Unit and ICT colleagues.

9.3 In line with the recommendations of the Independent Review Panel and the decision taken forward by the Democratic Services Committee in 2018 and supported by Council, Members are provided with two options in respect of telephony provision. Members can take forward the option of receiving a contribution from the Council for any own telephony arrangements they make or alternatively a handset is provided by the Council. In addition, provision is also made available for payment to a Members broadband provision to ensure Members can undertake their roles.

9.4 **In light of the above provisions made available to Members I am content that the digital support provided to Members is sufficient.**

10 HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES – OPINION

10.1 Being mindful of the requirements of the Measure and the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act, with particular reference to the increased responsibilities to support hybrid meetings and live broadcasting of meeting, as Head of Democratic Services it is evident that further resources are required to effectively discharge the relevant functions required and to provide the appropriate support for Elected members of the Council.

- 10.2 With the additional support indicated, through the additional GR10 role and the commencement of the webcasting apprentice role in September **I am of the view that there will then be sufficient resilience within the Council Business Unit to continue supporting non-executive Members, without compromising the level of service provided.** These enhancements will also provide the opportunity for more focused staff resource to support our individual functions (Council/Regulatory/Scrutiny/Member Support and Research.)
- 10.3 The purpose of this additional role is to further strengthen our scrutiny and democratic support capacity by creating additional officer expertise to enhance reporting arrangements and strengthen support available to Chairs, by creating additional resources dedicated to scrutiny alone. This additional resource will increase capacity to support the Council democratic functions over the immediate period and moving forward would create additional resilience in the service.
- 10.4 As we develop our scrutiny functions, in-line with the new Local Government & Elections Act, it will be necessary to continually review the level of support available. It will also be important to build upon the positive steps being taken to support member communication over the last eighteen months.
- 10.5 We await statutory guidance in respect of scrutiny arrangements for the new Corporate Joint Committees, and how constituent local authorities will play a role. We also await similar guidance in respect of scrutiny, as outlined in the new Act and the strengthened role of this specific committee. I am confident that the additional resources created with these additions will mean we are well placed to respond any further legislative requirements.
- 10.6 The significant investment in Members' facilities as part of chamber improvements and broadcasting of meeting during this year should be positively noted.
- 10.7 The improvements achieved to-date, most recently demonstrated by the introduction of tailored training sessions for respective committees at the start of the new municipal year, demonstrate that our training and development support for members continues to improve.
- 10.8 As I am also a member of the Senior Leadership Team, I will continue to champion the role of scrutiny and the needs of members, to support the democratic functions of the councils.
- 10.9 **On the basis of this detail, I am of the opinion, as the Council's statutory Head of Democratic Services, that the resources to be made available for members will remain sufficient, thanks to the additional resources secured. This enhanced support will continue to improve the provision, staffing capacity and the availability of support to all non-executive members.**

11. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 This report supports the need for all Members to have equal access to support regardless of political allegiance. The report encourages the authority to examine the way that business is conducted to ensure the equality of access and involvement of all people as councillors.

12. CONSULTATION

- 12.1 The Head of Democratic Services has consulted with the Council's Chief Executive and the Cabinet Member for Council Business.

13. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 13.1 The proposed way forward recommended by the Head of Democratic Services will require an additional budget of £42K per year; the part-year effect in 2021/22 can be met from existing resources within the Democratic Services & Communications revenue budget and the on-going annual budget requirement will be included within the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan for 2022/23 onwards.

14. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1 The legal implications are set out in the report in respect of the requirements of the 2011 Local Government Measure and subsequently the Local Government & Elections Wales Act 2021.

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

- 15.1 The work of all Councillors is fundamental to the work of the Council and subsequently the delivery of the Corporate Plan, hence ensuring Members are fully supported in undertaking their roles is important to the work of the Council overall.
- 15.2 Ensuring all Members are supported and have equal access to support and development links to the future generations wellbeing goals of a more equal Wales and a Wales of cohesive communities.

16. CONCLUSION

- 16.1 Through the additional resources outlined in this report I am confident that we can positively respond to future developments contained within the Local Government & Elections Act 2021 and plan and prepare effectively for the 2022 Local Government elections.
- 16.2 Over the course of the next twelve months the support and shape of the service will need to be considered in light of the implementation of the hybrid approach

to meetings, the Members Portal, training to Members and support to Members in Committee settings.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

SEPTEMBER 2021

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

BACKGROUND PAPERS - Democratic Services – Support for Members

Freestanding Matter



RHONDDA CYNON TAF

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

27 SEPTEMBER 2021

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

**COMMUNITY LIAISON COMMITTEE - SUPPORT PROVIDED TO RCT'S TOWN
AND COMMUNITY COUNCIL'S**

**REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND
COMMUNICATION**

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Members with an update in respect of the ongoing work of the Council Business Unit in supporting RCT's Town and Community Councils through the Community Liaison Committee and the Community Councils clerks meetings.
- 1.2 The support includes but is not limited to:
- Regular clerks meetings and Community Liaison Committee meetings
 - Access to Training
 - Support to meet the requirements of the Local Government and Elections Act (Wales) 2021 in respect of holding hybrid meetings.
 - Access to funding to implement hybrid meetings
 - Single point of contact support

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Committee
- (i) Notes the updates provided within the report and the support provided to Community and Town Council through the Community Liaison Committee and the Council Business Unit;
 - (ii) Provides any suggestions for strengthening communications between RCTCBC and Town and Community Councils

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 At the Council Meeting held on the 12th January, 2011, Rhondda Cynon Taf Council agreed to the establishment of a Community Liaison Committee

comprising of Cabinet Members and Chairs of the Town and Community Council's within RCT to following the publication of the "A Shared Community – Relationship Building and Charters for Unitary Authorities and Community and Town Councils" which strongly recommended that formal relationships be established between such Councils.

- 3.2 The Community Liaison Committee is chaired by the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Council Business, County Borough M Webber and is supported by the Council's Head of Democratic Services
- 3.3 To progress this formal relationship Rhondda Cynon Taf Council, along with 11 Community Councils and 1 Town Council signed up to a shared Charter, following guidance received from Welsh Government.
- 3.4 The Charter was designed to build on existing good practice and embrace the shared principles of openness, to achieve the best possible outcomes for the residents and communities of Rhondda Cynon Taf. The Charter was based on equal partnership encompassing a set of principles by which all will work together.
- 3.5 In 2019 it was recognised that with the updates in legislation and as a form of good practice, revisions needed to be made to the 2011 Charter to incorporate the principles and wellbeing goals of the Well Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act.
- 3.6 A revised Charter was circulated to all Community and Town Councils earlier that year as a platform for discussion. Since the initial draft further amendments were made to the Charter to further strengthen the document, illustrating the work already being taken forward in line with the Future Generations goals and five ways of working and to reflect the working relationship between each of its members.
- 3.7 Assisting in these revisions the Chair of the Community Liaison Committee along with the Head of Democratic Services met with members from each of the Town and Community Councils to discuss strengthening partnership arrangements and support. 10 Town and Community Councils have signed up to the Charter and further strengthen the collaborative arrangements between the Council and the Town and Community councils of RCT for the benefit of its residents. Ynysybwl Community Council have not committed to the signing of the Charter.
- 3.8 To further strengthen the collaborative work and as part of the revised Charter In September 2019 it was agreed that a dedicated single point of contact for Community Council clerks and their members be introduced to enable a clear two-way communication and to ensure they can raise matters with the Council outside of normal communications channels available.
- 3.9 The Council recognises this role as important in resolving matters which may not have been sufficiently addressed through normal channels or require specific assistance.

- 3.10 In December 2019 the Council Business Unit appointed an additional member of staff, within the Democratic Services team, who holds the responsibility of the role of single point of contact and liaison officer with Town and Community Councils in Rhondda Cynon Taf. This includes the servicing of the Community Liaison Committee and holding regular Clerks meetings.
- 3.11 Communications between Community Councils and the Council Business Unit has remained frequent throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Where meetings would have taken place in person previously, these have continued on a virtual basis.

4. **CURRENT POSITION**

- 4.1 Since the appointment of the Community Council Liaison Officer, a Community Council Clerks network was established, with regular clerks meetings taking place. These have continued on a regular basis throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The meetings provide an opportunity for the Town and Community Council Clerks to come together to discuss common issues and to seek advice and guidance from the Service Director Democratic Services and Communications and the Community Council Liaison Officer.
- 4.2 In addition to the Clerks meetings, the [Community Liaison Committee](#) has continued to meet throughout the pandemic, with the [Local Government and Elections \(Wales\) Act 2021](#) giving the Committee the ability to meet virtually.
- 4.3 The Service Director Democratic Services has attended all meetings and provides the members with regular service area updates, in particular where national guidance and legislation has an impact on Community Councils.
- 4.4 As well as being kept up to date on matters, members of the Community Liaison Committee are also consulted on a number of issues that affect their Communities and residents including:
- The Councils Diversity in Democracy Agenda, including appointing a Community Council representative to the Working Group
 - Budget Consultations
 - Reimbursement of Costs of Care (by the Independent Remuneration Panel)
 - Implementation of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill 2021 (now enacted)

4.5 **LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND ELECTIONS (WALES) ACT 2021**

- 4.6 The Community Liaison Committee and the Clerks meetings have been a vital source of information sharing for the Town and Community Councils, in particular to the clerks in supporting them to implement the regulations in the

Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 in relation to developing a hybrid model for their Council meetings.

- 4.7 The Community Council Liaison Officer attended a meeting of Llantrisant Community Council at their Council offices together with a member of the ICT department to see first-hand how the Community Councils were currently operating and the challenges they face to meet the regulations of the Act.
- 4.8 Officers observed the set-up of the meeting, the suitability of meeting venue, reliability of the WIFI connectivity and the undertaking of the Council meeting using video conferencing software and a laptop, web cam, projector and screen.
- 4.9 Following this meeting the ICT officer was able to draw up a list of recommended equipment and software for Community Councils to explore and present to their Councils to determine their own requirements to enable their Councils to develop and implement hybrid meetings. The list included equipment and software to suit varying Council budgets and dependent on the number of members expected to join their meetings.
- 4.10 A hybrid Clerks meeting was held the following week in the Councils newly refurbished Council Chamber. Two clerks attended the meeting in the chamber whilst others joined the meeting online. The clerks were presented with the list of recommended equipment and were also able to utilise the expertise of the ICT Officer who was also in attendance at the meeting. The clerks were also offered the opportunity to attend a number of the Councils offices that had been refurbished and set up to hold multi-location meetings with the Councils ICT Officer.
- 4.11 The Council Business Unit were also recently successful in a funding bid to the Digital Democracy Fund as reported in agenda item 5 to support a digital framework to assist in the delivery of virtual and hybrid meetings for Town and Community Councils. Expressions of interest to access the funding were sought from Community Councils and following a positive response this will be distributed to them in the Autumn.

4.12 FURTHER SUPPORT

- 4.13 Ongoing support, advice and training is continuously offered to the Town and Community Councils through the clerks who have been provided with a dedicated email address and phone number to contact the Community Council Liaison officer. Some of the support provided to the Community Councils is detailed below:
- Communications with latest COVID-19 guidance and how this impacts Community Councils such as reopening of their Community Halls, completing risk assessments, essential works during periods of national lockdown and reopening offices.

- Support with recruitment including providing model job descriptions, team structures and conducting interviews. As an interim measure, clerk support was provided to one Community Council until a successful recruitment process was undertaken (October – June 2021).
- Escalation of queries to relevant teams/ departments
- Access to the Councils design teams to support in the promotion of Community Council events
- Support in the resolution of complaints/ disputes

4.14 **TRAINING**

4.15 Following feedback from the clerks meetings, a number of training opportunities including training sessions and various materials have been provided to them that is detailed below:

- Providing support, guidance and training manuals on the operation of ZOOM to enable Community Councils to undertake hybrid meetings. This included a series of meetings demonstrating its functions to ensure Clerks were able to run their meetings efficiently.
- Providing access to RCT’s internal training modules on “the source”
- Two training sessions on how to use Microsoft Teams
- Access to the Councils wellbeing and occupational health teams

4.16 It is planned that with the forthcoming elections in May 2022 that the Community Liaison Committee will be consulted on a proposed programme of training for new and existing members which will be offered and rolled out to support Community Councillors in their role in the Community.

5 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 There are no Equality or Diversity implications aligned to this report

6. **CONSULTATION**

As part of each item various consultation meetings have taken place with Members / Officers and are advised upon within the report.

7. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)**

7.1 None.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 None

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

9.1 Working in partnership with the Town and Community Council's within Rhondda Cynon Taf links with the three priorities within the Corporate plan of People, Economy and Place, as it will help people and Communities to help themselves and assists in building a sustainable Rhondda Cynon Taf.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

27 SEPTEMBER 2021

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

This page is intentionally left blank



RHONDDA CYNON TAF

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

27TH SEPTEMBER 2021

DIGITAL DEMOCRACY FUND

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, DEMOCRATIC SERVICES & COMMUNICATION.

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of the report is to provide Members with an update in respect of the digital democracy fund that was awarded to RCT and the progress made to date.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that Members:

- (i) Consider the advancements made with webcasting and hybrid meetings by the Council and the future use of the digital democracy fund to assist in these advancements
- (ii) Acknowledge the support provided to Community and Town Councils with the roll out of hybrid meetings.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The roll out of webcasting and hybrid meetings has been proactively endorsed by Members of the Council and regular updates in respect of progress have been provided to the Democratic Services Committee.

3.2 The Democratic Services Committee undertook its first successful hybrid meeting on the 6th September and a link to the recording is provided here. [English](#) / [Cymraeg](#)

3.3 To enable the Council to undertake this new and statutory required approach to meetings, a new webcasting system has been procured, which has been funded through the Council's 2020/21 Budget, following support provided previously by the Democratic Services Committee. Additional funding has also been sought from Welsh Government in respect of further advancements with webcasting equipment through the Digital Democracy Fund.

4. DIGITAL DEMOCRACY FUND

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

- 4.2 On the 10th March, the Head of Democratic Services received notification that the Council had been successful with each of the bids submitted.

Expansion of the Webcasting infrastructure (Bid 1)

- 4.3 Our first bid recognised that the Council's current investment in the webcasting infrastructure would only support webcasting of Council proceedings, with this facility supporting full Council and planning meetings. The bespoke set-up used for scrutiny proceedings, which as Members will be aware is often better facilitated within our smaller committee rooms. It is was therefore proposed that funding be ascertained to take forward a further purchase of webcasting infrastructure within our smaller committee room settings. The bid also recognised the importance of the provision to provide a hybrid platform for most meetings to support Members whether they attend remotely or in person at a meeting. The Council recognised there was a strong need to plan for future hybrid meetings for the benefit of all Members, ensuring meetings are accessible and Members are treated equally. There are always significant accessibility risks for hybrid meetings and enabling use of the smaller committee room settings, learning where possible from other successful organisations who conduct hybrid meetings would increase the scope of engagement, not just formal committee meetings, but in terms of public and partner engagement and participation. It was therefore seen as essential that the smaller committee rooms were equipped with the webcasting facilities in the first instance.
- 4.4 Public I have visited the Committee Room and undertaken a survey of the room and provided a business case for requirements which officers within the Council Business Unit are currently working through to ensure that the provision of equipment is fit for purpose, especially following the recent comments brought forward by Members as part of the recent hybrid demonstrations meetings (detailed within section 4.7)
- 4.5 Alongside this the Council have utilised part of the funding to procure a 'speaker management system' to assist the Chair in the managing of hybrid meetings. Currently, when a Member in attendance at the Chamber wishes to speak at a meeting they need to activate their microphone which places them in a queuing system. A member's microphone is then activated by a Member of the Council

Business Unit following direction from the Chair. From recent meetings it is felt that this system can delay the interaction at meetings and therefore the newly procured system will allow the Chair to independently bring in Members to speak at their discretion. It is felt that this will help chairs manage meetings more effectively and keep the debate 'live' with no unnecessary delay to discussion and debate.

- 4.6 As part of good health and safety practice and especially in light of the covid pandemic, alternative headsets for the Council Chamber have been purchased and are awaiting delivery. The headsets are more amenable to the sanitation process that is undertaken and was previously undertaken in advance of meetings when translation was being utilised.
- 4.7 Following recent demonstrations of the hybrid approach to meetings, Members of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, Planning and Development Committee, Democratic Services Committee and Cabinet put forward a number of suggestions to better the hybrid experience including the accessibility and placement of the screens within the Chamber. The Council Business Unit are taking forward discussions with Public I to see what alternative arrangements are possible, the logistics that might need to be considered and any financial implications aligned to any suggested solutions.
- 4.8 The Head of Democratic Services has advised of the Council position in respect of usage of the funds and the potential delay with Committee room 1 including the potential for some of the fund to be used to ensure that the arrangements within the Council Chamber are suitable for Members. The Head of Democratic Services has received a positive response to the Councils use of the funding from Welsh Government.
- 4.9 Welsh government have advised that they will be using the recent link of the recorded hybrid cabinet committee as a form of good practice and demonstration of how the fund has supported Councils with the requirements placed upon it.

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

- 4.10 The Second bid looked to further improve the facilities within the Members portal which is being developed for the benefit of Members. Through the current virtual meetings arrangements taken forward by the Council it was considered that the Members Portal could also serve as an important area for a voting system to be developed, integrating the system with the Modern.Gov system, utilised by the Council. The need for an online voting system would be instrumental to the continuation of Council business in a timely and proficient manner, preventing a role call basis as currently utilised. This system will ensure accessibility and equality without any discrimination for those outside of the Council Chamber.
- 4.11 Since the application for the bid further work has been undertaken in respect of voting arrangements. Possibilities include using the bilingual voting app within the Modern Gov system which is utilised by Members to view Committee

papers, the use of 'polls' within the zoom platform, using the public I voting system within the Council Chamber and of course the current system of a Committee roll call. The Head of Democratic Services will be working with Members of the Democratic Services Committee and Group Leaders to discuss the best approach to take in respect of these developments.

- 4.12 As Members will be aware, the reason for this change in approach is that members have identified a wish to defer proceeding with a 'one-size-fits-all' voting arrangements until a time when members are all familiar with hybrid meeting arrangements. The Head of Democratic Services has again communicated this change in direction with the voting app and has requested that the funding be allocated towards any additional costings arising from the other Council bids, to which Welsh Government have agreed.

Support framework to further assist Town and Community Councils with the implementation of the Local Government & Elections Wales Act. (Bid 3)

- 4.13 The third bid looked at supporting Community and Town Councils in responding to the Local Government & Elections Wales Act, particularly in respect of public engagement to assist in the diversity in democracy agenda. The bid included the development of a digital support framework to assist in the delivery of virtual and hybrid meetings and strengthen the opportunity such meetings will have in the diversity of democracy agenda and public engagement. Through the use of the digital support fund the Council would look to further support our Town and Community Councils with digital engagement as we recognise that Community and Town Councils offer a means of connecting with residents at a local level. This work would promote participation within communities and support broader diversity in terms of engagement and representation at a Community Council level. As a Council we feel we would be able to provide and work with Community and Town Councils to identify digital solutions to assist their democratic processes and respond to the Act. This funding will enable practical support to be provided to support Town & Community Council Clerks to develop their digital environment, ensuring that their Elected Members can represent and communicate with residents in a digital way. This funding would enable 'good digital working practices' to be shared with our respective town and community councils. Through this support we would provide access to training available to principal council members.

- 4.14 The Council has already supported one of the Councils Community Councils by providing digital advice and support at their first hybrid meeting, reviewing the arrangements in place and producing digital options for consideration, which was discussed at a meeting of the Clerks on the 27th July. Each Community Council was asked to consider their requirements going forward as to how the Council could best support them digitally. Since then each Community Council has come forward with requests for support packages to be in place which we are currently processing and we are looking to split the funds equally between each of the Councils, and then compliment this with corporate IT support over the coming year to facilitate practical implementation.

It is anticipated that these funds will be allocated by the end of September at the latest.

5 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY

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

6 WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS

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

7 CONSULTATION

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

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

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

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 outlines a mandatory requirement for Local Authorities to provide a webcasting service.

9.2 The implementation of webcasting require amendments to the Council's Constitution which were taken forward at the Council's 26th Annual General meeting

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

10.1 The provision of webcasting would link to the Corporate Plan priorities with particular reference to 'living within our means' and an 'efficient and effective Council', ensuring transparency with our decision making process for the benefits of our residents.

10.2 Ensuring that there are greater opportunities for public engagement through webcasting links to the Wellbeing of Future Generations goals of a more equal Wales and a Wales of cohesive communities. This proposal would further support the ability of this council to involve communities in key decisions.

11 CONCLUSION

11.1 Through the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 Councils will be legally required to webcast meetings to strengthen local democracy and encourage public participation.

11.2 The provision of webcasting, has received cross-party support in the Council for the reasons set out, in particular for supporting positive engagement with the public going forward.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

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

DIGITAL DEMOCRACY FUND

This page is intentionally left blank



RHONDDA CYNON TAF

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

27TH SEPTEMBER 2021

DIVERSITY IN DEMOCRACY WORKING GROUP UPDATE

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, DEMOCRATIC SERVICES & COMMUNICATION.

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of the report is to provide Members with an update in respect of the recent meeting of the Diversity in Democracy Working Group.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that Members:

- (i) Note the areas of discussion taken forward at the meeting of the Diversity Working Group on the 9th September;
- (ii) Consider and approve the resulting recommendations arising out of the meeting as outlined within the report and to allow for these recommendations to be implemented in a timely manner.
- (iii) Subject to 2.1(ii) to consider and comment on the draft 'Memorandum of Understanding' attached as appendix A and to agree for this to be presented to the Council's Standards Committee for further comment and endorsement before presentation back to the Democratic Services Committee.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 At the meeting of the Democratic Services Committee on the 10th May Members received and supported the interim report of the Diversity in Democracy working group and its resulting recommendations.

3.2 Due to the importance of the work of the group and its links with the work of the WLGA in respect of 'Council's Diversity Pledges' the interim report was presented to Council for further endorsement and to raise the profile of the work undertaken.

3.3 Members of the Council endorsed the 16 recommendations outlined by the working group and also committed to becoming a Diverse Council.

4 **WORKING GROUP GOING FORWARD**

4.1 Due to a change in Committee membership following the AGM the membership of the working group was re-opened to all Members. It was also noted that the Community Council Clerk that was on the membership had also resigned her position during this time period. We are currently seeking a further representative to join the working group from a Community Council perspective.

4.2 The Working Group took forward its first meeting since the Council AGM on the 9th September and considered the following:

- Representation and a PowerPoint presentation from Race Alliance Wales
- Analysis of the Youth Engagement Campaign undertaken by the Council
- Members Survey
- Monitoring of the Working Groups Recommendations – Implementation Plan
- Future working

4.3 During the meeting the following recommendations were made pertaining to each agenda item:

4.3.1 **RACE ALLIANCE WALES**

- a) That the powerpoint delivered at the meeting be circulated to all Members of the Democratic Services Committee for information
- b) That Members utilise the support available through RAW to promote the diversity agenda within democracy

4.3.2 **SURVEY OF MEMBERS**

- a) That a Members survey is undertaken (as recently discussed at the Democratic Services Committee on the 6th September) concentrating on questions regarding Member's intentions of re-standing for Election and any barriers associated with this decision.
- b) That a recommendation is taken forward to the WLGA in respect of surveying Members across the 22 Local Authorities in respect of diversity which include socio-economic questions

4.3.3 **YOUTH AWARENESS RAISING CAMPAIGN**

- a) That a longer 'Register to Vote' campaign is undertaken by the Council
- b) That stronger links with school engagement is taken forward, covid restrictions permitting
- c) That a glossy factsheet / newsletter is produced for young people to help educate on how to vote and the benefits of voting
- d) That the Diversity and Inclusion Manager provides Members with the research document published by Race Alliance Wales in respect of youth voting.

4.3.4 **IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

- a) That advancements with the recommendations are presented to the Democratic Services Committee to allow the recommendations to be implemented in a timely manner rather than waiting for a full report of the working group to be presented.

- 4.4 The working Group are conscious of the time implications associated with its work and the positive impact any future recommendations may have on attracting new candidates to becoming a Councillor and the wider diversity campaign.
- 4.5 Going forward, the Working Group will concentrate on educating and information sharing and positive development of policies and action plans such as the Council's Race Equality Action plan. Members will also receive representatives from the 50:50 campaign and Stonewall.

5 MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

- 5.1 Within its interim report, the working group took forward a recommendation in respect of the creation of a 'Memorandum of Understanding'
"To consider introducing a 'statement of understanding' for Members outlining their duties as a Councillor including the need to have mutual respect within the Council Chamber."
- 5.2 The intended outcome of the statement would be a demonstration of mutual respect to other people with varying political opinions and a show of working together for the benefit of its communities.
- 5.3 A draft Memorandum is attached at appendix A for Members comments.
- 5.4 It is proposed that with Member's agreement this draft is presented to the Council's Standards committee for further comment.
- 5.5 Following comments from the Standards Committee the draft will be presented back to the Committee for final consideration before presentation to Council.

6 COUNCIL DEMOCRACY WEBPAGES

- 6.1 Work has been undertaken to develop the Council democracy pages as recommended by the working group
"To review the Council Websites 'Democracy pages' to promote the role of a Councillor with details and videos of local Members, promote how the work of a Councillor links in with everyday services taken forward by the Council and provide details and links of the different tiers of government to assist in increasing the understanding of democracy within RCT and Wales. To ensure that the page demonstrates the features available to Members – such as translation facilities, audio equipment within the Chamber, Hybrid meeting opportunities and promoting reasonable adjustments to prevent any perceived barriers for any future candidate"
- 6.2 Challenges encountered with these developments has been adapting the information into manageable bitesize information within the webpage structure and maintaining the accessibility requirements for the Council website.
- 6.3 To support these developments work has also been taken forward in respect of the video footage of local Members promoting the role of a Councillor. It is the intention that this video will be promoted on the Council website to further engage

potential candidates to stand for election and to further promote the role of a Councillor to residents.

- 6.4 The working group also acknowledged the opportunities of promoting the role of a Councillor through the Council's own Careers fairs.

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

- 6.5 Discussions have taken place with the Employment, Education & Training Manager and details of the role of a Councillor will be promoted through the virtual jobs fair webinars.

7 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY

- 7.1 The work of the Democratic Services Committee Diversity working 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

8 WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Encouraging diversity within democracy includes promotion of all languages. The Council has positively promoted and supported bilingual engagement at Council meetings and provision of Committee materials.

9 CONSULTATION

- 9.1 Diversity in Democracy Working Group.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 10.1 The awareness raising opportunities referenced within the interim report 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 Democratic Services Committee working group have, in a short period of time, already identified potential barriers that may dissuade members of the public to stand as a candidate for election.
- 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.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

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

Diversity in Democracy Working Group

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

This Memorandum of Understanding should be considered in conjunction with the Members' Code of Conduct and forms part of the ethical code which binds all Members of Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council.

As an Elected Member of Rhondda Cynon Taf Council I agree to:

1. Represent the people of Rhondda Cynon Taf equally and without discrimination. I will show respect at all times and consideration for others and not use bullying language or behaviour towards others.
2. Acknowledge all issues that are brought to my attention by residents of the County Borough and act appropriately and timely following receipt of such information, ensuring I act in the best interests of the residents and the Council as a whole.
3. Ensure that the Council's resources are used both lawfully and prudently, when discharging my duties and responsibilities.
4. Undertake my role in a professional manner whether in a physical or virtual setting when representing the Council and the residents that I serve.
5. Undertake my role and the duties aligned in a safe manner, ensuring the safety of myself, colleagues and residents whether through a physical or virtual setting.
6. Promote civility online through any digital engagement and social media platforms that I utilise, providing a clear statement of intent as to engagement through a civil and open manner.
7. Abide by the Council's Constitution, Rules of Procedure and Council policies and procedures as advised upon during my term of office.
8. Have regard to the contributions made by colleagues, officers and public speakers during Council meetings, demonstrating mutual respect regardless of political opinions and positively demonstrating a show of working together for the benefit of the communities within the County Borough.
9. Safeguard and promote the life chances of children looked after by the Council and diligently discharge my responsibilities as Corporate parent of those children, Safeguarding both Vulnerable Children and Adults.
10. Act according to the highest standards of probity in carrying out my various duties as a Councillor
11. Adhere to and respect the Members' Code of Conduct and have proper regard to the advice and guidance issued by the Council's Standards Committee, including adherence to the provisions of any Local Resolution Protocol proposed by the Council's Standards Committee.

12. Support and promote the conduct of the Council's business being carried out in an open and transparent manner and ensure that information provided to me in a confidential setting is not disclosed and made available in the public domain.
13. Promote and support these commitments by leadership and by example and act in a way that secures or preserves public confidence
14. Proactively take forward the training opportunities provided to me, including all training which has been identified as mandatory in the Member Development Programme, or equivalent, to equip me to carry out my duties as a Councillor.



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

27TH SEPTEMBER 2021

MEMBER'S TRAINING -UPDATE

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, DEMOCRATIC SERVICES & COMMUNICATION.

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of the report is to provide Members with an update in respect of the training opportunities that have been made available to Members over the last few months and the active offers of training to be taken forward.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that Members:

- (i) Acknowledge the training provided to Members since the Council AGM
- (ii) Consider the forthcoming training opportunities made available to Members and to provide any additional comments in respect of Members Training.

3. MEMBERS TRAINING.

3.1 Following on from the Members PDRs, individual requests through Committee meetings and approaches directly to the Head of Democratic Services a number of advancements have been made in respect of training provision to Members since the Council AGM.

3.2 Pre-retirement Courses have been scheduled, which is open for all Members to attend, with this training provision supported through 'Affinity'. The training will look to encourage a positive and realistic approach to a financially secure retirement and help Elected Members to make informed choices about retirement. The first of these sessions is to be held on the 24th September and the second session is to be held on the 30th September.

3.3 Introduction to Scrutiny and other Committees - Following the AGM training has also been provided by the Council Business Unit for scrutiny Members and Co-opted Members, with a training session run for each of the Committees, to remind new and old members to the committee (following changes to membership at the

AGM) of the Committees Terms of Reference, general good practice with scrutiny and providing an opportunity for related Senior officers to discuss emerging priorities for the service area to assist Members with their future discussions surrounding work programmes. Refresher training was also provided to Planning and Development Committee which was tailored to consider aspects of planning as requested by the Chair and training in respect of Licensing.

- 3.4 Training has also been taken forward with the three newly elected Members as part of their induction programme.
- 3.5 Training through the demonstration meetings of hybrid meetings have been undertaken as well as Modern Gov training on the new version of the App.
- 3.6 Treasury Management training was provided to all Members in September in advance of the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee.
- 3.7 Social Media training has been provided to Members on a one to one basis following specific requests for this provision.

4 FUTURE TRAINING

- 4.1 Emergency Planning 'interactive training sessions' have been scheduled for the October and notification of these dates will be shortly circulated to Members. It is intended that these sessions will take forward interactive sessions to discuss proactive approaches to any emergency within the County Borough.
- 4.2 Further training is being arranged in respect of the subject areas
 - Members Health & Wellbeing – 15th November 5pm
 - Unconscious bias – TBC
 - Scrutiny Training to Joint Scrutiny Committee Members - TBC
- 4.3 Where possible training will continue to be provided at 5pm although due to a busy committee calendar this may not always be accommodated.
- 4.4 Work is also being undertaken to offer Members with ICT Bitesize courses, similar to the training provision offered to Council staff. These courses will include zoom / teams training, Introduction to Ipad, Training on the Members Portal (once testing stage has been completed by the Democratic Services Committee Members), Staying safe in a virtual world and digital accessibility tools. These sessions will look to be run as mini online sessions with a small group of Members although individual one to one sessions can also be accommodated. Details of these opportunities will shortly be provided to Members.
- 4.5 An email will shortly be circulated to Members to remind Members of the online training opportunities through the RCT Source and a useful bilingual guide is currently being drafted to assist Members.

- 4.6 In addition to the above we will also be reminding and encouraging Members of the Welsh Language training opportunities that are available. Details of the opportunities for Members to undertake the Level 1 course will be promoted. This course is an interactive PowerPoint training based course, which Members can complete overtime and will provide a basic understanding and knowledge base for opening conversations, the Welsh alphabet and some phrases Members may wish to use during meetings. For those Members who wish to progress their Welsh language skills further, opportunities are available for the Welsh Language Level 2 course.
- 4.7 Work is also ongoing to support the training needs identified through the PDR process and a further report will be presented to Committee to advise upon this training programme.
- 4.8 Where appropriate, training sessions will be recorded and will be available for Members to view through the Members portal.
- 4.9 Refresher Code of Conduct training is always available to Members on a one to one basis as and when requested, with advice on hand from the Council's Monitoring Officer and Head of Democratic Services. Over the next few months virtual bitesize training sessions in respect of the Code of Conduct including details of the recent ombudsman guidance will be offered to Members by the Monitoring Officer. Details of which will shortly be provided to Members.
- 4.10 Where appropriate, factsheet information will be circulated to Members to advise and support them in their role. Such a fact sheet was circulated to Members regarding scam and nuisance calls and a further sheet is currently being created to assist Members in recognising scam emails, following recent cyber related issues witnessed by the Council.
- 4.11 The Council Business unit have commenced work on the draft Member Induction Programme to be taken forward following the Local Government Elections and will look to utilise good practices witnessed following the Senedd elections in respect of Member Induction to advance some of the training we provide. This programme will be shared with Group Leaders and the Democratic Services Committee for comment.

5 EVALUATING TRAINING

- 5.1 As a form of good practice, the Council Business Unit have reintroduced training evaluation forms to assist us gauge the training provided to Members, however open feedback is always welcome.
- 5.2 Evaluation forms were circulated to all Members following the induction training provided at the beginning of the Municipal Year. There was a very poor response

to the return of these forms, although the responses received were very positive about the training provided.

- 5.3 The unit will continue to engage in Member feedback on the training that is provided to ensure that we provide training that is fit for purpose.

6 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY

- 6.1 This report supports the need for all Members to have equal access to support regardless of political allegiance. The report encourages the authority to examine the way that business is conducted to ensure the equality of access and involvement of all people as councillors. The provision of E-learning Modules and hybrid meetings / training sessions will ensure all Members have equal access to training provision.

7 CONSULTATION

- 7.1 A meeting with the Head of Democratic Services and the Head of Organisational development was conducted following the Member PDRs to ensure a training needs plan was put in place during.
- 7.2 Members PDRs were conducted to allow information to be gathered in respect of any training requirements to assist Members in their roles.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 8.1 Members training is an important aspect to allow Members to feel equipped to undertake their duties and roles required of them. The Council have a Members training budget, which is accessed to provide any external training needed. Where practical in-house training is also provided to Members.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 None

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

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

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

11 CONCLUSION

11.1 Through the new way of working Officers will continue to support Members with any training opportunities identified to assist Members in undertaking their roles.

This page is intentionally left blank