



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Democratic Services Committee held on Thursday, 3 March 2022 at 5.00 pm.

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

Councillor L Hooper (Chair)

Councillor M Webber	Councillor J Brencher
Councillor J Edwards	Councillor G Holmes
Councillor K Morgan	Councillor S Rees
Councillor J Rosser	Councillor G Jones
Councillor W Jones	Councillor S Powderhill

Officers in attendance:-

Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication

34 Welcome & Introductions

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and acknowledged two new Members, Councillors Joy Rosser and Glynne Holmes who replace Councillors Gareth Caple and Jill Bonetto as they had recently been appointed to the Cabinet. The Chair extended his thanks to them for their contributions to the Democratic Services Committee.

35 Declaration of Interest

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, a declaration of personal interest was made later in the meeting pertaining to the agenda (Minute No. 37 refers).

County Borough Councillor K Morgan – "I work for the NHS"

36 Minutes

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the hybrid meeting held on the 8th November 2021 as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

37 Fair & Respectful Election Campaign Pledge

In his report, the Head of Democratic Services set out the decision of Council to delegate responsibility for confirming the contents of the RCT specific Fair & Respectful Election Campaign Pledge to the Democratic Services Committee. He added that the Council had made a commitment to support the Election Campaign Pledge which will form an integral part of the Council's Election material for successful candidates.

The Head of Democratic Services also advised that the recent sessions on 'Becoming a Councillor' aimed at all prospective candidates had been well received and had provided all attendees with information about the role of the councillor and the support available by the Council for new candidates and newly elected Councillors. He added that there had been much engagement between the prospective candidates and the Officers present and that issues of safety for candidates campaigning had been raised.

The Chair reminded Members of the contents of the joint statement made by all 22 Welsh Council Leaders at a meeting of the WLGA Executive Board, held on Friday 28th January 2022 which would form the basis of the RCT specific pledge.

Members were unanimous in their view that it was regrettable that a pledge was required at all and despite differing views and political backgrounds, most parties wanted to conduct a fair and respectful campaign and wished to represent their respective wards and communities without fear of abuse. Members felt the pledge needed some positive reflection as they agreed that the process for prospective candidates was a daunting one and the pledge was an opportunity to focus on each other's kindness and add some positivity to the existing wording.

Members were concerned that social media was a contributing factor to unfair behaviour and comments, as they encouraged such behaviour to be challenged online and for political groups to be responsible for the content of their respective online political pages. They also called for political literature to be accurate and fair, and to present a balanced view. Members welcomed the pledge and recognised that it was needed.

In response to a query, the Head of Democratic Services advised that the 'We' in the section of the pledge that states "We will call out...." referred to the Political Groups and stressed the importance of supporting the statement whilst not wishing to restrict active debate. The Head of Democratic Services also referred to the importance of Member remuneration as advocated by the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales and how not politicising this was key to encouraging a greater take up by Members of contributions such as costs of care and personal assistance.

The Vice Chair suggested the matter is re-assessed post- election by the Democratic Services Committee to understand the effectiveness of the pledge. She took the opportunity to thank the Chair and wished all those Members of the Democratic Services Committee standing in the Local Government Elections well in their campaigns and those not standing the very best wishes for the future.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the comments and feedback from the Democratic Services Committee are included in Rhondda Cynon Taf's Fair & Respectful Election Campaign statement;
2. That the RCT specific pledge forms an integral part of the material provided to successfully nominated candidates and is subsequently promoted by the Council throughout the 2022 election period; and
3. To re-assess the effectiveness of the Fair and Respectful campaign pledge post- election by the Democratic Services Committee.

38 Urgent Business

The Head of Democratic Services provided an update on the Members Induction process post-election and the intention to provide all Members, new and returning with the same information and packs. He advised that this induction process would feel very different to the last, held in 2017 as newly elected Members would be greeted at the three election sites by the Democratic Services team to capture their details for their IT devices and a booking system would be used to book their training sessions for the weeks ahead.

The Head of Democratic Services advised that it was the intention to conduct the training both virtually and in person with the opportunity for Members to be inducted virtually. Training would also be conducted through a combination of external trainers and in-house training. He added that the wellbeing focus within the training process would equip new and returning Members to tackle the challenges ahead.

The Chair welcomed the new approach to the induction process which he was sure would improve the induction experience for all councillors, and he recognised the huge volume of change which had been embraced by the Democratic Services team. The Vice Chair concluded that regular bulletins would be provided by the Council for all candidates throughout the election period and information would be provided by the Democratic Services team as to their location and the support they can provide.

This meeting closed at 5.55 pm

**CLLR L HOOPER
CHAIR.**