



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL

Minutes of the hybrid meeting of the Democratic Services Committee held on Monday, 13 February 2023 at 5.00 pm.

This meeting was live streamed, details of which can be accessed [here](#)

County Borough Councillors – The following Councillors were present in the Council Chamber:-

Councillor W Jones (Chair)

Councillor L Addiscott Councillor G Jones
Councillor S Morgans

The following Councillors were present online:-

Councillor M Webber Councillor J Bonetto
Councillor A J Ellis Councillor S Hickman
Councillor S Powderhill Councillor B Stephens
Councillor S Trask Councillor J Turner
Councillor K Webb

Officers in attendance

Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication

Apologies for absence

Councillor C Preedy

9 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from County Borough Councillor C Preedy.

10 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

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

11 MINUTES

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 22nd September 2022 as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

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

The Head of Democratic Services provided Members with his statutory required report, which provided details of the provision of staff, resources, and

accommodation available to support Members in their role within Rhondda Cynon Taf Council, as set out within the relevant legislation.

Members were provided with an overview of the staffing provision across the Council Business Unit, were the Head of Democratic Services advised of the return of 3 Members of staff from maternity leave and the loss of one temporary Member of staff to other employment. Members were reminded of the apprentice role within the unit which provides invaluable support to the production of hybrid and webcast Committee meetings, with the intention of making this a permanent role in the near future. The Head of Democratic Services put forward his thanks to all staff for going above and beyond over the past 12 months with particular reference to the work undertaken during the Member Induction programme.

In respect of accommodation and in response to the new way of working and the need for the Council to respond to rising cost of energy and the financial challenges recently reported to Members, the Council has reduced the use of accommodation at Clydach Vale from 6 'Pavilions' to 3. Members were advised that due to this approach, as a temporary measure, the accommodation available to Members had been revised. The Head of Democratic Services continued by advising of the reduced need for attendance by a Member to Clydach Vale through the successful operation of hybrid meeting arrangements, and online access to information for Members through means such as the Members Portal. He added that this approach mirrors the change in working patterns seen across the Council and society more generally post pandemic. As part of the new arrangement, Members would now share the space available on the ground floor of Pavilion B, over an extended footprint with Democratic Services Officers. A dedicated Members hot-desking space had been created at the rear of the building to support this new way of working. This set-up includes a dedicated meeting room for Members or political groups to book as and when required.

The Head of Democratic Services explained that in light of the revised arrangement the Council would not be compliant with the requirements of the Advanced Members Charter. However, in response to significant changes in working practices being adopted by local authorities and its Members, the Charter was currently being reviewed to reflect new ways of working.

The Head of Democratic Services continued his report by providing an overview of the arrangements in place in respect of Members Training, referencing the in depth Member induction programme that was provided and the future training proposals, including the undertaking of Members Personal Development Reviews, and the Officer thanked the Group Leaders for their support with the reviews.

Before finalising his report Members were provided with an overview of the digital support provided to Members, including the provision of devices and the security aspects linked to the use of the devices.

The Head of Democratic Services concluded his report by advising Members that he was of the opinion that there continued to be sufficient support within the Council Business Unit to support non-executive Members.

Members took the opportunity to comment upon the report and the opinion outlined within, and Members paid compliment to the support provided by the Council Business Unit to all Members to assist them to undertake their role and

to the Council's ICT support team, for their assistance with devices and ICT queries, commenting on the good working relationship between the two departments. Members paid tribute to the Member of staff within the team who had recently secured employment elsewhere and also welcomed back the 3 returning officers from maternity leave.

Members supported the accommodation changes for the reasons outlined within the report and welcomed the review being undertaken in respect of the Charter to reflect current working practices.

Following discussions Members **RESOLVED**:

- I. To note the overall support available to elected Members, as set out within the report.
- II. To note the statutory opinion of the Head of Democratic Services, in respect of the sufficiency of resources, as set out within the report.

13 MULTI LOCATION MEETING POLICY

Members were referred to the report before them which provided Members with a draft Multi Location Meeting Policy, for Members comment and consideration. Members were advised that through the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 Councils are statutory required to provide hybrid meeting facilities, enabling greater public participation and Councillor involvement in decision making.

Members were advised that statutory guidance sets out a number of general principles to guide Authorities when developing their meeting arrangements, namely, transparency, accessibility, good conduct, Welsh language, local needs and future generations. The guidance confirms the meeting arrangements should be reflected in the procedure rules set out in the constitution.

The statutory guidance also stipulates that Authorities should develop a policy setting out how multi-location meetings will operate and reflect the meeting arrangements in the constitution.

Members considered the draft policy attached as Appendix 1 to the report and spoke of the greater flexibility hybrid meetings provided, allowing Members greater opportunity to undertake Council business through a remote setting.

Members discussed in detail aspects of the policy focusing on the need to ensure that Members attending Meetings virtually were in a safe, secure and confidential environment.

Members were in agreement that certain meetings of the Council should be offered as hybrid, however if physical attendance was depleted then the meeting should be moved to a virtual only setting, with sufficient notification provided to Members. It was proposed that a proportion of the Committee Membership be identified in the policy to reflect these situations rather than an actual number of attendees listed, due to the varying membership sizes.

Following a lengthy discussion, it was **RESOLVED** to:

- I. Amend the policy to include reference to nonsmoking at meetings; further clarity on the location of a Member attending a meeting virtually and a percentage figure of the membership in relation to hybrid meetings to be included.
- II. That the revisions be circulated to the Committee membership for further comment before agreement by the Chair and Vice Chair of the Committee
- III. The agreed version of the policy be submitted to Council for endorsement.

14 MEMBERS PORTAL

The Head of Democratic Services referred Members to the report before them which provided details of the developments taken forward in respect of the Members' Portal.

Members were advised of the training materials contained within the Portal for ease of reference for Members and reminded of the functionality to submit questions to Council and completion of Declaration of Interest forms relating to a meeting. The Head of Democratic Services advised of current developments taken forward in respect of the 'Useful Information/Links' page and the provision currently being developed in respect of submitting of travel expenses to the Council's Payroll section, electronically via the Portal. This advancement would simplify the process with pre-populated information to reduce the time currently spent completing a paper expenses form.

Going forward, Members were informed that the Portal will, in time, provide statistical information, compiled from the Council's customer reporting system ('The CRM'). Information on reported matters, such as dog fouling or pot-holes, will be compiled on a ward by ward basis, alongside information on the resolution of these complaints. The portal will also provide information on the latest business of the council being considered and matters such as planning applications which relate to the respective Members electoral division.

Members commented on the functionality of the portal and the developments that were proposed to be taken forward over coming months.

Following discussions, it was **RESOLVED** that Members would advise the Democratic Services Officer if they would like to take forward the role as a 'champion' of the Members Portal and undertake demonstrations/provide feedback on the functionality of the Portal as and when new developments are completed.

15 INFORMATION REPORT

For information purposes, the Head of Democratic Services provided Members with an overview of the information report presented, which provided an update on a number of items under consideration by the Committee and to ensure Members are kept up to date on these items.

The report provided detail in respect of Member Devices; Members Attendance; Members 3rd Party transactions; Diversity in Democracy; Members Wellbeing; Member Notifications and details of the recent bid submitted within the Democracy Engagement Grant.

Members noted the information report.

This meeting closed at 6.25 pm

**Councillor W Jones
Chair.**