



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 - Democratic Services (07385406118)

YOU ARE SUMMONED to a **Hybrid** meeting of the **DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE** to be held on **MONDAY, 13TH FEBRUARY, 2023** at **5.00 PM**.

It is the intention to live stream this meeting, details of which can be accessed [here](#)

AGENDA

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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 the 22nd September 2022.

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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.

4. MULTI LOCATION MEETING POLICY

To consider the Council's Multi-Location meetings policy and provide comments and observations as appropriate.

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5. MEMBERS PORTAL

To receive an update on the development of the Members' Portal.

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6. INFORMATION REPORT

The following report is provided for the information of Members:

[Democratic Services Committee - Update Report](#)

(For Members to acknowledge the information contained within these reports but any queries relating to the item can be directed to CouncilBusiness@rctcbc.gov.uk)

7. 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 W Jones and County Borough Councillor M Webber respectively)

County Borough Councillors:

Councillor L Addiscott, Councillor J Bonetto, Councillor S J Davies,
Councillor A J Ellis, Councillor R Evans, Councillor S Hickman, Councillor G Jones,
Councillor S Morgans, Councillor S Powderhill, Councillor C Preedy,
Councillor B Stephens, Councillor S Trask, Councillor J Turner, Councillor K Webb
and Councillor P Evans

Christian Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication
Andy Wilkins, Director of Legal Services and Democratic Services



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE
Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Democratic Services Committee held on Thursday, 22
September 2022 at 5.00 pm.

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

Councillor W Jones (Chair)

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

Officers in attendance:-

Mr C Hanagan, Service Director Democratic Services & Communications

1 Welcome & Apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the Democratic Services Committee of the new Municipal Year.

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors L Addiscott, R Evans, G Jones and C Preedy.

2 Declaration of Interest

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

3 Minutes & Matters Arising

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 3rd March 2022 an accurate reflection of the meeting.

4 Terms of Reference

The Head of Democratic Services provided Members with a PowerPoint presentation outlining the terms of reference of the Democratic Services Committee, its functions, its increased membership, which reflects the importance of the committee and also the work to be taken forward over the Municipal Year, to assist new Members, post Local Government Election.

Members were reminded of the statutory responsibilities of the Committee including the appointment of the Head of Democratic Services to ensure the support and advice is provided to all Elected Members. Also, the need to review the support and resources available to non-executive members of the council. The Committee is also responsible for ensuring personal development and training opportunities for Members over the next five years.

The Head of Democratic Services referenced some of the key aspects of work that the Committee has previously been involved with, to champion the needs of all Members and all associated matters such as consideration of the IRP annual report and its focus on diversity and participation. When considering the year ahead, the Head of Democratic Services referred to the sufficiency of resources report and assessing the effectiveness of the Member induction programme and ongoing training arrangements for new and returning Members in addition to phase two of the training provision.

The Chair and Vice Chair both commented on the year ahead and how they intended to work together for the wellbeing of all Elected Members. Many Members praised the support provided by the Council Business Unit particularly during the Member induction period following the Local Government Elections.

The Chair welcomed the overview of the role of the Committee, and it was **RESOLVED** to acknowledge the contents of the presentation.

5 Draft Work Programme 2022 - 2023

The Head of Democratic Services presented the draft work programme for the Municipal Year 2022/23 and sought Members' approval for the items contained within.

Members considered the relevance of the items listed and commented on the importance of assessing the effectiveness of the Fair and Respectful campaign pledge post- election in a subsequent meeting of the Democratic Services Committee.

Members **RESOLVED** to approve the work programme for the 2022-23 Municipal Year subject to correcting the spelling mistake 'draft' listed under the November 2022 section.

6 Modern.Gov App- Voting Button

The Head of Democratic Services presented his report which provided Members with details of the Modern.Gov in-app voting system and in addition, an update on the intention to roll out the app. Members were advised that as the webcasting and hybrid approach has been successfully embedded into the Council's democratic process it is considered timely to roll out the voting app which will enhance the Council's voting process and ensure that a more sophisticated method of recording votes is established for both virtual and physical attendance.

The Head of Democratic Services emphasised the need to ensure that all Members are confident with the technology before the app is used in a multi meeting environment and advised that an incremental and phased roll out (as detailed within the timeline set out at section 4 of the report) would be undertaken before a review within the next few months by the Democratic Services Committee. He advised that it was important to proceed at the pace of those Members least familiar with digital technology to ensure the smooth

running of the process.

The Head of Democratic Services advised that further to inclusion of the in-app voting arrangements in the Council's Constitution in 2021 housekeeping arrangements would need to be developed for each meeting. For example, in the Senedd, proceedings are paused to undertake the vote and re convened in public session to announce the outcome of the vote which may assist with a clear and definitive process. He added that the Democratic Services Committee would continue to receive updates and progress reports on the webcasting of hybrid meetings as well as the in-app voting system before undertaking the latter at a meeting of full Council.

In conclusion, the Head of Democratic Services commented that the Modern.Gov in-app voting system will enable a clear and concise recording of Members' voting preferences and support the transparency of the voting process.

Further to Members' consideration, it was proposed by the Vice Chair that an additional recommendation should be included to reflect that appropriate training and support is provided to all Members (and on a one-to-one basis if needed) during the roll out as appropriate.

It was **RESOLVED** to:

1. Acknowledge the progress made (following the demonstration to Committee Members);
2. Agree the phased roll out approach to the voting app as detailed within section 4 of the report; and
3. Ensure that appropriate training and support is provided to all Members (and on a one-to-one basis if necessary) during the incremental roll out.

7 Members' Survey Results

The Head of Democratic Services provided Members with the feedback obtained from the Member Survey undertaken in line with Section 6 of the Local Government Measure 2011 as amended within the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021 and presented an opportunity to gain a broader understanding of the requirements and experiences of Members at this stage.

Members were reminded that the survey results on the timings of meetings have been determined and although the feedback is not binding, it is a useful consideration for the Committee Chairs when discussing their respective committee meetings. Other key areas were referred to by the Head of Democratic Services, such as Members' preferences whether to attend meetings in person or online which supports the Council's hybrid approach. He reflected that Members' preference is dependent on the type of Committee. With the Planning & Development Committee, where there is a higher level of public engagement or with Full Council involving all 75 Members, there is a greater preference to attend in person.

With regards to the support Members receive from the Democratic Services team,

the high level of satisfaction reflects that the current level of support and current resource remains sufficient and also demonstrates the need to maintain this positive level of support to newly elected Members post-election.

The Head of Democratic Services acknowledged that the Members Induction and training received had been positive throughout June, but he reflected that the induction had on times been too intense and needed to reflect Members' other commitments and this feedback would be useful for future planning.

In conclusion, the Head of Democratic Services referred Members to section 9 of the report, Welsh Language in meetings. He advised that previously and in accordance with the demographics at that time there was a requirement for the Welsh translation service to attend every meeting. According to the Welsh Language Standards Act, where an Elected Member/member of the public wishes to or may wish to converse through the medium of Welsh, there is a requirement to provide the Welsh translation service. In line with the survey responses which has highlighted a change in demographics and in order to directly support our Welsh speaking Members in meetings, The Head of Democratic Services proposed that the simultaneous Welsh translation service would be better used specifically for those committees where the membership includes Welsh speaking Members rather than providing an automatic provision. He added that it is intended to shadow Welsh speaking Members (and in instances where advance notice from a member of the public wishing to converse through the medium of Welsh has been given). This also includes any Members who wish to take the opportunity at any stage and bespoke Welsh Language training will be offered to all Members to develop their Welsh language skills. A further Welsh language survey will also be undertaken to assess the ongoing requirements of Elected Members.

The Vice Chair spoke of the Welsh Language Steering Group and its contribution and for the need to take into consideration the timing of the survey, so soon following the Local Government Elections when considering the total percentage of responses. The Head of Democratic Services confirmed that the resource impact is considered by Chairs of Scrutiny when organising Scrutiny Working Groups during 'office hours' recognising both the impact on the democratic services team and on the out of office hours and availability within the calendar of meetings.

The Chair thanked the Head of Democratic Services for the report and spoke of the important role of the Democratic Services Committee, to support all members of the Council. He acknowledged the need to ensure that appropriate resources are in place within the Council Business Unit to undertake such support.

Following discussions, it was **RESOLVED** to

- (i) Acknowledge the feedback obtained from the Member Survey 2022 as outlined within the report; and
- (ii) Agree that simultaneous translation will only be provided at those committees where the membership includes Welsh speaking Members (and where advance notice of a public speaker wishing to converse in Welsh has been given) (as set out in section 9 of the report).

This meeting closed at 5.40 pm

**CLLR W JONES
CHAIR.**

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RHONDDA CYNON TAF

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

13TH FEBRUARY 2023

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

**REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR DEMOCRATIC SERVICES &
COMMUNICATIONS**

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To confirm the Statutory view of the Head of Democratic Services, in respect of 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”) and Local Government & Elections Act (Wales) 2021 as amended.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Democratic Services Committee:

- 2.1 Notes the overall support available to elected Members, as set out within the report and attached appendices.
- 2.2 Notes the statutory opinion of the Head of Democratic Services, in respect of the sufficiency of resources, as set out within the report

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. This role has a

statutory responsibility to independently advise members and ensure that the Council has effective scrutiny arrangements in place.

3.4 Statutory functions of the Head of Democratic Services include:

- Determining the level and range of staff support available to Elected Members.
- Ensuring Members are effectively supported to discharge their committee responsibilities.
- Advising members in respect of the Council's democratic and committee arrangements.
- Ensuring the resources available (i.e. accommodation and technology) are sufficient to allow Members to effectively perform their role.
- Ensuring that appropriate training and development arrangements are in place for all Elected Members.

It is key for the appropriate resources to be made available by the Council to support these important democratic functions.

3.5 The Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales state in their 2022-2023 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.

3.6 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.

3.7 At the Council's twenty third annual general meeting, Members considered the review undertaken in respect of Overview and Scrutiny 'Fit for the Future'. Members 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'. Positive changes continue to be progressed in respect of the Council's scrutiny arrangements, with further amendments being made at the Council's 2022 AGM to allow for greater scrutiny impact in respect of supporting the Council's performance, reduce duplication of reporting and provide a clear simplified reporting structure, more a-lined with the Council's functions and Senior Leadership Team

3.8 The current available resources are provided within the report below. Members are reminded that the Council Business Unit supports Democratic, Scrutiny, Executive and Regulatory functions and Members' Support Services. In addition, the service leads to two Joint Scrutiny Committees. The service also

supports the Council's Mayoralty, the Office of the Leader of the Council, and the Cabinet Office. Support for executive functions do not form part of the statutory responsibilities of the Head of Democratic Services of the Democratic Services Committee.

- 3.9 As a result of the positive governance support provided to the Joint Committee of the Central South Education Consortium, over the last 12 months the Council has provided support for the wider governance arrangements of the organisation through a service level agreement.
- 3.10 In accordance with Section 6 of the Local Government Measure 2011, and as part of the statutory responsibilities of the Head of Democratic Services, the Council is required to survey the views of its Members in relation to the calendar of Council meetings at least once during each term of administration. Democratic Services also uses the survey to better understand the needs of Members to ensure that the provision of support and resources to non-executive members is adequate. It also aims to, where necessary, highlight and improve the support available.
- 3.11 A bilingual Survey of Members views on the support provided by the Council Business Unit was undertaken in June 2022 and captured the initial responses of Members during the Members' Induction process with the results reported to the Democratic Services Committee on the [6th September 2022](#).
- 3.12 The feedback delivered a positive endorsement of the current support provided to Members, with a unanimous 100% advising they were content with the provision of support and advice provided to returning and newly elected Members. The results also demonstrated a recognition of the improvements to the level of communication and information circulated through the Members daily/weekly updates, with almost all Members (97%) agreeing that the content and frequency were appropriate. Although this remains an area of continuous improvement for the Council Business Unit.
- 3.13 A full programme of training opportunities followed the Local Government Elections in June 2022, offering Members a bespoke package of virtual/hybrid training sessions delivered by external and in-house trainers where appropriate. The survey revealed that more than three quarters of Members (87%) felt that the programme was relevant in both delivery and content with only a small percentage highlighting that the flow of training could be reconsidered in the future to accommodate a less intensive period of training. Significantly, the recorded training modules and associated materials can be accessed on the Members' Portal.
- 3.14 Members were also surveyed on their '*language preference for correspondence and for the purposes of conducting meetings through their preferred language*'. This ensures that the Council Business Unit is providing the correct and most suitable Welsh language provision for its Members, so that they feel included and valued. With 10% preferring to converse/receive information through the medium of Welsh, the Council's commitment to provide the simultaneous translation facility for those who indicated that they wish to

converse through the medium of Welsh in a committee setting, remains unchanged as with all correspondence being disseminated bilingually. Members have continued to experience the same high-level service. With 16% of Members currently learning Welsh, steps were taken to build on this momentum and dedicated Welsh classes tailored for our Elected Members were established with the Council's Welsh language tutor.

- 3.15 The broader directorate is also responsible for the Council's Communications, Marketing and Consultation and Engagement functions. More recently the department has taken responsibility for the Armed Forces Covenant and the Veterans Advice Service for Rhondda Cynon Taf, Merthyr Tydfil and the Vale of Glamorgan. Following the review of the Council's Senior Leadership Team by the new Chief Executive, these services now form part of Legal and Democratic Services, under the Director of Legal and Democratic Services.
- 3.16 My report for the previous municipal year can be [viewed here](#). Previous reports summarise the ongoing improvements undertaken since 2018, which 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. STAFF RESOURCES AND ADVICE AVAILABLE TO MEMBERS

- 4.1 The resource available within the Council Business Unit currently consists of 10 Officers and the utilisation of 3 dedicated Welsh Translation Officers from within the Translation team, led by the Service Director of Democratic Services and Communication (Statutory Head of Democratic Services).
- 4.2 Post local elections, and with the new requirements upon us with the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act, it is important to continue this momentum of improvement.
- 4.3 As reported previously to the Democratic Services Committee, over the last twelve months, three permanent roles have undertaken maternity leave. At the end of 2021, in response to this reduction in capacity, two temporary roles were created to support service delivery to Members. At this time, Democratic Services was also fortunate to benefit from corporate funding to support the creation of an Apprentice role, to assist the delivery of hybrid meetings and the implementation of new technology to enable the live broadcasting of committee proceedings.
- 4.4 In anticipation of the additional requirements of the Local Government & Election (Wales) Act, and to strengthen broader capacity and resources moving forward and beyond the local elections, a new Grade 10 role was created and joined the team in early 2022.

- 4.5 These additional resources supported the service during a crucial time, with the loss of three experienced members of the department due to maternity from early 2022. Despite this being one of the busiest periods for the service, leading into the May 2022 local elections, the establishment of the Council's democratic arrangements post-election and the implementation of the Members Induction Programme during the summer period, through these resources available, and most importantly, the post holders themselves who perform these roles, newly elected and returning Members were effectively supported. I would like to place on record my thanks to all members of the team who stepped up during this period, to ensure the Council effectively discharged its responsibilities and supported the implementation of the 'new' Councils democratic arrangements .
- 4.6 The Council Business Manager, Senior Executive & Regulatory Business Officer and the Democratic Services & Engagement Officer have now returned to their roles, re- establishing the provision of staffing resources previously report.
- 4.7 The support provided by Democratic Services to assist in the delivery of Central South Consortium's governance arrangements, has been positively received. For this reason, since my last report, the provision of support to the consortium has been extended to cover all its governance arrangements. The additional funding received for governance support has enabled one of the temporary roles appointed to cover maternity over the last twelve months to be made permanent in October 2022, creating the additional role of a Democratic Services and Engagement Officer.
- 4.8 The Apprentice role, which supports the technical side of meeting arrangements, has developed into an essential role within the team. This apprentice placement ceases in July 2023 and in recognition of the importance of this role, the value it has added, and its essential nature arising from the requirements of the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021, a request has been made to secure corporate funding to make this role a permanent part of the services structure.
- 4.9 The second temporary role created to cover maternity leave (Temporary Committee Support Officer), has recently secured employment with another public sector organisation. Members will recognise the commitment and professionalism provided by the holder of this role, and wish them every success in their future career. While we are disappointed to lose this individual, I am satisfied that with all three colleagues now returned from maternity, there is an opportunity to reflect upon the services' requirement for this role, as part of our future arrangements.
- 4.10 To assist the Council Business Unit in delivering support to all Members through both the medium of Welsh and English, three dedicated translation officer posts continue to support the service, in order to provide dedicated support to the unit on behalf of Members.

- 4.11 The Council Business Unit continues to support two Joint Scrutiny Committees – Cwm Taf Public Services Board (PSB) Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee and 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.
- 4.12 I am satisfied that over the short to medium-term, there remains sufficient resources to support and advise these two external committees. There will however be a requirement to continually review the support requirements for these two important Joint Committees, with the establishment of the Cwm Taf Morgannwg PSB, following the addition of Bridgend County Borough into these arrangements, and the need to create bespoke scrutiny arrangements for the new Corporate Joint Committee over the coming year.
- 4.13 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 post pandemic, the role of the Mayor and deputy Mayor will continue to increase, and we will need to be mindful of the support implications this may have on the Officer providing this support moving forward.
- 4.14 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 and 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 five 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.
- 4.15 The Council Business Unit has always worked to a high standard, supporting Members to undertake their constituency roles, or their roles within Committees. This support is also offered to our co-opted Members and Joint Committee Members across and up-to ten local authorities. The work and practices of the Council Business Unit have 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.
- 4.16 **As Head of Democratic Services, I am satisfied that through the provision of staffing arrangements set out above, that the staff resource available to Members is sufficient. In arriving at this view, I have been mindful of the wider financial context facing the Council, and the necessity upon all departments to identify efficiencies in line with the Medium-Term Financial Planning objectives of the local authority.**

5. ACCOMMODATION

- 5.1 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. This has previously consisted of private offices available for political groups represented on the Council, within the Council Headquarter base, which also allowed Members easy access to the team within the Council Business Unit.

- 5.2 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. This Council Business Unit relocated to Pavilion B, in the accommodation which previously housed individual private offices for political groups.
- 5.3 The Council took this approach as part of its emerging Office Accommodation Strategy which will shortly be presented to Cabinet. This strategy seeks to respond to the new working arrangements of the Council, as set out in the Council's Hybrid Working Policy, which has reduced the need for physical office space, and instead 'hot desking' when attending an office location.
- 5.4 It is through this approach, as a temporary measure, the accommodation available to Members has been revised. The successful operation of hybrid meeting arrangements, and online access to information for Members through means such as the Members Portal, has significantly reduced the need for attendance by a Member to Clydach Vale. This mirrors the change in working patterns seen across the Council and society more generally post pandemic.
- 5.5 This accommodation has been under-utilised and rarely used, and for this reason the opportunity arising from the changes to accommodation at Clydach Vale has been taken, to adopt a similar approach for Member accommodation in line with the new way of working for Officers.
- 5.6 As part of this new arrangement, Members 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 has 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.
- 5.7 **Members will recall that a previous report identified the need to reflect on the best arrangements for Members and Officers of the Council Business Unit post pandemic - to build upon agile working and the progress made with virtual meeting arrangements.**
- 5.8 It is acknowledged that the balance Members adopt between normal face-to-face interaction and the new agile way of working will need to be appreciated and factored into future arrangements and office planning.
- 5.9 The service continues to provide in-person support to Members Monday-Wednesday, and by appointment on Thursday.

- 5.10 The Member's library situated at the Council Headquarters within Pavilion F has also been underutilised. With the delivery of the Members Portal post-election, there is no longer a requirement for such provisions. Equally, our wider aspirations for a paperless approach questioned the future purpose of this provision, as the Members Portal now provides the online ability to access key information, documentation and publications. This facility has also been closed to make the necessary energy efficiency savings in the current climate.
- 5.11 The Members lounge provides a shared space for all Councillors to network, and continues to be available adjacent to the chamber and committee rooms in Pavilion A.
- 5.12 This revised arrangement does mean that 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 is currently being reviewed to reflect new ways of working. Included in potential options for achieving Charter status in the future, is a move away from office accommodation requirements, to judging attainment on the level of IT provision provided to Members.
- 5.13 The Democratic Services Committee have played a positive role in the developments of the Council Chamber. This included a remodelling of the chamber layout, making better use of the space available and providing new furniture with USB charging points and increased desk space. A dedicated translation booth has also been installed, improving the view onto the chamber floor for Translation Officers, and soundproofing to enhance the audio received by Members. Changes to ensure accessibility were also taken forward.
- 5.14 The service has identified the importance of continuing the positive difference virtual arrangements have provided, in terms of Member attendance and engagement, and also allowing us to positively respond to the ambitions of Welsh Government, relating to public participation and diversity within local government in Wales.
- 5.15 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. I will continue to maintain a positive dialogue with the Council's Director of Corporate Estates in respect of the development of our accommodation arrangements and chamber facilities.
- 5.16 **As Head of Democratic Services I am of the view that despite the loss of individual private offices, this arrangement better reflects the new working practices of the Council and the needs of Members; for this reason, I am satisfied that the provision of accommodation remains sufficient for Members to effectively discharge their roles.**

6. **MEMBER TRAINING**

6.1 The Council Business Unit took forward a wide-ranging [Member Induction Programme](#) following the Local Government Elections. This programme was well received (as demonstrated by the Member survey results and as evidenced in section 3.11) as opportunities were available through mandatory, recommended and suggested training sessions which laid the foundations to equip Members' to undertake their roles. These sessions were offered remotely or through hybrid arrangements and at varying times to accommodate those Members with personal and/or work commitments:

- How the Council works
- Democratic processes
- Rules of proceedings
- Code of Conduct training
- Meeting participation
- Understanding Local Government Finance
- Elected Members Pension Scheme
- Corporate Parenting and Safeguarding
- Planning and Development
- Licensing
- Members Safety
- Information Management
- Scrutiny Questioning Skills
- Scrutiny Chairing Skills
- Accessing the Members Portal
- Welsh Language Skills
- Equality and Diversity

6.2 All learning modules and training materials continue to be available for Members to view through the Member's Portal as well as an additional 'useful information' page. Since the Members Induction period, a range of training has already been progressed on a one-to-one basis or where appropriate to all Members by open invitation, in response to the areas of need identified during the post-election induction process. These sessions have been varied and relate to Members' community leadership, IT training/drop-in sessions, managing casework or are relative to specific committee training or changes in membership. Members are also offered external training courses as they arise and are identified by the Council Business Unit as appropriate.

6.3 Recent training sessions have included Winter Maintenance Planning, one-to-one sessions on understanding the Members' Portal and pre council surgeries for IT queries.

6.4 The opportunity for Members to undertake a confidential Personal Development Review (PDR) is currently being rolled out. The outcomes of PDRs will inform the Member Development Programme (and future E-Learning modules) and can, where required, provide an understanding to matters such as corporate governance, statutory requirements, and service-related areas. Discussions will address how well supported councillors feel in their current role(s), how the

Council can provide councillors with opportunities to further develop their knowledge, skills and experience to ensure that they are supported in achieving their ambitions, how the Council could further support councillors with their health, wellbeing and safety and how well the Council's IT provision for councillors supports them in their role(s).

- 6.5 Work is currently underway to develop arrangements for future training following the Council Annual General Meeting in May 2023. This work will again require a significant amount of resource from the Council Business Unit as we work to ensure we deliver a programme that is fit for purpose for all Members, and builds upon the foundations laid post-election, and the experiences Members have gained during the first municipal year.
- 6.6 **As a result of the breadth of learning and development support provided to Members over the last twelve months, the commencement of the Member's 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.**
- 6.7 Following the election of 35 new members, there will be greater resource requirement towards Member development, which will require continued focus by the Democratic Services Committee.

7. DIGITAL SUPPORT

- 7.1 Through the new ways of working imposed on the Council through the pandemic, and the new statutory required hybrid approaches to meetings, the provision of ICT equipment to Members is now more important than ever.
- 7.2 Post-election, all Members were equipped with a digital device to allow them to undertake their Elected Member role, and to attend Committee meetings via the virtual Zoom platform, with appropriate training provided to each Member through the Council Business Unit and ICT colleagues.
- 7.3 In line with the recommendations of the Independent Review Panel and the decision taken forward by the Democratic Services Committee, Members were provided with a mobile telephony provision. Members can take forward the option of receiving a contribution from the Council for any personal telephony arrangements if they do not wish to utilise the handset provided by the Council.
- 7.4 One of the most significant risks we face as a Council is the risk posed by cyber criminals. This risk is detailed on our Council risk register.
- 7.5 One key area is that of digital identity. Unfortunately, Members details are more easily sourced due to the nature of the role they undertake and are listed on the public facing website. Therefore, Members become an easier target for cyber-attacks. By limiting use to trusted Council digital devices this allows the Council

to provide access to emails, teams and Council systems to Members, whilst Members are safe in the knowledge that this access is trusted.

- 7.6 Members on Council provided devices are more protected from such attacks, and also cannot be impersonated as they are protected by the Council's cyber security technologies. For the reasons mentioned above, Members are now only able to access Council emails from a Council digital device. It is for this reason that all Members, by default, were provided with the provision of a mobile telephone from the local elections in May 2022
- 7.7 **In light of the above provisions made available to Members, I am content that the digital support provided to Members is sufficient.**

8. HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES – OPINION

- 8.1 Through the additional support indicated, **I am of the view that there continues to be sufficient support within the Council Business Unit to support non-executive Members.** The enhancements set out above will also provide the opportunity for more focused staff resource to support our individual functions (Council/Regulatory/Scrutiny/Member Support and Research).
- 8.2 Available resources will continue to focus upon strengthening our scrutiny and democratic support capacity. As we develop our scrutiny functions, in line with the new Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act, it will be necessary to continually review the level of support available. It will also be important to build upon the positive steps already being taken to support Member communication.
- 8.3 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 mean we are well placed to respond any further legislative requirements.
- 8.4 The significant investment in Members' facilities as part of chamber improvements and broadcasting of meetings during the last two year should be positively noted.
- 8.5 The improvements achieved to date, most recently demonstrated by the induction programme, demonstrate that our training and development support for Members continues to improve.
- 8.6 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 Council.
- 8.7 **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.

9. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The report outlines 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.

10. CONSULTATION

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

11. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 11.1 The arrangements described above can be met from existing resources within the Democratic Services and Communications revenue budget and the on-going annual budget requirements.

12. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 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.

- 12.2 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*

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

- 13.1 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.
- 13.2 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.

14. CONCLUSION

- 14.1 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
- 14.2 Over the course of the next twelve months the support and shape of the service will need to be considered in light of the support to hybrid 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

13TH FEBRUARY 2023

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

**REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR DEMOCRATIC SERVICES &
COMMUNICATIONS**

BACKGROUND PAPERS - Democratic Services – Support for Members

Freestanding Matter



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2022/23

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

13th FEBRUARY 2023

MULTI-LOCATION MEETING POLICY

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Members' comment and approval on the draft Rhondda Cynon Taf Multi-Location Meeting policy (attached at Appendix 1).

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members of the Democratic Services Committee:

- 2.1 Review and comment on the Council's Multi-Location Meeting policy (as set out in **Appendix 1**);
- 2.2 Approve the use of the Council's Multi-Location meetings policy (with appropriate amendments as necessary).
- 2.3 Subject to 2.2, the Multi Location Meeting policy be presented to Council for endorsement, following which the Council Constitution be amended to include a copy of the agreed policy.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The need for Members to be aware of the Council's Multi-Location meetings policy and for Members of the Democratic Services Committee to provide comments and observations as appropriate.
- 3.2 For the policy to be shared with all Members of the Council and to adhere to the contents of the policy as a form of good practice when attending multi location meetings.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 At the start of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020 the Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Meetings) (Wales) Regulations 2020 provided a framework for Councils to convene remote meetings for all attendees while face to face meetings were unable to take place.
- 4.2 The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 has enabled Councils to continue to meet remotely with the introduction of multi-location meetings, thereby enabling greater public participation and Councillor involvement in decision making.
- 4.3 During Covid lockdowns and throughout 2020/21 Rhondda Cynon Taf Council has been convening its meetings by remote means resulting in a number of benefits such as allowing decisions to be made in a transparent way; Making it easy for the public to view and participate in decision making and the democratic process and making it easier for participants to take part if they have family and/or caring commitments.
- 4.4 When considering arrangements for remote attendance or 'multi-location meetings', Authorities must have regard to the statutory guidance issued by the Welsh Ministers: Interim statutory guidance on multi-location meetings <https://gov.wales/local-authority-multi-location-meetings-interim-guidance>
- 4.5 The 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.
- 4.6 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 (Appendix 1 refers).

5. AREAS FOR CONSIDERATION

- 5.1 A 'Multi-Location Meeting' is a meeting whose participants are not all in the same physical place. Some of the participants may be physically located in the meeting venue whilst others join from their home or other remote location.
- 5.2 The newly refurbished Council Chamber has multi-location meeting capability, through its webcasting facility, which enables participants to attend both remotely and in person. The Chamber also has a designated public gallery, which allows the public to attend in person. This is in addition to the live public webcasting of some meetings; both providing additional transparency and public oversight in the decision-making process.

5.3 The Council has determined that all meetings must be able to operate as multi-location meetings to ensure that participants are able to attend remotely or physically should they wish to do so, subject to those meetings identified by Council, which Members agreed to take forward as virtual only ([June 2021 Council](#)). (Appendix 1 refers).

6. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Equality considerations feature throughout the Council's draft multi-location meetings policy.

7. CONSULTATION

7.1 Consultation with key stakeholders was undertaken as part of refurbishing the Council's Chamber, with the draft multi-location meetings policy now being reviewed by the Democratic Services Committee.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no financial implications aligned to this report.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS AND LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

9.1 The report has been prepared in accordance with The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021

10. LINKS TO THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PLAN / OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES

10.1 Equality considerations feature throughout Corporate and National priorities and specifically the content of this report contributes to a More Equal Wales and a Wales of Cohesive Communities. Many of the improvements brought about by multi-location meetings, such as innovation around the transaction or meetings, reductions in the use of paper, enhanced public accessibility will serve the objective of making local democratic systems more sustainable.

10.2 Multi-location meetings contribute to the Councils Climate Change agenda as the meetings reduce the carbon footprint of physical meetings (although digital activity is not carbon-neutral).

11. CONCLUSION

11.1 It is recognised that Multi-Location meetings are a vital component of good democracy in local government and help improve the Council's decision making, service provision and cost effectiveness.

11.2 The undertaking of Multi-Location meetings will strengthen accountability and transparency in the democratic process.

11.3 The Multi Location meetings policy will be reviewed as and when appropriate to ensure it remains relevant and 'fit for purpose'.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 1972

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

**Democratic Services Committee
13th February 2023**

**REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR DEMOCRATIC SERVICES &
COMMUNICATIONS**

APPENDIX 1

Multi – Location Meeting Policy

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MULTI-LOCATION MEETINGS POLICY

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 came into force on the 30th April 2021 and enabled Councils to operate multi-location meetings whereby Members, Officers, the public and Press are able to attend meetings physically or remotely.
- 1.2 In August 2021, Welsh Government published Interim Statutory Guidance on Multi-Location Meetings which can be found [here](#):
- 1.3 Multi-location meetings provide an opportunity for local authorities to become more efficient, raise their profile in the local community and make it easier for the public to view and participate in decision making and the democratic process.
- 1.4 Conducting meetings in this manner allows for greater flexibility and equality of access, acknowledging that some participants may have a preference for physical meetings potentially due to protected characteristics or circumstances which limits their ability to participate online. Other participants may wish to join council meetings remotely and from another location as a matter of default because, for example, they have working or caring responsibilities..
- 1.5 The provision of multi-location meetings also helps the Authority meet the requirements of the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 in terms of making the Authority more sustainable and resilient. Multi-location meetings reduce the carbon footprint of wholly physical meetings and reduce both the reliance on paper and need for travel;
- 1.6 This policy aims to produce a clear guide as to how the Authority will take forward multi-location meetings, ensuring transparency with decision making and accessibility for all, whilst also reflecting the meeting arrangements within the Council Constitution.

2 LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

- 2.1 Under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 ('the 2021 Act'), Part 3, Chapter 4, local authorities are required to:
 - i. Electronically broadcast full Council meetings (with effect from May 2022).

- ii. Make and publish arrangements to ensure that all Council, Cabinet, Committee and Joint Committee meetings may be attended remotely also referred to as 'multi-location meetings'.
 - Meetings must be capable of being held virtually, but each authority must decide whether their meetings will be held fully virtually, partially virtually (where some participants are in the same physical location, whilst others join the meeting virtually, also referred to as 'hybrid meetings') or as physical meetings (authorities may **not** mandate physical attendance at meetings).
 - Participants in the meetings must be able to speak to and hear each other; and for meetings which are required to be broadcast (full Council meetings), participants must also be able to see and be seen by each other.
 - iii. Publish all meeting documents on the Council's website, including notices, summonses, agendas, reports and background papers (with effect from May 2021).
 - A note of the meeting, including Members in attendance and decisions made, must be published within 7 working days of the meeting.
 - Notice of meetings is no longer required to be posted at the Council's offices. However, copies of agendas and reports must be made available for the public if meetings are held physically.
 - The Council is also required to make public access provision for members of the public who cannot access electronic documents, for example, by providing access to computers, copies of documents, or making documents available for inspection.
- 2.2 Authorities should take into consideration the statutory guidance available when taking forward multi-location meetings. The statutory guidance provides 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.

3. WHAT IS A MULTI-LOCATION MEETING?

- 3.1 A Multi-location meeting is a meeting whose participants are not all in the same physical place. Some of the participants may be physically located in the meeting venue whilst others join from their home or other remote location.
- 3.2 In respect of such meetings, the Authority has determined these meetings to be called 'hybrid' meetings and will refer to them as such on Committee Summonses / Agendas / Meeting invites.
- 3.3 When a meeting is to be convened fully remotely the Council will regard these meetings as 'virtual' meetings and will refer to them as such on Committee Summonses / Agendas / Meeting invites.
- 3.4 The Council Chamber, situated in the Council Headquarters in Clydach Vale

has multi-location meeting capability to enable participants of meetings to attend and fully participate through a hybrid setting. The Council Chamber is therefore the designated venue for physical attendees at a Council Committee meeting. The Chamber also has a designated public gallery to allow the public and press to attend in person.

- 3.5 The Council uses a secure virtual platform to conduct the remote aspect of a meeting. Details of how to access meetings through the virtual platform are provided to Members and relevant attendees in advance of the meeting.
- 3.6 The Council has determined that all meetings must be able to operate as multi-location meetings to ensure that participants are able to attend remotely or physically should they wish to do so, subject to those meetings that were determined by Council, to be conducted as virtual only ([June 2021 Council](#)).

4. ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS

- 4.1 Meetings invitations will be provided electronically and will provide details of the meeting, its location and timings. Meeting invites will include links to enable the participants to join remotely should they wish to do so. In respect of hybrid meetings, participants will need to indicate their intention to attend the meeting physically or remotely in advance to enable any necessary administrative and support arrangements to be put in place by Democratic Services.
- 4.2 Owing to the necessary administrative support that is required to hold hybrid meetings, a minimum number of physical attendees will be put in place for those meetings as indicated below. If the minimum number is not met, the meeting will be held as virtual only and the participants informed accordingly by Democratic Services. The Council website will also be updated to advise of the changes and notify any members of the public who may have wished to attend the meeting physically in a viewing / observer capacity.
- 4.3 The minimum physical attendance by Members and subsequent arrangements will be in place as follows:

MEETING	DETAILS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council • Cabinet • Planning Committee • Licensing Committee • Appeals Committee • Standards Committee 	All meetings will be offered as hybrid (i.e. participants can attend either physically or remotely).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All Scrutiny Committees • Governance and Audit Committee • Democratic Services Committee 	All meetings will be offered as hybrid subject to the following attendance numbers: – Minimum number of physical attendees – 3

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Education Authority Governors • Voluntary Early Retirement Redundancy Panel • Pension Fund Committee • Executive Committees / Steering Groups • Joint Committees • Working Groups 	<p>All meetings will be offered as virtual (i.e. participants can attend remotely only)</p>
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5 QUORUM

- 5.1 The quorum of a meeting is one quarter of the voting Members unless specified otherwise within the Council’s Constitution. The quorum shall include those attending remotely, or physically; providing they are able to speak and be heard by each other and to see and be seen by others when participating in proceedings.
- 5.2 If the numbers present fall below the quorum required, the meeting ends immediately.

6 USE OF CAMERAS

- 6.1 Remote participants of meetings must be able to “speak to and be heard by each other” and “to see and be seen by each other”.
- 6.2 For all meetings, Members are requested to leave their cameras on throughout the duration of the meeting. Any Press in attendance will be asked to keep their cameras off for the duration of the meeting. If circumstance arises where it may not be appropriate to capture your video image, permission must be sought from the Chair and the reason recorded. It is accepted that there will be occasions when a remote participant may need to disable their camera due to poor connection/internet issues or personal circumstances of their home environment.
- 6.3 Committee reports under consideration will not be displayed on screen. Only when Officers are providing a presentation, will the information be shown on screen.
- 6.4 Members and Officers should be mindful of any confidential information they may have on display when attending a hybrid meeting that could be picked up on camera.

7 WITHDRAWAL FROM A MEETING DUE TO A PREJUDICIAL INTEREST

- 7.1 Should an Elected Member declare a Prejudicial Interest at a hybrid or virtual meeting, the Member must withdraw from the meeting unless they are relying

on a relevant exemption set out in the Council's Member Code of Conduct and which is properly disclosed or obtained a dispensation from the Council's Standards Committee. However, where Members of the public are able to speak at a meeting, the Elected Member can also remain to make their representations but must leave after their representations are made. (For further information on declarations of interests at meetings see the [Council's Constitution](#).)

- 7.2 The Elected Member will be invited back into the meeting once the item relating to the prejudicial item has concluded. Should that person not respond to the call to re-join, the meeting will continue without them, providing it is quorate.

8 CONSIDERATION OF EXEMPT OR CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION AT MEETINGS

- 8.1 Each meeting agenda will indicate whether the information to be considered is exempt or confidential and these items are generally kept until the end of the agenda to limit any disruption to the meeting and any participants who may be required to leave the meeting at that point.
- 8.2 Agenda items which contain public information, and which are not exempt or confidential can be considered in a public forum. When an exempt or confidential item is itemised on the agenda the following steps may be used to ensure that the information is not shared with anyone other than those entitled to receive it:
- a) Request that those not entitled to consider the exempt information leave the public remote meeting or be moved to the "virtual" waiting room whilst the exempt information is considered.
 - b) Request that Members who are attending a meeting remotely ensure that the consideration (including any vote) on any confidential/exempt item cannot be overheard or seen other than by themselves
 - c) The meeting recording and webcast will be paused for the duration of the exempt item. In the physical part of the meeting any observers will be requested to leave the room whilst the exempt item is considered.
 - d) When consideration of the exempt information has been completed, if there are further public items to be considered, all remote participants will be invited to re-join the public remote meeting and the recording and webcast will be resumed. Likewise, the observers or participants attending the physical meeting will be invited to return into the meeting venue.

9 MEETING ETIQUETTE

- 9.1 Participants attending meetings remotely, should use an appropriate background setting. It is recommended that Members either blur their background or chose the corporate background feature when attending remotely.

- 9.2 Members should conduct themselves in a professional manner at all meetings regardless of the setting (physical or remote). Members should refrain, whenever possible, from eating when on camera and should consider their appearance with no offensive clothing or materials on display. Members should ensure that they show respect at all times and consideration for others and not use bullying language or behaviour towards others.
- 9.3 In addition it is essential to avoid joining a meeting virtually from a noisy or public location or from your vehicle as undoubtedly these locations will cause connectivity, sound and vision issues and may detract from the content of the meeting. Neither will they offer a safe and confidential environment when discussing exempt agenda items. Under such circumstances the Chair may ask a member to leave the meeting and rejoin from a more suitable location.
- 9.4 Virtual participants should only use the chat function if there is something they need the meeting to be aware of i.e. they are having sound issues or they need to leave the meeting early. The chat facility is not to be used for discussions, as all discussions must be made verbally in the meeting for the sake of individuals observing the meeting and / or the meeting recording where appropriate. The chat is not to be used for other reasons. Be mindful that everyone in the meeting can see the chat content.
- 9.5 All those participating in the meeting, physically or remotely, will need to indicate when they would like to speak, via the microphone queuing system in the Chamber or virtual hands raised when attending remotely. Only when brought in by the Presiding Officer / Chair may someone speak. Those in physical attendance in the Council Chamber should wait for their microphone light to indicate red before speaking. Those attending remotely should remember to unmute their microphone when speaking and to re-mute when finished. In both settings, participations must speak clearly and into the microphone.

10 VOTING

- 10.1 Voting will either take place electronically, via a roll call or a mixture of both. All voting results will be announced by either the Presiding Officer / Chair, the Monitoring/Legal Officer or the Head of Democratic Services before moving to the next item of business. Should a Member leave the meeting and not return, their vote will not be able to be provided by another Member.
- 10.2 Unless a recorded vote is requested in accordance with the Council's Constitution, the Chair will seek a consensus from Members. If no objections are received the recommendations will be considered as carried ("no dissent").
- 10.3 In both Hybrid or virtual meetings, where the vote will be carried out electronically the names of those voting for, against or abstaining will be automatically recorded and published on the Council's website. If a physical roll call of votes is taken this will be undertaken by the Monitoring Officer or Head of Democratic Services at Full Council and for any other meeting by the Legal/Democratic Services Officer.

11 WELSH SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION

- 11.1 The Council Chamber conferencing system, which includes simultaneous interpretation and webcasting, currently promotes the use of the Welsh Language at every opportunity and this provision is in place to support those committees where the membership includes Welsh speaking Members. This will also be offered where Democratic Services has been informed in advance of any public speakers wishing to converse through the medium of Welsh (as indicated above).
- 11.2 For observers of any live webcast meeting, observers will have the option of viewing the webcast through either the English or Welsh feed provided, subject to their language choice.

12 RECORD OF ATTENDANCE

- 12.1 The Democratic Services Officer will record the attendance of each Committee Member and participant at the meeting and record attendance in the relevant Decision Notice/Minutes of the meeting. An attendance record will also be displayed on each individual Members' profile on the Council webpages. Committee Members are to inform the relevant Democratic Services Officer if they are unable to attend a meeting and their apologies will be recorded at the meeting and published in the minutes of the meeting.

13 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

- 13.1 In order to address Committees such as the Planning & Development Committee, public participation guidance is available to assist residents when they attend both remote meetings and in person in the Council Chamber. Following confirmation of their requests to the appropriate chair, they will be contacted and supported through the processes in place to address Committee.
- 13.2 A public participant at a meeting wishing to speak in Welsh is required to contact Democratic Services at least 2 days in advance of a meeting (as directed on each Committee agenda) so that the necessary translation arrangements can be made. All meetings will be facilitated by a Democratic Services Officer.

14 CHAIRING MEETINGS

- 14.1 The Statutory Guidance understands that chairing a multi-location meeting is very different to chairing a face-to-face meeting. The job of the Presiding Officer / Chair is particularly challenging at a physical meeting with some participants joining remotely. Presiding Officers / Chairs and vice-chairs are encouraged to attend meetings in person in order to benefit from the direct support of the Democratic Services officer and Legal officer supporting the Committee.

- 14.2 In general Chairs of meetings should ensure they are prepared for the meeting; ensure all participants are able to access the meeting and can see and hear each other; introduce themselves and others to members of the public who may be present; check occasionally to ensure no one has been lost due to technical difficulties and provide support to those participants experiencing challenges; and, ensure all participants are given an opportunity to speak and appropriately use the chat facility.

15 WEBCASTING OF MEETINGS IN RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL

- 15.1 Local Authorities are required to webcast certain Council meetings. The main purpose of webcasting is to aid transparency, governance and accountability by giving members of the public, elected members, officers and other interested parties the opportunity to observe meetings without having to attend in person and for the Council to have an official audio and visual record of its decision-making process.

- 15.2 The following formal meetings of the Council are amongst some of the meetings that will either be webcast by being streamed live or recorded for upload to the Council's webcasting website within a reasonable period of time following the end of the meeting:

[Home – Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council \(public-i.tv\)](#)
[Virtual Meetings | Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council](#)
 [\(rctcbc.gov.uk\)](http://rctcbc.gov.uk)

- Council
- Cabinet
- Planning & Development Committee
- Licensing Committee
- Governance and Audit Committee
- Democratic Services Committee
- All Scrutiny Committee meetings
- Standards Committee

- 15.3 Webcasting enhances the formal record of the meeting and the decisions taken, which are published on the Council website in the form of minutes or decision notices.

- 15.4 A webcasting protocol is included in [Part 4 Of the Council's Constitution](#).

16 RECORDING OF THE MEETING

- 16.1 At the start of each meeting, participants will be informed verbally of the intention to record the meeting. Subject to any disagreement being made verbally, all attendees consent to be filmed and to the use of those images and any sound recordings.

16.2 When recording the meeting the Council collects, uses and stores the following categories of personal information about participants;

- Their voice which will be recorded when they speak at the meeting;
- Their image which will be recorded for the duration of their attendance in the meeting.

16.3 Details of how the local authority uses a participant's personal information for Recording and Publishing Meetings of the Council, Cabinet and Committees can be found [here](#).

17 PUBLICATION OF MEETING INFORMATION

17.1 The Council's committee administration software [Civica-Modern.gov](#) is used to publish all meeting related agendas, reports, minutes and decision notices to its Council webpages on both the English and Welsh side of the website for the public to view. In addition, each Committee page links to its relevant webcast recording.

18 CALENDAR OF MEETINGS

18.1 A calendar of meetings will be developed annually which identifies when Committee meetings will be taken forward throughout the Municipal Year and the timings of such meetings. This may be subject to change for operational reasons and these changes will be publicised.

19 TRAINING

19.1 Members and officers will receive training to be able to participate at meetings which will include the use of the virtual meeting platform software utilised for joining remote meetings and the use of the microphones in the Council Chamber when meetings take place physically in the building. Other training includes access to Modern Gov Committee papers, electronic voting and external participants will also receive support from Democratic Services when accessing the meeting.

19.2 Training for multi-location meetings will continue to be reviewed and provided to ensure the appropriate support provision is provided at all times by the Council Business Unit.

20 REVIEWING THE POLICY

20.1 The Multi Location meetings policy will be reviewed as and when appropriate to ensure it remains relevant and 'fit for purpose'.

21 SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

21.1 This guidance policy should be read in conjunction with the Council's Constitution, Privacy Notice for Recording and publishing Council, Cabinet and Committee Meetings and the Council's Corporate Privacy Notice - which can

be found in the following links:

Constitution – [Council Constitution | Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council \(rctcbc.gov.uk\)](http://rctcbc.gov.uk)

Privacy Notice - [Recording and Publishing Council, Cabinet and Committee Meetings for Staff and Elected Members | Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council \(rctcbc.gov.uk\)](http://rctcbc.gov.uk)

Council's Corporate Privacy Notice – [How we use your personal information - An Overview | Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council \(rctcbc.gov.uk\)](http://rctcbc.gov.uk)

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RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2022/23

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

13th FEBRUARY 2023

MEMBERS' PORTAL

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update to the Democratic Services Committee on the development of the Members' Portal since the Committee's revised membership following the Local Government Elections in May 2022

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members of the Democratic Services Committee:

- 2.1 Review and comment on the development of the Members' Portal to date; and,
- 2.2 Nominate Members from the Democratic Services Committee to champion the Members Portal and undertake demonstrations/provide feedback on the functionality of the Portal as and when new developments are completed.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The need for newly elected Members to be aware of the Members' Portal planned development since its inception in 2019.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 At the Democratic Services Committee on the 19th March 2019, Members agreed to the development of a dedicated Members Portal which would enable them to access and submit information through their Council device, for example submitting democratic requests such as tabling of questions or motions, raising scrutiny research requests and submitting Declarations of Interest.

- 4.2 Following the initial agreement of the Committee, the Head of Democratic Services met with officers from Customer Service and the Council's website development team to discuss the requirements and development of the portal. A project plan was agreed with a view to rolling out the portal early the following year.
- 4.3 With the onset of Covid-19, the Council focussed its priorities on the impact of the pandemic, response and recovery. During this time the development of the Members' Portal was put on hold, as with many other similar projects where resource constraints were acknowledged.
- 4.4 In 2021, the Democratic Services Committee considered the continuation of past activities through its future Work Programme where work may be incomplete, the Members' Portal was one such area which was reviewed and subsequently reinstated. Officers from the Council Business Unit and the Customer Care team jointly progressed this project at that time.
- 4.5 Three key areas were identified which would allow greater flexibility to enable Members to undertake their Elected Member role, allowing Members to submit questions to Council, submit a 'Call In' form in respect of a key decision and the opportunity to complete a Declaration of Interest form relating to any conflicts of personal interest during a committee meeting. Members were provided with a demonstration of the portal and a small working group was formed to test the system and provide feedback on its functionality.
- 4.6 Following the Local Government Elections, both returning, and newly elected Members received one to one training on how to access and use the portal on their Council device with the support of the Council's Digital Skills team and training continues to be available on request and through other opportunities such as the pre-Council surgeries.
- 4.7 The training materials for new and returning Members, which were used to complement the Council Members' induction programme following the Local Government Elections, are available for Members to view through the portal. The materials outline the core roles and responsibilities of Elected Members, introductory guides to topics and subject areas that they may have responsibility for. This also includes recordings of the training sessions, so that Elected Members are able to review their content at a convenient time.
- 4.8 In the future, all in-house and external provider training modules (and where appropriate, all recordings) will be uploaded to the portal providing a one-stop shop for Members' training modules.
- 4.9 Currently the 'Useful Information/Links' page is under development. Here, Members can locate useful information relating to Democratic Services matters as well as providing information about other Council Services in one location. In

addition, there will be a provision to signpost Members to many other external organisations providing a central location for information gathering. The content within this section of the Members Portal will be reviewed, updated and added to as appropriate. Access to data, specific to Members Wards is also something that Members will be able to access in the near future.

4.10 Members will soon have the opportunity to submit their travel expenses to the Council's Payroll section, electronically via the Portal. This will simplify the process with pre-populated information to reduce the time currently spent completing a paper expenses form.

4.11 The Council Business Unit was recently assigned a dedicated Business Analyst resource from the Digital Transformation Team who will assist with the development of the portal and identify areas of improvement. The additional resource will assist with demonstrations to Elected Members and provide the required technical and design support.

5. FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

5.1 The Portal, is a developing system and it is proposed that it 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.

5.2 It is appropriate that the Democratic Services Committee is involved in the development of the Portal and receives updates and demonstrations to its meetings. Member involvement will ensure that the system is developed and tailored to Members' needs.

6. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Equality considerations feature throughout the development of the Members; Portal.

7. CONSULTATION

7.1 Consultation and demonstration with the Democratic Services Committee in respect of the developments with the Portal will enable effective engagement and direct liaison with Elected Members to better develop the Members' portal.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no financial implications aligned to this report.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS AND LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

9.1 The report has been prepared in accordance with The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021

10. CONCLUSION

10.1 It is recognised that the Members Portal will support Elected Members to undertake their role in a more effective way by gathering information and resources in one location through their Council device. The potential to build on what has already been developed will serve to improve the user experience.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 1972

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

**DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE
13TH FEBRUARY 2023**

**REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR DEMOCRATIC SERVICES &
COMMUNICATIONS**

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