



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Democratic Services Committee held on Thursday, 27 April 2023 at 3.30 pm.

County Borough Councillors – The following Councillors were present:

Councillor W Jones (Chair)

Councillor M Webber	Councillor L Addiscott
Councillor J Bonetto	Councillor S J Davies
Councillor A J Ellis	Councillor S Hickman
Councillor S Morgans	Councillor B Stephens
Councillor S Trask	Councillor J Turner
Councillor K Webb	Councillor P Evans

Officers in attendance

Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication

16 Welcome

The Chair welcomed all Members to the days meeting.

17 Apologies

Apologies of absence were received from County Borough Councillors G Jones and C Preedy.

18 Declaration of Interest

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

19 Minutes

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 13th February 2023 as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

20 Matters Arising

Minute 13 – Members were advised that the Multi location Meeting policy was presented to the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs at their recent meeting who were supportive of the policy following the comments and amendments of the Committee.

Minute 14 – A Member Portal Champions meeting has been undertaken, where Members considered a range of new developments. The Portal Champions were thanked for their time and constructive feedback.

21 Members Training

The Head of Democratic Services provided Members with an update in respect of the training opportunities that had been made available to Members, including details of the Member Induction Programme and the future proposals in respect of training.

Members were referred to the Personal Development Review process that the Head of Democratic Services, along with colleagues in the Council Business Unit were currently undertaking. The Officer advised that such reviews were an opportunity for Members to discuss support and training opportunities as well as discussing Members wellbeing. It was advised that the majority of Members had asked for a follow up meeting, which the Head of Democratic Services has agreed to provide. This will provide further opportunities for Members to discuss support arrangements and general wellbeing. Culminating from these meetings, the Head of Democratic Services will compile a detailed training programme which will be presented to the Committee at a future meeting advising how this programme will be delivered upon.

The Head of Democratic Services provided details of training events undertaken since the Member Induction programme and provided details of future training opportunities including Member briefing sessions.

The Chair thanked the Officer for the report and spoke of the training opportunities available to Members and the support provisions including Members wellbeing.

The Vice Chair welcomed the report and reminded Members of her role as Member Champion, another opportunity for Members to seek advice and support regardless of political party. The Vice Chair commented on further training that would be beneficial to all Members in respect of equality and diversity with particular reference to 'Gender Fluidity' and spoke of the Autism training undertaken by the Cabinet and queried when this would be available to all Members.

The Head of Democratic Services thanked the Members for their comments and agreed that the training suggested would be beneficial for all Members and would look to add this into the training programme. In respect of the Autism Awareness training, work was currently being undertaken by the Council Business Unit in conjunction with colleagues in Human Resources to commence the roll out of such training.

Members **RESOLVED:**

- (i) To acknowledge the training provided to Members since the Member Induction Programme;
- (ii) To note the forthcoming training opportunities made available to Members

22 Elected Members Draft Research Support Protocol

Members were referred to the report before them which sought to remind Members of the Research provision available for Members and to review the Council's current protocol following the new statutory guidance issued, as suggested by the WLGA.

The Head of Democratic Services explained the research facility requirements under the Local Government & Elections Wales Act 2019 and spoke of the unique position of RCT, as such a provision had been established since 2018, although it was noted that this provision had been under utilised.

Members were advised that the new statutory guidance as a minimum recommends that Councils undertake an internal review / audit of the existing research support provided to Councillors and provided a range of questions to assist Councils with such a review, as outlined within 4.2 of the report.

The Head of Democratic Services commented that although there is a need for a robust criteria for research requests it is also important that the criteria does not become too prescriptive to dissuade Members from using the facility. Therefore the criteria proposed for RCT Council, as highlighted within Appendix A of the document would still remain relatively open with requests being approved by the Head of Democratic Services or other appropriate officer in their absence. Members were advised that where appropriate research requests would be made available to all Members.

The Vice Chair commented on the importance of the Research opportunities within the Council Business Unit and encouraged Members to utilise the resource going forward.

One Member queried whether examples of research could be added to the criteria, to ensure Members kept within the parameters of non political research requests to which the officer agreed.

The Chair thanked the Head of Democratic Services for the report and commented on the positive position of the Council and its proactive approach to support.

Following discussions it was **RESOLVED**:

- i. To note the research facility available for Members to

- utilise to assist them in undertaking their role
- ii. To adopt the draft protocol outlined within Appendix A of the report subject to the inclusion of research examples within the criteria
- iii. To support the promotion of the Member Research facility to all Members and the sharing of research requests (where appropriate) to all Members in the future.

23 Census 2021 RCT and Ward Level Data

The Head of Democratic Services provided Members with details of the provision of Census data available, including ward level data and took the opportunity to explain how such data could be made available going forward for Members to utilise.

Through his report, Members were provided with examples of how such data could be gathered through external sources and commented on the importance of Members accessing such data to assist them in their roles. Reference was made to the 'Community Data Analyst' officer who assists departments within the Council to acquire and interpret data to assist in service delivery and policy making.

Going forward, the Head of Democratic Services advised how the Community Data Analyst, along with other colleagues was developing an online data Library, which will host a range of data to assist both Council Officers and Members in the future. Members were advised of the proposal that the Democratic Services Committee 'Member Portal Champions' test the system at an appropriate time in its development to ensure its fit for purpose.

The Head of Democratic Services also advised that it was the intention that as the data library would be a web based system, the library would be embedded within the Members Portal, again allowing the portal to become the 'one stop shop' for all Members information and requests going forward.

The Head of Democratic Services took the opportunity to encourage Members to contact the Council Business Unit if they had any data research requests, where officers would direct the request appropriately to the Community Data Analyst.

Members took the opportunity to thank the Corporate Policy & Consultation Manager and the team for the work undertaken in respect of data collection and consultation and the Vice Chair spoke of the valuable data collected in respect of Armed forces which the council are positively using to help veterans going forward.

The Chair commented on the importance of accessing data and

understanding the data acquired and spoke of the need for future briefing sessions to assist Members in this area.

It was **RESOLVED:**

- i. To acknowledge the Data information currently available for Members to access
- ii. To support the developments taken forward with the Data online library
- iii. To support that the 'Members Portal Champions' work with data colleagues to support developments of the data library to ensure that it is fit for purpose.

24 Annual Report

The Head of Democratic Services welcomed Members comments in respect of the Committees Annual report which provided a summary of the work undertaken by the Committee during the Municipal Year.

Members were provided with an overview of the report, which highlighted the work undertaken in respect of Hybrid working arrangements, digital voting, Members Wellbeing and Members Security as well as many other important subject areas.

The Vice Chair welcomed the report and commented on the significant developments taken forward by the Committee over the Municipal Year, under the positive influence of the Chair.

Members agreed the report was an accurate reflection on the amount of work undertaken by the Head of Democratic Services and colleagues within the Council Business Unit and spoke of the significant developments taken forward with hybrid working arrangements over a short period of time.

The Chair took the opportunity to thank the Vice Chair for the continued support provided and to all Committee Members for their attendance, feedback and support of the work undertaken.

Following discussions it was **RESOLVED**

- I. To agree the draft Annual report at Appendix 1.
- II. To agree that the Chair of the Democratic Services Committee endorse the Democratic Services Committee Annual Report 2022/23 to a future Council meeting.

25 Independent Remuneration Panel

For information purposes the Head of Democratic Services provided Members with details of the recent Independent Remuneration Panel Annual Report.

26 Members Safety

Members were provided with a brief synopsis of the information report before them in respect of Members safety.

This meeting closed at 4.10 pm

**Councillor W Jones
Chair.**