



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Democratic Services Committee held on Wednesday, 5 July 2023 at 3.30 pm.

County Borough Councillors

Councillor W Jones (Chair)

Councillor M Webber	Councillor J Brencher
Councillor A J Ellis	Councillor P Evans
Councillor S Hickman	Councillor S Morgans
Councillor C Preedy	Councillor B Stephens
Councillor S Trask	Councillor J Turner
Councillor K Webb	

Officers in attendance

Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication

1 WELCOME

The Chair welcomed all Members to the inaugural meeting of the Committee following the Council AGM, with a special welcome to County Borough Councillor J Brencher as a new Member to the Committee.

2 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors L Addiscott, J Bonetto and S Powderhill.

3 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

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

4 MINUTES

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 27th April 2023 as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

5 MEMBER'S TRAINING - DRAFT MEMBER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

The Head of Democratic Services provided Members with the Draft Member Development Programme, which outlined training opportunities identified by Members through the recent Personal Development Review. The Head of Democratic Services advised that the programme had been developed to assist Members with the skills necessary to undertake their roles.

Members were advised of the tiered approach to learning outlined within the draft programme and the flexible approach to the delivery of learning and development opportunities which would be adapted to meet the identified needs of individuals and groups.

The Officer informed Members that subject to Members comments it was proposed that the delivery of the training programme be regularly monitored by the Democratic Services Committee, so that Members could further shape its delivery over the Municipal Year. The Head of Democratic Services would also provide updates to Group Leaders during their diarised meetings.

The Vice Chair welcomed the comprehensive programme and the combination of training being delivered both inhouse and through external providers, and the benefits of such training.

The Chair reiterated the need for flexibility with delivery of the programme and spoke of the continued support available through Democratic Services that all Members could utilise.

Members of the Committee spoke positively of the training provided to date and the increase in knowledge and skills following such training.

Following discussions the Committee **RESOLVED**:

- (i) That following consideration of the proposed draft Member Development Programme appended at Appendix 1 of the report to agree to the proposed programme and to monitor its delivery throughout the Municipal Year.
- (ii) That notification of the training scheduled is provided to all Members at the earliest opportunity to maximize attendance

6 THE COUNCIL'S OFFICE ACCOMMODATION STRATEGY - RELOCATION OF THE COUNCIL CHAMBER

The Head of Democratic Services provided details in respect of members facilities and accommodation, following the decision of Cabinet to relocate the Council's Head Quarters, and Council Chamber, to 2 Llys Cadwyn Pontypridd as part of the Council's Office Accommodation Strategy. The report also provided the opportunity for the Head of Democratic Services to provide a statutory opinion in respect of the proposed new accommodation arrangements for Members, following the recent Sufficiency of Resources report.

Members were reminded of the drivers for the cabinet decision in respect of the relocation which would see a greater footfall within town centres and a relocation of the main Council Headquarters to a town centre location easily accessible by public transport which would be of greater benefit to staff and residents and improve involvement and engagement between the Council and residents. The Head of Democratic Services added that the move to a new modern building provided the opportunity to enhance members facilities, at this new modern location, and determine a new model which would serve elected members for many years ahead.

The Committee were advised of the work undertaken to date with colleagues

from Corporate Estates and the discussions taken forward with Public I who previously supported the Council with enhancements made in 2020 to the current Council Chamber, which enabled the Council to comply to the new statutory requirements upon us in respect of live broadcasting and remote attendance. It was advised that when developing options for a new Council chamber, a key priority has been to facilitate the ability to re-use existing technology and furniture which were introduced as part of the chamber improvements in 2020.

Details of Members accommodation, The Council Chamber, public and press access and details surrounding a multi faith room and parking provision were spoken in length by the Head of Democratic Services, with a draft floor layout of the new accommodation arrangements presented to the Committee.

The Officer concluded his presentation of the report by providing his statutory opinion in respect of sufficiency of accommodation for Members. It was noted that the move to 2 Llys Cadwen, would provide significant improvements in respect of the accommodation offered to Members and the Head of Democratic Services referenced the previous Members Charter requirements, which were to be revised following new working arrangements. It was advised that the revised charter was still to be published, although it was proposed that the new office arrangements would enable Rhondda Cynon Taf to be well placed to become an early adopter of the new Members Charters in 2024. In conclusion the Head of Democratic Services confirmed that the accommodation provided to Elected Members was 'sufficient' and would be remarkably enhanced following the relocation to Pontypridd.

Members of the Committee spoke positively of the relocation and the improved accessibility to the new headquarters for members of the public and the positive impact the relocation would have on the town centre and the positive impact on Members through improved networking provision.

One Member queried some aspects of the proposed new layout for Members facilities in respect of toilet facilities and concern was highlighted in respect of parking provision although the improved public transport links was noted. The Head of Democratic Services responded and agreed to take forward the comments to colleagues in Corporate Estates and Highways.

The importance of sufficient political rooms within the Members facilities was also highlighted and the continued provision of hotdesking facilities was also welcomed.

Members queried whether the Chamber facilities within the Pontypridd Municipal Building could also be utilised going forward for some Committee meetings. The Head of Democratic Services agreed that there could be further future use of the old Chamber, although this usage could be potentially restricted due to the technological equipment needed to support hybrid meetings which were currently unavailable in the old chamber and the fact that the building was a listed building.

Following detailed discussions, it was **RESOLVED**:

1. To note the work undertaken to date in respect of the relocation of the Council Chamber; and that the Head of Democratic Services takes

forward Members concerns in respect of:

- I. Sufficient Toilet Provision
 - II. Parking Provision for Elected Members
 - III. Sufficient Political Rooms.
2. To note the revised statutory opinion in respect of accommodation resources available to Members as set out in paragraph 8.
 3. To receive further updates as appropriate to ensure Members are kept abreast of the office move and for a site visit to be undertaken by the Committee when deemed appropriate.

7 MEMBER'S SURVEY - CONSIDERATION OF FEEDBACK

Through his report, the Head of Democratic Services provided Members with the feedback obtained from the Member survey undertaken in April 2023, prior to the Council Annual General Meeting. Members were advised that the survey captured some initial responses surrounding the support provided to Members to assist them in undertaking their role with the aim of identifying areas where the Council Business Unit could improve or change current arrangements.

The Head of Democratic Services advised that 51 Members had completed the questionnaire and the Officer continued to refer Members to each of the sections listed within the survey, including Committee meeting times, hybrid meetings, Member support arrangements and digital support.

The Committee heard that although the responses were in general positive, they had also provided numerous opportunities for reflection or have supported projects already being taken forward. Such opportunities included a forthcoming report and briefing session to Members in relation to the support provision available to Members, Member Refreshments, Members Safety and the Memorandum of Understanding.

Members of the Committee spoke positively of the support provisions available to Members through the Democratic Services team, ICT officers and the digital equipment and support provided to Members.

Members **RESOLVED:**

1. To note the feedback obtained from the Member Survey 2023 as outlined within the report;
2. To agree for the Head of Democratic Services to take forward the actions outlined within section 9 of the report;

8 DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME

The Head of Democratic Services presented the draft work programme for the

Municipal Year 2023 - 24 and sought Members' approval for the items contained within.

Members commented on the items proposed within and **RESOLVED** to approve the work programme for the 2023-24 Municipal Year.

This meeting closed at 4.29 pm

**Councillor W Jones
Chair.**