



**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
2 Llys Cadwyn
Taff Street
Pontypridd
CF37 4TH

Meeting Contact: Emma Wilkins (emma.wilkins@rctcbc.gov.uk)

YOU ARE SUMMONED to a Hybrid meeting of **DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE** to be held on **WEDNESDAY, 1ST MAY, 2024** at **1.00 PM**.

(Venue: Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council, 2 Llys Cadwyn, Taff Street, Pontypridd, CF37 4TH / ZOOM)

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

AGENDA

**Page
No's**

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 11th September 2023.

3 - 6

3. MEMBERS TRAINING

To receive an update from the Head of Democratic Services providing Members with details of training completed to date and future training provision.

- 7 - 16**
- 4. 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.
- 17 - 36**
- 5. REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S MEMBER - OFFICER RELATIONS PROTOCOL**
- As recommended by the Council's Standards Committee, to receive for comment the draft Member – Officer Relations Protocol.
- 37 - 50**
- 6. DIVERSITY IN DEMOCRACY**
- To review the work undertaken to date in respect of diversity within democracy within RCT.
- 51 - 74**
- 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



RHONDDA CYNON TAF

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Democratic Services Committee held Virtually on Monday, 11 September 2023 at 5.00 pm.

County Borough Councillors

Councillor W Jones (Chair)

Councillor M Webber	Councillor J Bonetto
Councillor J Brencher	Councillor A J Ellis
Councillor P Evans	Councillor S Morgans
Councillor B Stephens	Councillor J Turner

Officers in attendance

Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication
Mrs E Wilkins, Council Business Manager

9 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors L Addiscott, Councillor S Hickman, Councillor S Powderhill, Councillor S Trask And Councillor K Webb.

10 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

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

11 MINUTES

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 5th July 2023 as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

12 MATTERS ARISING

The Head of Democratic Services and Council Business Manager provided Members with updates in respect of the matters arising from the minutes of the July Committee meeting:

Minute 5(2) – Notification of the Member Development Programme had been circulated to all Members and going forward monthly breakdowns of forthcoming training was also being provided.

Minute 6(1) – Before the Head of Democratic Services provided an update in respect of the Office accommodation move, the Chair took the opportunity to thank Members for their attendance at the site visit carried out to Llys Cadwyn, and for the feedback provided.

- I. **Sufficient Toilet Provision** – The Head of Democratic Services advised that due to large structural changes needed, additional toilets on the Members floor would not be possible, however, Members would be able to have access to toilet provision on other floors within the building if necessary.
- II. **Sufficient Political Rooms** – The Head of Democratic Services advised that Members comments in respect political rooms had been taken forward by Corporate Estates.
- III. **Sufficient Parkin Provision** – Members were advised that the Head of Democratic Services had met with colleagues within Highways who had advised that in addition to the parking provision within Llys Cadwyn itself, and the public parking arrangements available in the town car parks, Officers were confident that Members attending the standard 5pm Committee meetings would find sufficient parking provision available.

In addition to the above, the Head of Democratic Services advised of the work going forward with the Office Accommodation move which would be further reported on at the next meeting of the Committee and advised of the timeline in place, with the decommissioning of the Council Chamber, where the hybrid meeting equipment would be moved from The Pavilions and taken to Llys Cadwyn towards the end of November. Members were advised that this work would therefore mean that Committee meetings would return to virtual meetings only, until the works had been completed in the New Year.

13 COUNCILLOR SUPPORT SELF EVALUATION FRAMEWORK - REVIEW OF THE MEMBERS CHARTER

The Head of Democratic Services referred Members to the report, which provided Members with the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft self-evaluation framework of the WLGA in respect to Councillor Support and development.

Members were reminded of the purpose of the Charter and its original creation, which was aimed to provide a broad framework for local planning, self-assessment, action and review together with networking and comparison amongst Councils and the sharing of good and innovative practice. The Head of Democratic Services advised of the previous good practice of the Council and its receipt of the Charter and that the Council was the first Council to receive the Advanced Charter due to its support to Members.

It was advised that the Charter criteria was being reviewed to take into account the different ways of working following the covid pandemic and to take in to account the requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 and the associated Welsh Government guidance as it becomes available.

The Committee were referred to the proposed framework that was currently out to consultation, which provided a voluntary self-assessment framework that focusses on the support provided for Councillors to deliver the outcomes needed by their communities. The framework aims to cover all aspects of good practice in Councillor support. However, as priorities and resources differ between councils, it would be for councils to decide locally how much of the framework to use and which sections should be prioritised.

Members commented on the framework before them and agreed with the voluntary self assessment framework and that the Framework should incorporate all aspects of good practice in work of member development, committee support and policy support for members.

It was positively acknowledged that the framework allows Councils to decide locally upon those areas in line with the principles listed and that the revised approach enables the Council to develop an approach which would reflect the priorities of members.

The Committee **RESOLVED:**

- (i) To acknowledge the high standard of support provided to Members through its previous receipt of the Charter and Advanced Charter;
- (ii) To agree that the original Charter requirements required a review to align with new working practices and emerging legislation.
- (iii) To provide comment and feedback in respect of the draft Councillor Support Self Evaluation framework outlined in section 5 (iii) of the report.

14 PROPOSED UPDATES TO THE ELECTED MEMBER ICT, INTERNET & EMAIL ACCEPTABLE USE POLICY

The Council Business Manager referred Members to the Joint Report, which provided proposed revisions to the Elected Members ICT, Internet and email policy, and sought the Committees agreements to the proposed revisions.

Members were advised that the original policy was endorsed by the Democratic Services Committee in 2018 and the policy defines what the Council considers as acceptable use of its ICT equipment, internet and email facilities and sets out rules and guidelines for its access and use.

The increased usage of ICT by Members due to the new ways of working following the covid pandemic and general evolution in digital advancements was acknowledged and the Officer advised that due to these changes it was felt appropriate that a review of the policy was undertaken to ensure that it was still fit for purpose. It was added that reviewing the policy also allows the Council to strengthen the cyber security arrangements in place for the protection of the Council and its Elected Members and to bring the policy in line with current working practices.

Members queried the process that would be undertaken in respect of Members signing the revised Policy and it was confirmed that Members would be able to take forward either a manual signing or through electronic means, to the preference of the Members. The Head of Democratic Services advised that work would also be undertaken in respect of the potential of providing Members with electronic signatures.

The Committee **RESOLVED:**

- i. To review the proposed Elected Member ICT, Internet & Email Policy (Version 3) as contained in Appendix A of the report.
- ii. To Approve the revised Elected Member ICT, Internet & Email Acceptable Use Policy (Version 3).
- iii. To agree the process for Elected Members to consent to the policy, as per the 'Policy Acceptance Form' contained within Appendix IV of the policy.

15 MEMBER'S SUPPORT

The Chair referenced Members to the information report before them and advised that a Member Briefing session in respect of Member Support Arrangements was being held on the 13th September, which was open to all Members and that this session would provide Members with further insight into the support available to them.

Members **RESOLVED** to note the information report.

This meeting closed at 5.27 pm

**Councillor W Jones
Chair.**



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

1st MAY 2024

MEMBER'S TRAINING - MEMBER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME UPDATE

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

1. **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

The purpose of the report is to provide Members with an update in respect of the delivery of the Council's Member Development Programme 2023 – 2024, which looks to assist Members with the skills necessary to undertake their roles.

2. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1 It is recommended that Members:

- (i) Consider the update provided in respect of the provision of training;
- (ii) Provide comment on the content and delivery of the 2023 – 2024 Member Development Programme;
- (iii) Note that the recently conducted Members Annual Survey 2024 and the forthcoming Member Personal Development Reviews are utilised as conduits to gain further information in respect of Members training needs.
- (iv) Agree that following the completion of the 2024 Personal Development Review process, the Draft 2024 – 2025 Member Development Programme is presented to the Democratic Services Committee for consideration and approval.

3. **BACKGROUND**

3.1 The role of an Elected Member can be complex and challenging. Constantly changing priorities and legislation require difficult decisions for which Members need to be well informed. It is therefore essential that Members are equipped and supported to allow them to undertake their role confidently

3.2 The Head of Democratic Services, in conjunction with the Democratic Services Committee seeks to ensure that Members are provided with sufficient training to assist them in undertaking all aspects of their role.

3.3 The Head of Democratic Services along with colleagues in the Council Business Unit identified training support and opportunities through the Member

Personal Development Review process, which was undertaken with Elected Members in 2023.

- 3.4 Other training opportunities were identified through the Members survey that was undertaken and Members direct requests to the Head of Democratic Services and requests through Committee meetings. Consideration was also given to the Welsh Government Competency Framework and modules identified through this framework as general good practice.
- 3.5 In July 2023 the Head of Democratic Services presented the Committee with a draft [Member Development Programme 2023 – 2024](#), which provided a robust training programme for the Municipal Year.

4 MEMBER TRAINING PROVIDED TO DATE

- 4.1 The table below indicated the training delivered to Members this Municipal Year, organised through the Head of Democratic Services. Following such training, where available, powerpoint presentations were provided to Members as well recordings of the sessions. These recordings will be made available on the Members Portal for future reference.

Name Of Training	Provider	Date	Attendance (Members)
O&S Committee Refresher	In house	24.05.23	7
Education Scrutiny Refresher	In house	26.06.23	15
CCFSP Scrutiny Training	In house	June 23	12
Community Services Scrutiny Refresher	In house	June 23	11
Standards (Mock Code of Conduct Hearing – Joint with RCT & MT Council)	Anthony Collins Solicitors	June 23	5 (RCT)
Planning Refresher	In House	June 23	10
Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs	WLGA	13.07.2023	6
Treasury Management Training	In House	04.09.23	26
CCTM PSB JOSC – Future Generations Act	Future Generations	05.09.23	5
Appeals Refresher	Eversheds	06.09.23	4
Housing Allocation	In House	06.09.23	29
Cyber Security Training	In House	08.09.23	4
Scrutiny Data Training (O&S)	Data Cymru 101	12.09.23	7
Member Support Arrangements	In House	13.09.23	36
Cyber Security	In House	18.09.23	27

Understanding the council's budget	In House	27.09.23	13
Cyber Security	In House	28.09.23	7
Member safety Briefing	SWP	02.10.23	21
Building Control	In House	06.10.23	8
Equality Act Training	WLGA	09.10.23	11
Ombudsman Complaints Training	Ombudsman	10.10.23	20
Cyber Security	SWP	October 23	12
Licensing Committee Training	IN House	17.10.23	15
Well-being session (Sleep)	In House	25.10.23	16
Winter Maintenance	In House	06.11.23	40
Scrutiny Questioning	WLGA	8.11.23	15
Member Briefing: Procurement	In house	13.11.23	9
Safeguarding	IN House	14.11.23	24
Understanding performance data (O&S)	Data Cymru 101	15.11.23	4
Cyber Security	In House	28.11.23	10
Emergency Planning	In House	27.11.23	33
Members Wellbeing DSE guidance	In House	04.12.23	15
Gender Fluidity	Umbrella	11.12.23	10
FGA Training	Future Generations Office	09.01.24	11
FGA Training	Future Generations Office	01.02.24	21
Information Management	In House	05.02.24	11
Emergency Planning	In House	20.02.24	25
Anti Racism Training	No Boundaries	08.03.24	10
Highways	In House	14.03.24	19
Domestic Abuse	In House	20.03.24	12

4.2 The Programme outlined a tiered approach with 'open' training (as indicated above) which was open to all Members either through open briefing sessions or through online learning opportunities. 'Bespoke' training requested by individual Members have also been taken forward either through 1:1 settings or smaller group settings depending on the requests received and the nature of the request.

4.3 These individual training or smaller groups sessions are not indicated in the table in 4.1, however such sessions have focussed on Time Management Training / Information Management / Introduction to Local Government Finance / Pension Fund / Social Media.

- 4.4 All Members were encouraged to attend the Committee Refresher training that was conducted following the 2023 Council AGM, regardless of whether Members were returning to a Committee membership or were taking part as a new Committee Member. This training was provided for all Scrutiny Committees and Regulatory Committees. We would appreciate Members feedback as to whether this refresher training would be welcomed again this year after the Council AGM, or whether individual training is provided to a Member following a membership change only.
- 4.5 Training has also been delivered to a group of Members who are trialling the Stay Safe App, which will hopefully be rolled out to all Members in the near future.
- 4.6 In addition to the training presented by the Council, the Council Business Unit have been actively seeking opportunities for Members on other training programmes such as the successful WLGA Community Project / Leadership Programme.
- 4.7 Training has been taken forward by the Councils ICT team department with Members following specific training requests and advice on using Council devices and software. Monthly updates are also provided in respect of 'bitesize' workshops through the Councils Digital Team.
- 4.8 The Council Business Units weekly update also provides other training opportunities such as training provided by Data Cymru and the Local Government Association. In addition, any workshops / training delivered in house by the Human Resources department / Councils Equalities and Diversity team are also highlighted to Members.
- 4.9 E-learning opportunities have also been made available through the Councils Source platform, with all Members being provided with log in details to access the array of modules contained within. The Unit have been keen to recommend the completion of 3 specific e-learning modules by Members– Cyber Security , Autism Awareness training and Climate Change.
- 4.10 Promotion of Welsh Language training opportunities have also been provided to Members, with details of physical face to face course and online courses available. These sessions are provided with the aim of increasing participation through the medium of Welsh as part of committee proceedings.
- 4.11 With the move of the Council Headquarters, induction visits were also provided to Members to provide the opportunity for Members to learn of the new working arrangements and opportunities available to Elected Members including training in respect of the Council Chamber voting arrangements.
- 4.12 It was the intention to hold a number of 'informal drop in ' sessions, providing Members with the environment to come together to share good practices, however due to the need to move to virtual only meetings for a number of months due to the relocation of the Council Headquarters, these opportunities were put on hold, however, these will look to be rolled forward to the next Development

Programme. Due to the new facilities within the Council Headquarters, Llys Cadwyn will better support such sessions.

- 4.13 Arrangements were also made for Members to receive the flu vaccine, with health professionals on site at the previous Council Chamber, which coincided with a Members Wellbeing training session.
- 4.14 Working with the Council's Health & Safety department the Council Business Unit were pleased to launch the new guidance for Elected Members on working from home with display screen equipment (DSE) and will continue to promote this important message to Members to undertake the necessary self assessments.
- 4.15 Following Members requests, a list of acronyms associated with Education and Pensions has been compiled to hopefully assist Members when considering future reports on these subjects. This list was further extended to include acronyms from a Governor perspective.
- 4.16 In respect of the Pension Committee, their Terms of Reference require:

"To receive regular training to enable Committee Members to make effective decisions and be fully aware of their statutory and fiduciary responsibilities and their stewardship role."

The Pension Fund maintains a CIPFA Pension 'knowledge and skills' framework, for both elected members and officers involved in the governance arrangements of the Fund. The activity is published in the Fund's Annual report.

- 4.17 Similarly the Council's Governance and Audit Committee Members are also expected to complete necessary training to assist them in undertaking their role. Training updates are provided in the Governance and Audit Committee Annual Report, which will be presented to the Committee in the new Municipal Year.

5 CHALLENGES WITH THE DELIVERY OF THE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME.

- 5.1 The 2023 – 2024 Development Programme has been the most comprehensive training programme delivered to date by the Council, and our thanks are given to the officers who have provided their time and expertise in delivering the training and to Members for their attendance and engagement at each session.
- 5.2 There have however been challenges faced in delivering such a comprehensive training programme, which is highlighted below:
- 5.3 Trying to establish a preferred day of the week and time for training is continuing to prove difficult. Where possible the Head of Democratic Services has scheduled training for 4pm, to allow flexibility for Members with several commitments such as work / caring commitments. However, with a very busy Committee calendar in place throughout the Municipal year, combined with the Council's approach to no Committee business / training during school holidays the availability of such 'free evenings' is minimal. The Council Business Unit

have therefore on several occasions delivered duplicate training sessions on different days and times of the week to try and accommodate Members availability.

- 5.4 A 'month ahead' outlook of training is provided to Members, so that Members can view forth coming training, before diary markers and associated details are provided. It is a balance when trying to provide this information, so that it is not provided too early or too late that Members can not commit due to already busy calendars. The Council Business Unit are conscious of the amount of emails generated to Members by the Unit, which can also lead to training opportunities unfortunately being overlooked.
- 5.5 Training sessions have predominantly been delivered virtually again, to try and maximise attendance and due to the Chamber relocation, where all meetings were moved to virtual. Methods of delivery will be reflected upon, following the responses to the Member's Survey.
- 5.6 The feedback on the training provided has been anecdotally positive and we look forward to gaining further intelligence about the training provided over the Municipal Year through the Member Survey. At the start of the year, specific evaluation forms were circulated to Members for completion however, the response rate to these requests were very poor and we will look to alternative methods, potentially through the Members portal to gather this intelligence in future. The Head of Democratic Services always holds an 'open door policy' and welcomes any feedback at any time from Members from any aspect of the support to Members, including the training opportunities provided.
- 5.7 We are confident that we have delivered on the Development Programme for the municipal year, apart from one or two specifics. One area still to be actioned is public speaker training, which was requested by a handful of Members, and we are still looking at options available to take this forward. The Development Programme also outlined the intention to take forward previous planned training, suggested by the Head of Democratic Services in respect of 'Resonant Leadership'. Unfortunately, this training has still not been scheduled due to the fact that the Unit have been delivering upon the training specifically requested by Members through the PDR process or requests made by Committees. It was also felt that with the opportunities made available by the WLGA through the free training on the Community Leadership Programme provided the opportunity for the resonant leadership programme to be put on hold until a more suitable time.
- 5.8 Members views are sought in respect of the Head of Democratic Services, determining via discussion with Group Leader, which areas of training should be 'mandated'. While any areas of training above and the beyond the existing requirements (Such as Code of Conduct) could not enforced, the support and direction within political groups to participate, would make a positive difference in uptake, and the continuous improvements of members skills and knowledge base.

5.9 This arrangement would positively lend itself to our future Members Self-Assessment Framework evaluation.

6 2024 – 2025 MEMBERS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME.

6.1 At the most recent Group Leaders meeting, Group Leaders supported the continuation of the PDR process through the Head of Democratic Services. The Council Business Unit will therefore shortly commence the arrangements for the undertaking of such reviews and we recommend all Members to engage in this process. The PDRs provides the opportunity for confidential discussions to identify any training or support needs. The PDRS are not an appraisal of a Members role.

6.2 To help both Members and Officers in getting the most out of the PDR a range of questions have been provided within the Members Survey for Members to complete. This information will help inform discussions and will remain confidential at all times.

6.3 If Members agreed, opportunities could be made for Members to undertake a training needs analysis with colleagues in the Council's Development team to further highlight any specific training needs.

6.4 Through the responses provided during the Member survey and the PDR process, the Head of Democratic Services should have sufficient information to be able to collate the Member Development Programme for 2024 – 2025. As in previous years, this programme will remain fluid to allow for any necessary changes to be made, to reflect changing priorities and requests of Members.

6.5 Through the use of the Member Portal and the Training Calendar contained within, identifying training opportunities across the municipal year should assist Members with their diary commitments and provide a clearer picture of the training opportunities provided to Members. The Portal booking system will provide details of forthcoming training as well as the training tracker, meaning that Members will be able to access this information in once succinct place.

6.6 Elected Member learning and development will continue to be resourced from the allocated Member Development budget. Where appropriate, in house training will be provided by Directorates if the topic relates to their service areas. The Council will look to capitalise on any free training that is offered by the WLGA and other organisations as appropriate.

7 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY

7.1 This report supports 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. The provision of E-learning

Modules and hybrid meetings / training sessions will ensure all Members have equal access to training provision.

8 CONSULTATION

- 8.1 Members PDRs were conducted to allow information to be gathered in respect of any training requirements to assist Members in their roles.
- 8.2 Members should continue to advise of any training requests at any opportunity and discussions will be taken forward by the Head of Democratic Services with Group Leaders to ensure all Members are supported with development opportunities.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 9.1 Members training is an important aspect to allow Members to feel equipped to undertake their duties and roles required of them. The Council have a Members training budget, which is accessed to provide any external training needed. Where practical in-house training is also provided to Members.

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There is a statutory responsibility placed upon the Head of Democratic Services to provide sufficient training and development support to elected members. This includes conducting or facilitating Personal Development Reviews with all elected members.

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

- 11.1 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.
- 11.2 Ensuring all Members are supported and have equal access to support and development links to the future generations well being goals of a more equal Wales and a Wales of cohesive communities.

13 CONCLUSION

- 13.1 The Council Business unit will continue to support Members with any training opportunities identified to assist Members in undertaking their roles.
- 13.2 Members are reminded that they may request any form of training that they feel would assist them in undertaking their role to the Head of Democratic Services.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, DEMOCRATIC SERVICES & COMMUNICATION

Free Standing Matter.

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RHONDDA CYNON TAF

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

1ST MAY 2024

**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.
- 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.
- 2.3 Endorse the proposed arrangement in respect of the cost of broadband & agenda review and its associated costs detailed in section 10 for the reasons outlined within the report.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In accordance with the Local Government Measure 2011, it is my duty, as Head of Democratic Services to provide a report detailing the support provided to Elected Members by the Council and to provide my view on the sufficiency of this support through a sufficiency of resources report. The sufficiency 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.

- 3.2 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’.
- 3.3 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. This report can be accessed [here](#).
- 3.4 Members are reminded that the Council Business Unit supports a wide range of governance arrangements, including Democratic Services, Scrutiny, Executive and Regulatory functions and Members’ Support Services. The service also supports the Council’s Mayoral Office, 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 or the Democratic Services Committee.
- 3.5 The broader directorate is also responsible for the Council’s Communications, Marketing, 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.
- 3.6 The strong links between these functions and democracy have provided an ability to provide further support to Elected Members and additional capacity to support priorities, without compromising the necessary distinction required between corporate functions, and the services and resources dedicated to elected members and democratic functions. .
- 3.7 The Council Business Unit continues to support a number of Joint Committee. This includes the Public Service Board, the newly established South East Wales Corporate Joint Committee (formerly the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal) and the Central South Education Consortium (CSEC). As well as servicing the Joint committee of the CSEC, through a service level agreement, the Council Business Unit provides wider governance arrangements to the organisation. This arrangement has enabled wider capacity to Elected Members in Rhondda Cynon Taf to be maintained and enhanced.

4 **STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS**

4.1 'The Measure', which was replaced by the Local Government & Elections Act (Wales) 2021, 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. The Council's Democratic Services Committee was established at the Council's Annual General Meeting in May 2012.

4.2 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.

4.3 **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 provision and delivery of scrutiny by elected members, within the local authority
- To ensure the provision of appropriate research facilities to members
- 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.

4.4 Members are advised to note that the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales states 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.

4.5 In accordance with the 'Measure' and the Democratic Services 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.

- 4.6 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. The Council Business Unit goes above this duty and administers the survey on an annual basis as we use 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.
- 4.7 Members will be familiar with the feedback provided by the survey undertaken during the 2022/23 Municipal year, which was reported to the Committee in September 2023 and can be accessed [here](#). The 2023 / 2024 bilingual Members Survey has recently been undertaken ahead of the Council AGM, which will assist in setting the Calendar of meetings for the next Municipal Year.
- 4.8 Previous surveys evidence a positive endorsement of the current support provided to Members, with 71% of Members advising they were very satisfied and 24% satisfied with the support provided by the Council Business Unit during 2022/2023 Municipal year. 4% advised that their view on the support was 'unknown' as they felt that they had not utilised the support arrangements. Members feedback in respect Members Support was the lack of awareness of support that was available and the Council Business Unit took forward a report on the support available in response to this feedback. A Members Briefing session highlighting the opportunities for all Members was also delivered. The results also demonstrated a recognition of the improvements to the level of communication and information circulated through the Members daily/weekly updates, with 94% agreeing that the content and frequency were appropriate. Although this remains an area of continuous improvement for the Council Business Unit with the intention that further developments to the Members Portal will assist in improving communication links to Members.
- 4.9 Since the local elections 2022, the unit has noticed a significant increase in the level and complexity of support requested by members to enable them to effectively perform their role. This point is made in a positive context, to note the importance placed by Elected Members upon serving their constituents effectively, and ensuring they are well placed to perform their role within the democratic arrangements of the Council.
- 4.10 Since the implementation of the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021, additional requirements have been placed upon the team. In addition, the Unit look wherever possible to continue the momentum of improvement we have sustained since the reorganisation of the service back in 2018.
- 4.11 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, is central in the consideration of the Council corporate leadership. It is important to place on

record the support which has been provided corporately over the last five years for Democratic services, against a backdrop of reducing public sector resources over the period. This prioritisation has enabled the creation of additional capacity for Members support and the appropriate level of resource to progress major enhancements in how services are delivered.

- 4.12 Members will be familiar with the financial context and outlook reported as part of the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan. This information makes clear that all Council services will need to reflect upon how they deliver services in the future, and the need to achieve efficiency savings in service delivery moving forward over the short to medium term.
- 4.13 Supporting the improvements which have been driven forward in recent years, has been a recognition corporately, by my colleagues in the Senior Leadership Team, in particular the important role scrutiny plays, and the need to provide sufficient financial resources to the Council Business Unit, and in turn Elected Members to achieve this. It is important to highlight that the pace of improvement and change may be reduced in future years in response to the wider financial circumstances facing the Council.
- 4.14 Our focus over the next Municipal Year will be to take forward the public participation Strategy's aspirations as set out in the Council's recently adopted Public Participation Strategy, which looks to improve and promote engagement and involvement in the democratic process. A particular focus will be participation in the scrutiny process.
- 4.15 This will of course require appropriate resources to be made available, and to support members aspirations, we will be able to utilise the wider expertise available across the wider service directorate. When new approaches or ways of working are introduced within the Unit the challenge in the future becomes sustaining this activity alongside the day-to-day business activity. The availability of future resources will need to be a consideration when members are determining the level and pace of change in this specific area.
- 4.16 The service will continue to prioritise the potential provided by our continued investment in our broadcasting technology to enable participation in our democratic proceedings. Furthermore, we will look to progress the roll-out of the additional functionality which is available to support committee proceedings.
- 4.17 The department is investing a significant amount of time and effort into exploring refinements to our hybrid meeting functionality, including a one-size-fits-all voting system for both physical and online participants.
- 4.18 The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 placed a requirement on councils to provide all members with an opportunity to have a personal development review to assess their development needs. Such reviews are conducted by the Head of Democratic Services and within RCT are supported by Senior colleagues within the Council Business Unit. Such reviews are an assessment of training and development needs rather than a review of

performance. Such reviews allow the Head of Democratic Services to form a robust Member Development Programme going forward.

- 4.19 It was pleasing to note from the previous Member Survey that Members found the Personal Development Review Process helpful, and the process provided the opportunities for Officers to further understand the needs and requirements of Members, and once again, can I thank all Members for their contributions in the process. It should be noted the resource and time implications put upon Officers in undertaking such reviews.

5 STAFF RESOURCES AND ADVICE AVAILABLE TO MEMBERS

- 5.1 The resource available within the Council Business Unit consists of 9 Officers and the utilisation of 3 dedicated Welsh Translation Officers from within the Translation team. The unit is led by the Service Director of Democratic Services and Communication (Statutory Head of Democratic Services).
- 5.2 Through the Office accommodation move, it has been appropriate to move the previous site supervisor under the remit of the Council Business Unit, as the 'Council Business – Meeting Supervisor' to help support the smooth running of public meetings within the new Headquarters. This role is making a positive difference to 'Members Services' support.
- 5.3 A report provided to the Democratic Services Committee during the 2023 – 2024 Municipal Year highlights the work undertaken by the Unit, which can be accessed [here](#).
- 5.4 In summary the unit provide support to Members through:
- Timely production of agenda / Reports / minutes / Decisions Notices
 - Members Services general support – Letters / Reporting of problems / Declarations of Interest / Member Role descriptions
 - Supporting Members through hybrid / virtual meetings
 - Promotion of webcasting
 - Working Groups and production of final reports and recommendations
 - Member Research Provision
 - Members' wellbeing
 - Detailed Member Development Programme
 - Promotion of Welsh Language with the availability of dedicated Members' Welsh Language classes with the Council's Welsh language tutor
 - Continued development of the Members Portal
 - Diversity in Democracy Agenda
 - Support to the Central South Consortium
 - Improved Communication with Members through the daily and weekly updates
- 5.5 The list of formal Committee meetings supported by the Unit can be found through the following [link](#). This list is not exhaustive. Scrutiny Working group meetings, plus some Member / Officer meetings are not included within the list.

- 5.6 To date, support to the Mayor & Deputy Mayor, and the civic functions of the Council has been provided through the Council Business Unit. In response to the changing role of the Mayor post pandemic, civic activity has reduced in recent years. For example, in 2020 the Official Council Vehicle was not replaced, and the Mayoral Administrator/Chauffeur role was deleted from our structure as part of the need to identify ongoing efficiency savings.
- 5.7 The role and 'workload' of the Mayor has continued to reduce in recent years, and it is therefore the intention not to replace the role of Mayoral Secretary, when the current postholder retires in May 2024. Can I place on record my thanks to the outgoing Mayors secretary for their work and contributions over the years and wish them a happy and healthy retirement. As a consequence of the above it will be necessary to 'downscale' the role of the Mayor moving forward, and restrict activity to very specific Civic functions, to enable the service to achieve necessary savings. The deletion of this role will see a reduction in the wider capacity available to Elected Members
- 5.8 The Council Business Unit continues to provide governance support to the Central South Consortium, including responsibility for the Joint Committee. As members will be aware, since 2020 the Council has been responsible for delivery of the scrutiny functions of the Cardiff Capital Region Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee. Following agreement of the ten local authorities which make up the South East Wales Corporate Joint Committee (CJC), this Council will now provide support to the Elected Members of the CJC Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee (JSOC), including myself as acting as the advisor to the committee, and taking the roles defined to a 'Head of Democratic Services' for the purposes of providing sufficient support and resources to perform their role.
- 5.9 Due to the professional running of the Council's hybrid meetings, the Head of Democratic Services has been approached to support the delivery of hybrid and webcasting support to the SEW CJC for a number of their meetings. discussions are ongoing in respect of this provision of technical and logistical support for the CJC, which will form part of a potential service level agreement (SLA). This SLA will provide an additional financial income to the service, which can be reinvested into member support resources in RCT.
- 5.10 To assist the Council Business Unit in delivering support to all Members through both the medium of Welsh and English, three dedicated translation officers continue to support the service, in order to provide dedicated support to the unit on behalf of Members. Furthermore in a bid to increase the level of discussion through the medium of Welsh in the Council Chamber, a dedicated training resource continues to be provided to elected members, to enable all Councillors to learn or refresh their skills.
- 5.11 The Council Business Unit continues to support the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Public Services Board (PSB) Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the City Deal Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The department also provides administration support to the Cwm Taf Morgannwg PSB itself.

- 5.12 I am satisfied that over the short to medium-term, there remains sufficient resources to support and advise these 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.
- 5.13 Funding received for the support the service provides to the Central South Consortium in particular, provides funding which supports additional capacity which supplements our base-budget resources. Any review of this support, and the level of service we provide, may have a financial impact, which will need to be addressed, to maintain the current level provision over the medium to longer term.
- 5.14 2023/2024 has seen no substantive changes in the staff arrangements, following the return during the previous municipal of year, of three key officers from maternity leave.
- 5.15 Capacity issues have arisen over this reporting period, due to the unfortunate long term sickness absence of two members of the team. I would like to thank members for their support during this time and extend our best wishes to those two members of staff. In addition, over the last twelve months an Officer within the Council Business Unit, was seconded to the Cabinet Office to provide maternity cover to the role of 'Private Secretary to the Leader of the Council'. This secondment is due to conclude at the end of June 2024 and has provided a positive developmental opportunity for the postholder.
- 5.16 It is the intention moving forward, to merge responsibility for the civic functions of the Council, into the Cabinet Office/Cabinet Support Team.
- 5.17 To offset some of the capacity challenges we face, effective use will continue to be made of Officer support and expertise which exists within the wider directorate. Better working arrangements provide opportunities for staff to undertake work across different sections across Democratic Services and Communications, and in addition the wider Legal and Democratic Services Directorate, rather than working in silo. This has supported with Staff development and also Service priorities.
- 5.18 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.

- 5.19 As Head of Democratic Services I am incredibly fortunate to be supported by an incredibly enthusiastic and dedicated team of officers, who enable the service to grow and improve and effectively support all Elected Members.
- 5.20 **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.**

6. ACCOMMODATION

- 6.1 Members will be well aware of the recent relocation of the Council Headquarters from Clydach Vale to 2 Llys Cadwyn, Pontypridd in January 2024. The opportunities presented by this move to modernise the provision of accommodation and associated services to Elected Members, and more broadly our democratic functions were detailed to the members in my report presented at the July Democratic Services Committee, which can be found [here](#). In addition, a Members site visit was undertaken ahead of the commencement of any work undertaken and a survey of Members was also carried out to take on Members views of the arrangements to be in place.
- 6.2 Our new accommodation 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.
- 6.3 It is through this approach that the member accommodation and services available to Members has been developed and revised at Llys Cadwyn Council Headquarters. 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 physical attendance by a Member. This mirrors the change in working patterns seen across the Council and society more generally post pandemic.
- 6.4 As part of this new accommodation offer Members are able to access hotdesking facilities, political room access with hybrid meeting facilities as well as the provision for public meeting rooms within the building to allow Members to meet with local constituents through the Councils booking room system.
- 6.5 In addition to the Council Chamber the Council's Committee room is also equipped with hybrid and webcasting meeting facilities to allow for the live streaming and webcasting in a smaller meeting room environment. Through the relocation of the Council Chamber, the Council Business Unit have reflected on the Chamber layout and previous feedback from Members on the screen placement in the previous Council Chamber in Clydach Vale. The Council Chamber now provides further screens and desk monitors to improve the meeting room environment for Members in attendance in the Council Chamber.

Both the Council Chamber and Committee room are accessible with translation provision.

- 6.6 The Council Chamber accommodates a public gallery as well as a press gallery and a public foyer directly outside the Council Chamber.
- 6.7 A Members Lounge has also been provided to allow Members to take forward the important networking opportunities needed ahead of Committee meetings, as well as being a place for Members to consider reports ahead of meetings.
- 6.8 The Council Headquarters also provides the provision of a Faith Room / Wellbeing Room which both Elected Members and staff are able to access.
- 6.9 Concerns were raised by Members in respect of car parking provision ahead of the office move, however Members have been advised of the accessibility of local car parks within the immediate vicinity and where possible, as well as improved public transport links compared to the previous location in Clydach Vale.
- 6.10 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. I believe our relocation has achieved this goal and in doing so significantly improved public access to the Council proceedings.
- 6.11 At our new location, services have returned to being provided in-person support to Members Monday-Friday.
- 6.12 The new Councillor Self Assessment arrangements, which replaces the previous Members Charters, to which RCT achieved the advance level for the support and services provided, provides greater flexibility for support, and in particular accommodation to be provided in a bespoke way, which best services our Elected Members. Members will shortly receive a report in respect of early adoption of the Self Assessment.
- 6.13 The Democratic Services Committee have played a positive role in the developments of the office accommodation arrangements and I am grateful to specific support provided as the plans developed, by the Chair of this committee.
- 6.14 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.
- 6.15 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, as members and staff adapt to our new accommodation. 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.

- 6.16 **As Head of Democratic Services I am of the view that thanks to our relocation, our accommodation offer has been transformed and truly reflects modern working arrangements. Furthermore the move, has enhanced our meeting facilities, in a location which is significantly more accessible for the public. I am satisfied that the provision of accommodation remains sufficient for Members to effectively discharge their roles.**

7. MEMBER TRAINING

- 7.1 The Council Business Unit has again taken forward a wide-ranging Member Development Programme which was drafted following the previous Member Personal Development Reviews. This programme continues to be well received (as demonstrated by the previous Member survey).

- 7.2 These sessions continue to be offered remotely or through hybrid arrangements and at varying times to accommodate the varying circumstances of individual members. Where possible, this training continues to be provided in house, with outside expertise only being utilised in response to specific area, or in response to a request from a member.

- 7.3 Generic training provided to members over the course of the last municipal year, has focussed upon ensuring that each Elected Member is well placed to perform their important role in the governance arrangements of the local authority. Reports detailing the training provided to Members have been reported to the Committee as appropriate throughout the Municipal Year. Such training has included:

- Code of Conduct training
- 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

- 7.4 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.

- 7.5 Recent training sessions have included Winter Maintenance Planning, Emergency Planning, Anti Racism training and also one-to-one sessions on understanding the Members' Portal, Time Management and pre council surgeries for IT queries. In addition, following the relocation of the Council Chamber induction visits, including training on the new voting system within the Council Chamber were also provided.
- 7.6 The Development Programme for this Municipal Year has largely been delivered upon, albeit the intention to take forward informal sessions with Members, to share good practices and useful 'hints and tips' was postponed due to the move to virtual meetings due to the Office relocation. Refresher training in respect of Declarations of Interest has also been scheduled for the next Municipal Year. My thanks to all those Members who attended and engaged in the sessions provided as well as to Officers for providing their time and knowledge to assist Members in their role.
- 7.7 Following the election of 35 new members at the last local elections I am mindful that there will be greater resource requirement towards Member development, which will require continued focus by the Democratic Services Committee.
- 7.8 The opportunity for Members to undertake a confidential Personal Development Review (PDR) will be shortly 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).
- 7.9 Work is currently underway to develop arrangements for future training following the Council Annual General Meeting in May 2024 which will be further complimented following the PDR process. 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 their term of office.
- 7.10 **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.

8. DIGITAL SUPPORT

- 8.1 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.
- 8.2 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.
- 8.3 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.
- 8.4 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.
- 8.5 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.
- 8.6 Members, on Council provided devices, are better 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.
- 8.7 The digital advancements made in the Council Chamber provides better engagement in the democratic process for the public through the live streaming of meetings. The hybrid arrangements also make attendance at meetings for Members more accessible.
- 8.8 A new digital voting system has been made available in the Council Chamber to assist in the transparency of the governance and decision making of the Council. Further work and discussions are ongoing by Officers within the Council Business Unit with relevant companies in respect of a universal 'hybrid' voting system and updates are provided to the Committee as appropriate.

- 8.9 As previously mentioned, through the new office accommodation arrangements, political meeting rooms and general meetings room are set up with basic hybrid facilities which Members can access. Dedicated ICT support has also been made available at Llys Cadwyn during the Member Induction process.
- 8.10 Advancement have been made through the Members Portal, following feedback from Members and through work with the Committee's Member Portal Champions. Members, through the system can now submit expense claims electronically. In addition is the development of a training calendar and access to a data library. Future developments will look to provide a 'case management' system within the Portal as we continue to work with colleagues in the digital team.
- 8.11 Members safety in undertaking their role is of paramount importance. The Unit therefore provides where necessary, safety and security provision at some Members residential address, as a precautionary safety measure. In addition the Unit are also funding a trial of the Stay Safe App which is hoped will be rolled out to all Members during the Municipal Year.
- 8.12 **In light of the above provisions made available to Members, I am content that the digital support provided to Members is sufficient.**

9. HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES – OPINION

- 9.1 I am of the view that there continues to be sufficient support within the Council Business Unit to support non-executive Members. The approaches 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).
- 9.2 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.
- 9.3 The significant investment in Members' facilities as part of the new Council HQ and chamber improvements and broadcasting of meetings should be positively noted.
- 9.4 The improvements achieved to date, demonstrated by the Member Development programme, demonstrate that our training and development support for Members continues to improve.

- 9.5 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.
- 9.6 **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 appropriate staffing resources being in place and the provisions in place through the Council's accommodation offer.**

10 EFFICIENCY SAVINGS

- 10.1 Members will be aware that in the context of the financial challenges facing the local authority, all Council departments are reviewing all areas of expenditure, with the aim, where possible, to delivery important efficiency savings without impacting on frontline service delivery to the public. As has been reported to members, this process is becoming increasingly challenging for Council services, and members will note the reductions in expenditure already being progressed in respect of the Council's Mayoralty arrangements.
- 10.2 The Statutory requirements upon the Council in respect of members resources, makes specific reference to the provision, including ICT resources. In 2018 the IRP determined that 'all elected Members should be provided with adequate telephone and email facilities and electronic access to appropriate information at no cost to the individual Members'.
- 10.3 At the Council's Democratic Services Committee held on the [23rd July 2018](#), a report was approved proposing that all Elected Members be remunerated for costs associated with the provision of home broadband as it was a key enabler to accessing email facilities and electronic records, following the Committee's consideration of the 10th Annual Report of the IRP. Despite the changes in work patterns which developed in response to the Covid Pandemic, the Council has continued to provide financial support to cover these costs.
- 10.4 In 2018 Council determined in response to the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (IRP) that all Elected Members should receive a payment of £37 per month (before tax and national insurance deductions) as a contribution toward the cost of home broadband
- 10.5 Currently 37 members utilise this provision, with a base budget in place for up to 75 members to receive this support.
- 10.6 Since this original determination by the IRP, the level of member remuneration has been reviewed. The current Annual Report of the IRP does not specifically reference a requirement to meet these costs.

- 10.7 More generally, since this point in time the Council as a whole has moved to a hybrid model of working with Council Officers working remotely without additional support or remuneration to meet costs such as broadband.
- 10.8 Furthermore, since the local elections in 2022, all Members have been issued with a mobile telephone with data allowance (as part of the Council's strengthened Cyber Security arrangements) in addition to an electronic device such as laptop and/or Tablet to assist them in their role. Members are also encouraged to embrace hybrid working arrangements when performing their role, in support of the wider principles within the Council's accommodation strategy, including recently introduced bespoke hot-desking arrangements for Councillors at our new civic headquarters.
- 10.9 It is noted that in the IRP Annual report, the recommendation in respect of Broadband payments to Principal Council Elected Members is no longer specifically referenced, although in the latest report, such a reference was made to such payments for Town and Community Councillors only, who it is presumed, are not in receipt of such support arrangements as Principal Council Elected Members as outlined above.
- 10.10 Clarification was sought from the IRP in February in respect of this previous determination of the Panel and its current standing. No formal response has been received however.
- 10.11 It is proposed to withdraw this support, delivering a saving of £16,428. The annual budget for this member support is £33,300.
- 10.12 In addition to the Broadband allowance, further opportunities have been identified in the printing costs associated with the Council Business Unit. We have therefore reviewed our current arrangements in respect of the distribution of Committee Agendas. This review sought to ensure that we continue to maintain an efficient and cost-effective processes, and to ensure we continue to aim for paper-less approach where appropriate. I am confident members of the Democratic Services Committee will support a concerted re-focus upon our 'paper-light approach to committee business.
- 10.13 The specific needs of members was reviewed following the local election in May 2022, and for specific reasons we provide hard copies of Committee agenda's to Councillors who have previously indicated that need. It is important to stress that this print copy does not replace the electronic summons for a committee meeting.
- 10.14 Whether Members receive an additional hard copy of an agenda or not, all Committee agendas are published electronically, and members receive notification through the current email channels, signposting to the Committee Documents either through the Council website or through the Modern.Gov App.

10.15 It is proposed that following the Council's 29th Annual General meeting we will cease the practice of sending hard copy agenda's in the post, unless Members advise us of their individual circumstances where hard copies are still necessary. While we will aim to assist in such circumstances, to ensure we do not digitally exclude or disadvantage any Member, a general 'personal preference' will no longer be considered a reason for providing an additional hard copy.

Recommendation of the Head of Democratic Services in respect of proposed efficiency savings.

10.16 As Head of Democratic Services and in consideration of the above I propose that this financial support of payment of broadband allowance is withdrawn from Elected Members. As outlined, this recommendation would be based on the enhanced digital technology now provided to Members, and being conscious of the disparity which now exists between Council staff and Elected Members. (As stated staff alike using their own home broadband arrangements with no additional payments to support this arrangement).

10.17 The withdrawal of hard copy of agenda's would allow further savings in respect of associated printing costs associated by the Council Unit, whilst also reducing the carbon footprint of the Council. However, we will ensure that Members do not become digitally excluded if hard copies are necessary.

10.18 I would encourage Members views on these proposals and recommendation.

11. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

11.1 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.

11.2 As a Council we are mindful of equality of provision for Elected Members and Staff and have therefore proposed the withdrawal of the current broadband payment to Elected Members.

11.3 In respect of the review of publication of Committee Agendas we will not digitally exclude any Member, following any specific advice provided.

12. CONSULTATION

12.1 The Head of Democratic Services has consulted with the Council's Chief Executive and the Cabinet Member for Council Business in addition to the Councils Section 151 officer.

13. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

13.1 The arrangements described above can be met from existing resources within the Democratic Services and Communications revenue budget and the ongoing annual budget requirements.

13.2 As outlined in the body of the report there has been a deduction in the Mayors budget, following cessation of the post of Mayors secretary and supporting budget due to the need for efficiency savings.

13.3 Due to ongoing financial pressures and the need for further efficiency savings across all areas of the Council the proposal to withdraw the Broadband payments for the reasons outlined within the report are now recommended.

13.4 Members who have opted to receive the broadband payment are currently provided with an allocation of £37 per month in respect of broadband allowance

13.5 The review of agenda paper based publication will also provide opportunities for efficiency savings in this area.

14. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

14.1 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.

14.2 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*

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

- 15.1 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.
- 15.2 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.

16. CONCLUSION

- 16.1 Through the resources outlined in this report, I am confident that we are providing sufficient support and resources to all of our Elected Members, however we will continually strive to improve the services provide to further assist Members in the important role that they undertake on a daily basis.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

1ST May 2024

**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



RHONDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

1st MAY 2024

REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S MEMBER – OFFICER RELATIONS PROTOCOL

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To review and comment on an amended version of the Council's Member-Officer Relations Protocol, as annexed at Appendix 1 to this report.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

- 2.1 Members provide any comments or proposed changes to the amended version of the Council's existing Member-Officer Relations Protocol; and
- 2.2 To provide the Committees feedback on the amended protocol to the next Standards Committee meeting in the new Municipal Year.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In 2013 the Council adopted a revised 'Member – Officer Relations Protocol'. As a reminder the Member - Officer Relations Protocol sets out a framework for good working relationships between Members and Officers as the best means of supporting the work of this Council. It explains how the nature of the relationship between elected Councillors and employed officials should work and describes their different but complementary roles within the Council. It also sets out the behaviours and treatment that each can expect from the other and thereby expands upon the Councillors Code of Conduct. It is only the Ombudsman who has the right to receive complaints made by Officers where Members are in breach of the Members' Code of Conduct itself. The Monitoring Officer will advise the Officer whether in his/her opinion the allegation should be dealt with as a breach of the Member - Officer Relations Protocol or whether it should be referred to the Ombudsman as an allegation of breach of the Members' Code of Conduct.

- 3.2 The Member/Officer protocol is an adjunct to the Councillors' Code of Conduct and is an important contributor to the working culture within the Council. It sets out:
- the differing roles of members and officers and what they can expect from each other;
 - further explanation and guidance on appropriate behaviours;
 - mechanisms for handling concerns or problems within the relationship.
- 3.3 An alleged breach of the Protocol cannot be directly enforced in the same way as an alleged breach of the Code of Conduct. However, the document will inform any investigation by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.
- 3.4 The procedures to be followed for dealing with complaints made against Members under the Member – Officer Relations Protocol are those procedures adopted by the Council in relation to complaints made under the Local Resolution Protocol unless a complaint is formally made with the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.

4. REVIEW OF MEMBER – OFFICER RELATIONS PROTOCOL

- 4.1 At the January meeting of the Council's Standards Committee, The Committee reviewed the Member - Officer protocol as part of the Committee's rolling work programme.
- 4.2 At the meeting it was advised that as part of the review other local authorities protocols had been viewed for comparison and consideration had been made to other updates that may be appropriate or necessary since the last review in 2013.
- 4.3 During the Standards Committee meeting, it was agreed that the revised protocol be referred to the Democratic Services Committee for review and Comment, before further consideration by the Standards Committee.
- 4.4 Members should note any revised protocol would need to be approved by the Full Council following a recommendation from the Council's Standards Committee.
- 4.5 Members will find appended at Appendix 1 a revised Member-Officer Relations Protocol. It is recommended Members review the document and provide any feedback they have, together with any further amendments they deem appropriate.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no specific legal implications arising from this report however both Members and Officers are subject to the respective adopted Codes of Conduct of the Council and in the case of officers its disciplinary policies and employment rules.

6. CONSULTATION

- 6.1 The Council's Standards and Democratic Services Committee are being consulted on any proposed amendments to the Member-Officer Relations Protocol prior to any suggested amendments being considered at a meeting of Full Council.

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no specific equality and diversity implications arising from this report however both Officers and Members must conduct themselves in accordance with the provisions of the Equality Act 2010 applicable to a Local Authority in Wales.

8. FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

1st May 2024

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

Background Papers: Member – Officer Relations Protocol

MEMBER - OFFICER RELATIONS PROTOCOL

1. Underlying Principles

- 1.1 The Local Government Act 2000 set up an Ethical Framework for Local Government introducing a Statutory Code of Conduct for Members (Councillors and co-opted members) and requiring the appointment of a Standards Committee to promote and maintain high standards of conduct.
- 1.2 This Protocol sets up a framework for good working relationships between Members and Officers with regards to their respective roles, as set out below and in the Council's Constitution, as the best means of supporting the work of this Council.
- 1.3 The basic principle of good Member-Officer relations in local government is trust, mutual respect and a common understanding of respective roles. Members are elected to represent the whole community and Officers are appointed by the Council to give creative, robust, and impartial advice, which will assist Members in reaching the best decisions for that community.
- 1.4 The Members' Code of Conduct says that they should "show respect and consideration for others" and "must not do anything which compromises, or which is likely to compromise, the impartiality of the Authority's employees".
- 1.5 The Code of Conduct for Local Government Employees says that "mutual respect between qualifying employees and Members is essential to good local government, and working relationships should be kept on a professional basis. Qualifying employees of the Council should deal with the public, Members and other employees sympathetically, efficiently and without bias." The National Conditions of Service for Staff in Local Government provide: "The public is entitled to demand, of a local government officer, conduct of the highest standard".
- 1.6 The Protocol seeks to set out not only current practices and conventions but also aims to promote clarity and certainty on dealing with other issues.
- 1.7 The Protocol will also reflect the principles underlying the respective Codes of Conduct which apply to Members and Officers so that together they enhance and maintain the integrity of the Council and its public reputation.

2. Member - Officer Relations

- 2.1 Both Members and Officers serve the public but their roles and responsibilities differ. Members represent their constituents and the wider public. Officers are responsible to the Council and must give advice to Members and the Council and carry out the Council's work under the direction and control of the Council, the Cabinet and its Committees and sub-Committees.
- 2.2 Members and Officers shall establish sound and effective working relations that are characterised by mutual respect which is essential to good local government and put aside any personal differences.

2.3 In advising, Officers are free to give their professional advice wherever appropriate. Members may wish to test this advice by questioning and challenging something they do not agree with, but they should not, by their conduct or actions, make Officers feel intimidated or threatened. Any challenge to advice should be made to an officer of suitable seniority. Officers should remember that Councillors are democratically elected to secure their objectives and fully entitled to question advice given, and to receive a full and complete explanation.

Members can expect from Officers:-

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Commitment to the Council as a whole and not only to one part of it/political group• A working partnership and an understanding of, and support for, respective roles, workloads and the differing pressures.• Respect and courtesy• The highest standards of integrity |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Timely responses to enquiries and complaints in accordance with the procedures for handling Member enquiries |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Impartial, clear professional advice not influenced by political views or preference• Regular up to date information that can be considered appropriate and relevant to their needs having regard to any individual responsibilities that they have and positions that they hold• Awareness of and sensitivity of the political environment• Appropriate confidentiality• Support for the role of Members within the arrangements made by the Council• That they will not use their relationship with Members to seek to advance their personal interests or to influence decisions improperly• Compliance with this Protocol at all times• Compliance with the Officers' Code of Conduct• Compliance with relevant Equalities legislation |

2.4 Officers can expect from Members:-

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Respect and courtesy• The highest standards of integrity• A working partnership and an understanding of and support for respective roles, workloads and pressures• That they will not raise matters relating to the conduct or capability of an Officer, or of the employees collectively, at meetings held in public or in the Press. Employees have no means of responding to criticism like this in public• That they will not require Officers to change their professional advice nor take any action which an Officer considers unlawful or illegal or which would amount to maladministration or breach of a statutory code of conduct• Leadership• Appropriate scrutiny of decisions that focuses on objective measures of performance and outcomes |
|---|

- Respect for differing working hours and working patterns with appropriate time being allowed for Officers responding to queries and concerns as per Council arrangements
- Not to be subject to bullying or discrimination or to be put under undue pressure
- That they will not use their relationship with Officers to seek to advance their personal interests or those of others or to influence decisions improperly
- Recognise and pay due regard to their role as an employer in their dealings with Officers
- Compliance with the Members' Code of Conduct
- Compliance with this Protocol at all times
- Compliance with relevant Equalities legislation

2.5 Close personal familiarity between individual Members and Officers can damage professional relationships and prove embarrassing to other Members and Officers. Situations should be avoided that could give rise to suspicion and any appearance of improper conduct. This includes excessive socialising between Members and Officers. Where a Member and an Officer have a close relationship (whether familial, social, business, emotional etc) its existence must be declared, through the relevant process for declaring interests, so that appropriate steps can be taken to ensure that the relationship does not:

- Impinge upon the functioning of the Council or the exercise of Council functions
- Undermine or circumvent procedural safeguards
- Impact upon the Council's reputation

2.6 Any act against an individual Officer may be regarded as a form of bullying, intimidation or harassment if it is intended to influence unfairly that person's actions, thoughts or deeds. Whilst this Protocol cannot give guidance on every situation where such behaviour may occur, the Council is committed to promoting professional and courteous working relationships between individuals. No public comment will be made on any ongoing disciplinary proceedings as it could prejudice their outcome or breach the confidentiality that Officers are entitled to expect in relation to such matters.

2.7 Members should consult with the Monitoring Officer and the Chief Finance Officer about legality, maladministration, financial impropriety and probity or where they have any doubt as to whether the particular decisions were or are likely to be contrary to the policy framework or budget.

2.8 In seeking advice and support Members should have due regard to the seniority of the Officer with whom they are dealing and the fact that, while those Officers owe duties to the Council as their employer such duties are first expressed to their respective manager and the Chief Executive and not to any individual Member. For this reason Members should not give direct instructions to staff unless authorised so to do by the Constitution. If so authorised instructions shall be given to the relevant Chief Officer rather than a more junior member of staff.

- 2.9 All dealings between Members and Officers should observe reasonable standards of courtesy and neither party should seek to take advantage of their position. It is important in any dealings between Members and Officers that neither should seek to take unfair advantage of their position or seek to assert undue pressure. This is particularly relevant where the Council is considering taking, or is in the process of taking, enforcement action.
- 2.10 If there are any occasions where Members may have reason to complain about the conduct or performance of an Officer, all such complaints should be made personally, either to the Chief Executive or Monitoring Officer as appropriate (and in the case of the Chief Executive to the Monitoring Officer). It is particularly important that such complaints are made in this way and are not aired in public such as at a meeting of the Council, to other external bodies or members of the public or in the Press.
- 2.11 Similarly, if there is concern by an Officer in relation to a Member's conduct, all such concerns should initially be brought personally by the relevant Chief Officer to the attention of the Chief Executive or in his/her absence to the Monitoring Officer. If the concern is sufficiently serious the Chief Executive will bring the matter to the attention of the Monitoring Officer.
- 2.12 All Members have the same right and obligations in their relationship with Officers and should be treated equally. However, Members of the Executive and Chairs of Committees have additional responsibilities and their relationship with Officers may be different and more complex from those of Members without those responsibilities and this is recognised in the expectations they are entitled to have of Officers. Also, where a political group forms an administration either alone or in partnership with another group or groups, it is recognised that the relationship with Officers, particularly those at a senior level, will differ from that with opposition groups.

3. The Role of Officers

- 3.1 To initiate and to implement the policies set and the decisions made by Members.
- 3.2 To provide impartial, professional and technical advice to Members.
- 3.3 To carry out those functions delegated to Officers.
- 3.4 To provide reasonable help, support and advice to all Members.
- 3.5 To represent the Council on outside bodies.
- 3.6 To act in a specific capacity listed below where appointed so to do by the Council:

The Chief Executive (as defined by the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021) has the following functions and duties:

to prepare proposals for the consideration of the Council as to the co-ordination of the discharge of the Council's functions; the number and grades of staff that are required to discharge those functions; the organisation of the

Council's staff; and the appointment and proper management of the Council's staff.

The Monitoring Officer (Director of Legal & Democratic Services) (as defined by the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 section 5) has the following functions and duties:

to prepare reports for the consideration of the Council where it appears to him that any proposal, decision or omission by the Council, a Committee, Sub-Committee, or Officer has given rise or is likely to give rise to a contravention of any statute or maladministration or injustice as mentioned in Part III of the Local Government Act 1974.

The Chief Financial Officer (as defined by the Local Government Act 1972 section 151) (**Deputy Chief Executive and Group Director, Finance, Digital & Frontline Services**) has the following functions and duties:

to prepare reports for the consideration of the Council where it appears to him that any Committee, Sub-Committee, or Officer has or is about to make a decision which involves or would involve the Council incurring expenditure which is unlawful; or has taken or is about to take a course of action which, if pursued to its conclusion, would be unlawful and is likely to cause a loss or deficiency to the Council; or is about to enter an item of account, the entry of which would be unlawful.

4. The Role of Members

- 4.1 To promote the social, economic and environmental well being of the community.
- 4.2 Collectively be the ultimate policy makers and decision makers and carry out a number of strategic and corporate functions.
- 4.3 Represent their communities and bring their views into the Council's decision-making process, i.e. become the advocate of and for their communities.
- 4.4 Deal with individual casework and act as an advocate for constituents in resolving particular concerns or grievances.
- 4.5 Balance different interests identified within the electoral ward and represent the ward as a whole.
- 4.6 Be involved in decision making and must reach decisions having regard to any relevant advice given by Officers.
- 4.7 Be available to represent the Council on other bodies.
- 4.8 To provide leadership, promote the highest standards of conduct and ethics and to treat each other with courtesy and respect.
- 4.9 To act collectively as the employer of the staff.
- 4.10 To act in a specific capacity listed below where appointed so to do by the Council in accordance with the Constitution:
 - Chair of the Council
 - Leader of the Executive
 - Executive Member

- Portfolio Holder (with or without delegated authority)
- Chair of the Scrutiny Committee
- Member of the Scrutiny Committee
- Chair of a Committee other than Scrutiny
- Member of a Committee other than Scrutiny
- Representing the Council on Outside Bodies

Rights and Duties of Individual Members

4.11 All Members have the right:-

- To inspect documents in the possession or control of the Council as set out in the Council's Constitution
- To attend Committee, Sub Committee, Joint Committee, training sessions and such meetings as are necessary for the proper performance of that Member's duties
- To see accounts and make copies before the Annual Audit to inspect specific books, contracts, bills etc
- To receive approved allowances

4.12 There are also duties on individual Members to:-

- Abide by the Members Code of Conduct and this Protocol
- To disclose personal and prejudicial interests as set out in the Code of Conduct
- To register the receipt of any gifts and hospitality at levels determined by the Council
- To use all reasonable endeavours to attend meetings of the Council, its Committees, sub-Committees, other events and any outside bodies to which they have been appointed and to give apologies [with reason] where appropriate on those occasions where the Member is unable to attend
- To attend and participate in opportunities for training and development including policy development
- To take into account advice provided by the Chief Executive, the Monitoring Officer or Officers of the Council.

5. Members in their role as Local Members

5.1 When acting in their electoral ward role Members:

- need to be mindful of their competing roles, i.e. acting for the Council and acting for constituents, and the possible conflicts of interest that can arise and the pressure this can bring on Officer time; and
- recognise the Officer's right to suggest that senior Officers, the Executive (Council) or a Committee should authorise additional work requested by individual Members.

6. The Relationship between the Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Officers (when Executive decisions are being scrutinised)

- 6.1 The Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees shall seek the advice of the Monitoring Officer where they consider there is doubt about the legality of Executive decisions or the Monitoring Officer and other appropriate Officers where they consider a decision of the Executive might be contrary to the policy framework.
- 6.2 When considering calling Officers to give evidence the Committee shall not normally, without the consent of the relevant Chief Officer, request the attendance of a junior Officer to ensure that such Officers are not put under undue pressure.
- 6.3 When asking Officers to give evidence before the Committee questions should be confined, so far as possible, to questions of fact and explanation and professional opinion relating to policies and decisions.
- 6.4 Where they consider it appropriate the Committee may ask Officers to explain advice given to Members (of the Executive) prior to decisions being taken and explain decisions they themselves have taken under the Scheme of Delegation.
- 6.5 The Committee shall not question Officers in such a manner whereby the nature and frequency of the questions or tone or language used could be considered by a reasonable person to be harassment, discriminatory or otherwise unacceptable nor deal with matters which are of a possible disciplinary/capability nature.
- 6.6 The Committee shall, at all times respect the political impartiality of the Officers and must not expect Officers to give a political view.

7. Officer Relationships with Party Groups

- 7.1 It must be recognised by all Officers and Members that in discharging their duties Officers serve the Council as a whole and not exclusively any political group, combination of groups, or any individual Members.
- 7.2 Officers may properly be called upon to support and contribute to the deliberations of political groups but must at all times maintain political neutrality. All Officers must, in their dealings with political groups and individual Members, treat them in a fair and even handed manner.
- 7.3 The support provided by Officers can take many forms, ranging from a briefing with the Leader of the Executive, the Leaders of other political groups, or Chairs of Committees, to a presentation to a full party group meeting.
- 7.4 Any request for advice given to a political group or Member will be treated with strict confidence by the Officers concerned and will not be accessible to any other political groups. Factual information upon which any advice is based will, if requested, be available to all political groups.
- 7.5 When attendance is requested for political group meetings:
 - 7.5.1 the request to attend a group meeting must be made through the Chief

Executive;

- 7.5.2 Officers will not attend party group meetings which include persons who are not Members of the Council or be present at purely party political discussions;
- 7.5.3 such a request can only be made in relation to Council business;
- 7.5.4 Officers must respect the confidentiality of any party group discussions at which they are present.

8. Confidentiality and the Press

- 8.1 Any Council information provided to a Member in his/her capacity as a Member must only be used by the Member in connection with the proper performance of their duties. Confidential information should not be disclosed to the media, discussed or released to any other persons. Members should not disclose or use confidential information for the personal advantage of themselves or anyone known to them or to the disadvantage or the discredit of the Council or anyone else.
- 8.2 Officers and Members have a responsibility to protect the Council's reputation. Leaking of confidential information including exempt agenda items and minutes to the media or public criticism of individual Officers by Members or of individual Members by Officers is unacceptable. There are clear requirements set out both in the Members' Code of Conduct and in the Officer Code of Conduct regarding confidentiality.
- 8.3 Duties of confidentiality (under common law) arise when one person (the 'confident') is provided with information by another (the 'confider') either orally or in writing in the expectation that the information will only be used or disclosed in accordance with the wishes of the confider.

Examples of this duty are;-

- if the relationship is inherently confidential e.g. lawyer and client
 - If the relationship is personal e.g. between colleagues in circumstances that suggest an expectation of confidentiality
 - If there is risk through identification e.g. whistle blowers
- 8.4 The fact that information is not marked 'confidential' does not necessarily prevent it from being confidential as this may be inferred from the subject matter and the surrounding circumstances. Confidentiality is unlikely to be established where the information is already known to a wide circle or is in the public domain. Wherever possible, officers and Members should clearly indicate in correspondence or verbally when they expect information to remain confidential to avoid confusion.
 - 8.5 Whilst this Protocol is not aimed in any way at restricting a Member's freedom of speech or right to contact the media, Members must distinguish between acceptable levels of political debate and unacceptable or derogatory personal comments or remarks when they comment on particular issues. Comments to the Press should not challenge the integrity and good faith of other Members or

be based on inaccurate information offered without due regard or attempt to establish the facts.

9. Correspondence and E mails

- 9.1 All correspondence, including Emails between an individual Member and an Officer should not normally be copied (by the Officer) to any other Member. Where it is necessary to copy the correspondence to another Member this should be made clear to the original Member, before any correspondence is sent.
- 9.2 Correspondence including emails between an individual Member and an Officer should not routinely be copied by the Member to the media. Officers other than the Press and Communications Team should not contact the Press (unless authorised to do so) and should comply with the requirements of the Officers' Code of Conduct.
- 9.3 Local government should promote openness and transparency so information should not be disseminated secretly. E mails by and from Members should not be blind copied, without acknowledging to whom the e-mail has been copied.
- 9.4 Members and Officers need to meet or speak to discuss Council business. Officers will generally keep a written note of such meetings as an aide memoire. Sometimes a more formal note of the discussion will be prepared such as confirmatory email or minutes. Such record keeping is to be expected and is normally taken to be agreed. Covert recording of meetings or conversations should not take place.
- 9.5 Members who do not use the Council's IT equipment will nevertheless comply with the Council's ICT Security Policy, and this Protocol.

10. Use of Social Media

- 10.1 Members and Officers must use social media (e.g. Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter), Tik Tok) and blogs responsibly and in accordance with both the law and Members' and Officers' Codes of Conduct. Care must be taken not to disclose confidential information, particularly personal data relating to third parties, which is protected by Data Protection Legislation.

11. Attendance by Members at meetings arranged by Officers

- 11.1 Members are free to meet Officers to discuss aspects of the Council's business, bearing in mind the reasonable calls of their other duties.
- 11.2 Officers will arrange many meetings with colleagues or third parties to discharge the routine business of the Council or to action its decisions. The convention is that Members will not be present at these meetings but will be advised either informally or through reports to Cabinet and Committees of any relevant discussions and/or outcomes. There may be occasions where a Member may be invited to attend a meeting by the appropriate Officer or by a resolution of a Committee.

- 11.3 Members may request meetings with Officers and bring third parties to that meeting where appropriate.

12. Breaches of this Protocol

- 12.1 Allegations by an Officer of a specific breach of this Protocol by a Member should be made to the Monitoring Officer. It is hoped that any potential problems may be resolved by early discussion between the Member(s) involved and the Monitoring Officer. If this proves impossible the Monitoring Officer may, in consultation with the Chair of the Standards Committee refer the matter to the Standards Committee and invite them to reach a view as to whether the Protocol has been breached. The view of the Standards Committee will be reported at a Council meeting. The Standards Committee will follow the Council's Local Protocol resolution procedures (suitably adapted) for dealing with any complaints made against Members under this Protocol. In certain circumstances breach of this protocol may amount to a potential breach of the Member's Code of Conduct. If the breach is sufficiently serious this may warrant a formal reference to the Monitoring Officer as a complaint to be considered for potential investigation by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. The Monitoring Officer will assist in this process if necessary.
- 12.2 The Chief Executive will decide whether disciplinary procedures are appropriate in the case of an alleged breach of this Protocol by Officers.
- 12.3 Allegations by a Member of a specific breach of this protocol by another Member will be dealt with in accordance with the Council's Local Protocol resolution procedures (suitably adapted).
- 12.4 At all times the relevant Political Group Leaders and Chief Executive will seek to resolve, by mediation and conciliation, any issues or problems arising in working relationships between Members and Officers.

13. Training and Briefing

- 13.1 Training and briefing for the operation of this Protocol for Members and Officers will be arranged as required and overseen by the Standards Committee.

14. Advice

- 14.1 The Council's Monitoring Officer and Deputy Monitoring Officer will give advice on the interpretation and operation of this Protocol.

15. Review

- 15.1 The operation of this Protocol will be regularly monitored and reviewed by the Standards Committee with particular reference to findings on breaches, and recommendations made to Council for amendment where necessary.



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

1ST MAY 2024

DIVERISTY IN DEMOCRACY.

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to remind Members of the previous work of the Committee in respect of Diversity in Democracy and the resulting actions undertaken to increase Diversity within Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council through the Council's Diversity Pledge.
- 1.2 The report also illustrates the need for a continued focus by the Council with the diversity agenda.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members

- 2.1 Note the content of the report and the work undertaken to date in respect of Diversity within Democracy
- 2.2 Acknowledge the suggested improvements highlighted within the report, to further improve the diversity in democracy agenda within the Council.
- 2.3 To note the creation of the Equality, Inclusion and Diversity Steering Group within the Leaders Scheme of Delegation which will further assist in the delivery of actions identified within the Council's Diversity Pledge.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The need to ensure that Diversity in Democracy is continually promoted by the Council to achieve a Council that is reflective of the County Borough and Members are reflective of the people that they serve.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 It is important for democratic institutions and public services to reflect the diversity of the population they represent and serve. The diversity agenda has been

growing across all aspects of public life and it is important that we as a Council are committed to increasing diversity, which includes tackling the barriers which prevent an individual's active participation in local democracy.

- 4.2 At the Democratic Services Committee meeting on the 1st October 2020, Members considered the written statement from the then Minister for Housing and Local Government on [phase 2 of the diversity in democracy programme](#). Following consideration of the statement, Members resolved to take forward a working group to consider aspects of the plan in respect of diversity.
- 4.3 The work of the Diversity working group looked to improve the equality and diversity across the County Borough, within the local democracy setting. It was acknowledged that the more representative of society and diverse our Elected Members are, the better understanding they will have of the needs of the local community and therefore are better equipped at carrying out their duties and responsibilities.
- 4.4 The Working Group produced an interim report in May 2021, which identified areas of 'awareness raising' ahead of the 2022 Local Government Elections. The Group also recognised the good practice of establishing a Memorandum of Understanding and assisted in the drafting of the Council's Diversity Pledge, with both documents subsequently endorsed by Council.
- 4.5 Due to the forthcoming 2022 Local Governments Elections and the need to progress some of the recommendations already identified by the Working Group an [interim report](#) was produced which resulted in 16 recommendations.
- 4.6 Following the interim report, the Working Group continued to meet and received input from numerous organisations, who provided detail and context of the barriers faced, although no further recommendations were taken forward.
- 4.7 It is important to note that the Working Group recognised that in respect of diversity in democracy, there were and still are many things outside of the Council's control and work needed, and continues to be needed, to be taken forward in conjunction with political parties and other stakeholders to promote the diversity agenda .
- 4.8 Since this work, the Senedd's Local Government and Housing Committee published its [report](#) on Diversity in Local Government on the 17th October 2023. The report's aim was to assess progress on diversity in local government since the 2022 Elections. The Chair of the Committee noted that "Despite recent developments, continued momentum towards increasing diversity in local government remains a concern."
- 4.9 The Minister for Finance and Local Government, within the above inquiry commented that there was "an awful lot of progress in recent years", noting the diversity in democracy programme and the "significant changes" through the 2021 Act, although acknowledged that further progress is needed.

5. HOW DOES DIVERSITY IN DEMOCRACY LOOK – 2022 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS?

5.1 The Welsh Government, with the support of Data Cymru, carried out of a survey of local government election candidates for the May 2022 elections.

5.2 A total of 1,077 responses were received. Of these, 309 were elected as County Councillors and 444 were elected as Community Councillors, 352 were not elected in either capacity and 116 had an unknown outcome. It should be noted that the numbers do not add up to 1,077 as candidates can stand for, and be elected as, County and Community Councillors at the same time.

5.3 There were 3,291 County candidates and 6,639 Community candidates in the 2022 local government elections. Overall, 38% of County candidates were elected as County Councillors and 82% of Community candidates were elected as Community Councillors.

Sex

5.4 Of the 1,077 candidates who responded to the survey, 40% were female and 60% were male.

5.5 Around three-fifths (60%) of the 309 candidates elected as County Councillors in 2022 were male and around two thirds (69%) of the 261 candidates who stood for election as County Councillors in 2022 but were not elected were also male. Among the 444 Community Councillors elected in 2022, around three-fifths were male (57%) and a similar proportion of the 138 Community candidates who were not elected, (58%) were male.

Age

5.6 Half of the 1,077 candidates who responded to the survey (50%) were aged 60 years or over, around two-fifths (38%) were aged between 40 and 59 years, a tenth (10%) were aged between 25 and 39 years and the remaining 2% were aged between 18 and 24 years.

5.7 Around half (46%) of elected County Councillors and 56% of elected Community Councillors who responded to the survey were aged 60 years or older. Only a very small proportion of those elected County Councillors (2%) and Community Councillors (1%) were aged between 18 to 29 years. Among the 399 County and Community candidates who were not elected in 2022, 5% were aged between 18 to 29 years.

Ethnicity

5.8 Overall, 96% of the 1,077 candidates reported they were from a White ethnic group.

- 5.9 Only 1% of candidates reported they were from an Asian, Asian Welsh or Asian British ethnic group, 1% reported they were from mixed or multiple ethnic groups and around 1% reported they were from Black, Black Welsh, Black British, Caribbean or African ethnic groups. Around 2% of respondents chose not to answer this question.

Religion

- 5.10 Around half (54%) of the 1,077 candidates who responded to the survey noted their religion as Christian (including all denominations), a further 40% said they had no religion and 3% answered 'other' and provided a range of responses, including Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh. The remaining 4% chose not to answer this question.
- 5.11 There was little variation across the answers provided by elected County and Community Councillors and candidates who were not elected.

Sexual orientation

- 5.12 The survey found that 88% of the 1,077 candidates who responded to the survey identified as 'heterosexual or straight', 6% identified as 'lesbian, gay or bisexual' and the remaining 1% identified as 'any other sexual orientation'.
- 5.13 Among the 309 elected County Councillors who responded, 6% stated they were lesbian, gay or bisexual, while 8% of the 261 County candidates who were not elected in 2022 identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual. The proportion of elected Community Councillors and Community candidates who were not elected in 2022 and who identified as being lesbian, gay or bisexual were 5% and 6% respectively.

Disability

- 5.14 The majority of the 1,077 candidates who responded (82%) reported that they did not consider themselves to be a disabled person, while 14% of candidates did consider themselves to be a disabled person. A small proportion (3%) of respondents indicated that they preferred not to say.
- 5.15 Of the 309 County Councillors who responded, around a tenth (13%) considered themselves to be a disabled person, while 15% of the Community Councillors who responded considered themselves to be a disabled person.
- 5.16 Around a third (35%) of the 1,077 candidates who responded to the survey indicated that they had at least one health condition or impairment. Of these 379 candidates, around a quarter (26% or 97 respondents) listed conditions or impairments in more than one category. Around a fifth (17%) of all candidates also noted that they had a long-term health condition.

Education

- 5.17 Around two thirds of the 1,077 candidates who responded to the survey (63%) held a highest qualification equivalent to Level 4 or above (e.g. a degree, post graduate or professional qualification), a further 29% held a qualification equivalent to Level 1-3 and the remaining 5% held no qualifications.
- 5.18 The results were very similar across both elected County and Community Councillors and candidates who were not elected in 2022.

Employment

- 5.19 Around two-fifths (43%) of the 1,077 candidates noted they were employed, either full-time (30%) or part-time (13%), 38% of candidates were retired, a further 14% were self-employed and 2% were unemployed. The remaining 10% provided a range of other responses, including that they were either full-time or part-time students, on maternity leave, long-term sick or disabled, unpaid carers or unpaid workers in a family business.
- 5.20 Of the 309 County Councillors who responded, around a half (47%) were employees, 14% were self-employed, and around a third (32%) were retired. Two-fifths (40%) of the 444 Community Councillors who responded were employees, 13% were self-employed, and 43% were retired.
- 5.21 Around half of all candidates who responded (46%) stated that their current, or most, recent employment was in the public sector (including local government, central government, NHS, education and other public sector), 43% worked in the private sector, 8% worked in the voluntary sector and 1% in 'other' sectors (including agriculture).

Welsh language

- 5.23 A large proportion (91%) of the 1,077 candidates who responded indicated that their preferred language was English, while around a tenth (9%) said their preferred language was Welsh.
- 5.24 The survey indicated that 28% of the candidates that responded could understand spoken Welsh, around a fifth (22%) could speak Welsh, 23% could read Welsh, and 18% could write in Welsh.

Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council

- 5.25 Rhondda Cynon Taf is the 3rd largest Council area in Wales made up of communities with different needs and aspirations. Covering a wide geographical area it has a population of just over 237,000 people. Like much of Wales we have a population that is growing older with an increase of people aged over 65, with 1 in 5 people in this age group. The majority of the county's population identify as White Welsh and British, though the ethnic minority population has slightly grown in recent years. Over half of the population have no religion, of the rest of the population Christianity is the predominant religion.

- 5.26 Following the 2022 Local Government Elections, the Council introduced 35 new Members to the Council. Of the 75 Members of the Council, 35 Members are Female (47%) with 40 Members being Male (53%).
- 5.27 In respect of Positions within the Council:
- 1 Male Leader of the Council and 1 Female Deputy Leader
 - Other Political Groups – 1 female political leader and 3 Male political Leaders. 2 Female deputy leaders of Political Groups with 2 Male deputy political Leaders.
 - 3 Members of the Cabinet are Female with 5 Members of the Cabinet being Male
 - 10 Female Members are Chairs of Committee with 17 Male Members are Chairs of Committee
 - 15 Female Members are Vice Chairs of Committee with 10 Male Members are Vice Chairs of Committee ¹
 - 1 Madam Mayor
 - 1 Male Presiding Member with 2 deputy Presiding Members (1 Female / 1 Male).
- 5.28 Through the Diversity & Democracy Report 2023 the WLGA advised that greater progress had been made in improving gender diversity following the 2022 elections, but noted that it was more difficult to assess diversity across other protected characteristics.
- 5.29 Traditionally, the average age of councillors in Wales was around 60 and has remained stubbornly within that range for many years. Within RCT following the Local Government 2022 Election, there has been a clear shift in the age range of Members, with the majority of Members being below the age of 60.
- 5.30 In light of the above information RCT Council favours well in comparison to many other Local Authorities with its gender balance ratio. However, there is still lots the Council must do to attract other diverse candidates in coming forward and engaging within the democratic process.
- 5.31 In respect of ethnicity, the Council has improved in this area, although is still non reflective of the County Borough as a whole.
- 5.32 The number of Elected Member with Welsh as their first language has decreased since the 2022 Election, although the Council promotes the use of the Welsh Language across all aspects of its work and the wider County Borough.

6. WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO DEMOCRACY?

- 6.1 The role of a councillor is stimulating, rewarding and regarded as a privilege by many. The role however is a challenging and demanding one and is not one that should be considered lightly; it is a complex and demanding role, which requires a significant time commitment and can therefore have implications on people's family lives and work-life balance. It can impact on a professional career and on an individual's income and future financial security. It is also a role that can expose individuals (and their families) to regular personal criticism, insults and even threats, particularly through social media.

¹ 1 Vice Chair position to be appointed and 1 vice chair on a rotational basis with other Local Authority.

6.2 A number of studies have been compiled to look at the barriers to democracy with such studies highlighting:

- Child care and other caring responsibilities
- Time-commitment and meeting times
- Public criticism and online abuse
- Public's understanding of local government and the role and responsibilities of councillors and the Council itself is limited therefore portraying a political and organisational culture
- Remuneration and Employment
- Role models and incumbency

6.3 Members of the previous Democratic Services Working Group also considered the following as potential barriers:

- Disability access
- Technical / Digital Barriers
- Language Barriers
- Support and guidance for independent candidates

7 WHAT ARE WE DOING TO CONTINUE THE DIVERSITY AGENDA, AS LINKED TO THE COUNCIL'S DIVERSITY PLEDGE AND PREVIOUS WORK OF THE DIVERSITY WORKING GROUP.

7.1 The Council recognises that Diversity within Local Government creates an inclusive environment, accepting of every individual's differences, enabling all Councillors to achieve their full potential and as a result, allowing Council services to reach their fullest potential for the benefit of its residents. At the Council meeting of the 26th May 2021 the Council formally committed to being a Diverse Council, using the work of the Democratic Services working group as its foundation. A link to the Council's pledge can be found [here](#).

7.2 The following provides details of the actions listed within the pledge and the work carried out to date in respect of this work.

7.3 Diversity Champions

Current Position: Each Political Group Leader agreed to undertake the role of a Diversity Champion ahead of the 2022 Local Government Elections and as a Council, Members agreed to take forward the Fair & Respectful Election Campaign Pledge. The Council's Deputy Leader has continued to take forward the 'Member Equalities Champion' role, as highlighted within the Diversity Pledge, due to her role as Cabinet Member for Council Business and strong work with equalities across the Council.

At a recent meeting of Group Leaders, it was reaffirmed that each of the opposition Group Leaders would continue to undertake the role of a Diversity Champion within their political grouping.

Suggested improvements - It is suggested that the Council's Equalities Manager attends a Group Meeting in respect of Diversity.

7.4 Engaging with 3rd Sector Organisations and underrepresented groups / Learning Events.

Current Position: Through the work of the Diversity Working Group, Members met with various organisations to listen and learn of the barriers to diversity in democracy, felt by different groups. Such organisations included Race Alliance Wales and the Diverse 50:50 Campaign.

Prior to the Election, the Head of Democratic Services took forward engagement events at the Council Chamber and virtual events for prospective Candidates, providing a platform for learning opportunities into how the Council works and further information into the role of a Councillor.

During Democracy Week (October 2023) the Council invited individuals from Innovate Trust to the Council Chamber to support them with their understanding of the work of the Councillor, the role of a Councillor and the importance of registering to vote. This event has helped us build and learn how we can better engage and promote democracy to everyone to ensure we build a diverse democracy for the future.

It is the intention that further workshop settings with various groups to help educate and engage people across the County Borough in the democratic process will be scheduled. The Council's Public Participation Strategy has recently been endorsed by Council which will assist in taking forward aspects of this work.

Suggested improvements: To have any beneficial impact, such engagement needs to commence early before any Local Government Election, to allow any interested individual sufficient time to get involved in a political party prior to selection processes or to stand independently.

Since the 2022 Local Election, the number of engagement opportunities has been minimal due to the Council Business Unit heavily supporting newly Elected Members in their new roles. However, the Head of Democratic Services is committed to taking forward such events from the next Municipal Year, working with the Council's Community Development Officer and wider team, providing virtual platforms and engagement sessions in local settings to create, comfortable environments for such engagement. A calendar of such events will look to be created and promoted on the Council's Public participation section of the website which is being developed, linked with the Councils Public Participation Strategy.

7.5 Council Website

Current Position: Through the work of the DSC Working Group, a review of the Council's democracy pages was undertaken. Opportunities were taken forward to promote the role of a Councillor, through written advice on the relevant

webpages and video recordings of past and present Members, sharing their experiences of being a Members and providing information on the support arrangements in place, including details in respect of remuneration and how to stand for Election. Links to such pages can be found [here](#).

Suggested improvements: Further improvements to the Council democracy pages on the Council's website has been identified, with the addition of further videos and infographics to be added to the pages to display some of the information in a more engaging and accessible manner. One of the most recent videos in respect of democracy can be found [here](#).

7.6 Promotion of the role of a Councillor at Council Job and Career Fairs

"We agree that promoting awareness of the role of a councillor and how people can stand for election is key to increasing interest in local politics. "

Current Position: Members of the Council Business Unit, along with colleagues in elections, attended the RCT Jobs Fair within Llys Cadwyn during October and more recently in March, to promote the role of a Councillor and to raise the importance of voting. There was positive engagement at the sessions, through educating people across the County Borough about the role and future possibilities of standing as a candidate at future elections and the importance of establishing a diverse Council.

The Council sought funding from the democracy engagement fund to help support such events through a promotional banner and ipads to promote the opportunity for online voter registration. The Grant looked to encourage and support people to participate in democracy, helping funded organisations ensure as many people as possible are engaged, motivated, and empowered to take part in democracy, giving them the tools to make their voice heard and impact positively on the Wales around them. However, the Council were unsuccessful with their bid submission.

Suggested improvements: Visual displays to be reviewed to seek further engagement at future events. It is also suggested that where possible Member engagement is also provided, so the public can hear first hand about the role of a Councillor.

7.7 Welsh Government candidates' and Councillors' survey.

As part of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, local authorities are required to conduct a standardised survey of Councillors and candidates for election to the office of Councillor in their areas. The survey is to include both County and Town and Community Councillors and candidates and asks a prescribed set of questions that included (but was not limited to) questions about sex and gender identity; sexual orientation; language; ethnicity; age; disability; religion or belief; health; education and qualifications; employment; and work as a Councillor. Data Cymru conducted the 2022 survey on behalf of the local authorities. The main aim of the survey was to provide timely information on the

demographic profile of local authority Councillors and candidates. The intention is that the survey will be repeated during each ordinary election to track changes in Councillors' and candidates' characteristics over time.

Through the Diversity pledge the Council gave a commitment to ensuring that all members and candidates complete the Welsh Government candidates' and councillors' survey distributed at election time.

As required, the Council provided Welsh Government with the details of all candidates standing for election, to allow them to receive the survey.

Suggested Improvements – Further promotion of the survey and the need for completion will be promoted to all candidates and newly elected Members whenever possible following publication of the survey, including promotion during the Member Induction Programme.

Within the Elections and Elected Bodies (Wales) Bill, Section 26 relates to the Survey of councillors and unsuccessful candidates in local elections. It is suggested that in addition to the core questions in the survey, which apply to each local authority in Wales, it allows local authorities to include questions aimed at identifying the impact of any local initiatives established to improve the diversity of candidate standing in the election for which the survey is being undertaken.

7.8 To take forward improved equality monitoring of Members

Through the Diversity Working group, Members considered the proposal to take forward an independent Members diversity survey which would serve as a benchmark for the Authority going forward. During the work of the group the Diversity and Inclusion Manager brought forward research conducted in respect of socio-economic questions to be included within a potential survey for Members consideration, prior to a complete survey being considered.

Following the research, the following areas were recommended for Socio-economic background monitoring to which Members of the working group agreed:

- a. Parents/Guardian Occupation
- b. Type of secondary school attended
- c. Parents qualification/university attended
- d. Eligibility for Free School Meals

Suggested Improvements – The proposed survey presented to the Working Group in 2021 be reviewed by the Diversity and Inclusion Manager to ensure that it is still fit for purpose. Once finalised this survey to be conducted within the current term of office for Members.

7.9 Working with Diversity Champions to encourage each political group to set ambitious targets for candidate selection from under-represented groups at the 2022 local elections.

At the most recent Political Group Leaders meeting (February 2024) Group Leaders agreed to act as diversity champions within each of their Council's political groups.

Suggested Improvements - Through the regular Political Group Leaders meeting, agenda Items in respect of diversity target setting will be incorporated for future meetings.

Offer support and recourses, to support political groups to encourage a diverse range of individuals to consider standing on behalf of a political party. It should be recognised that larger political groups, who represent larger UK or national parties already have structures in place to undertake selection of candidates for the 2027 local elections. This work would therefore include discussions, in a non-political way, aimed at supporting smaller political groups and independent candidates to promote diversity, aimed at ensuring the broadest range of backgrounds are considered for standing for elected office.

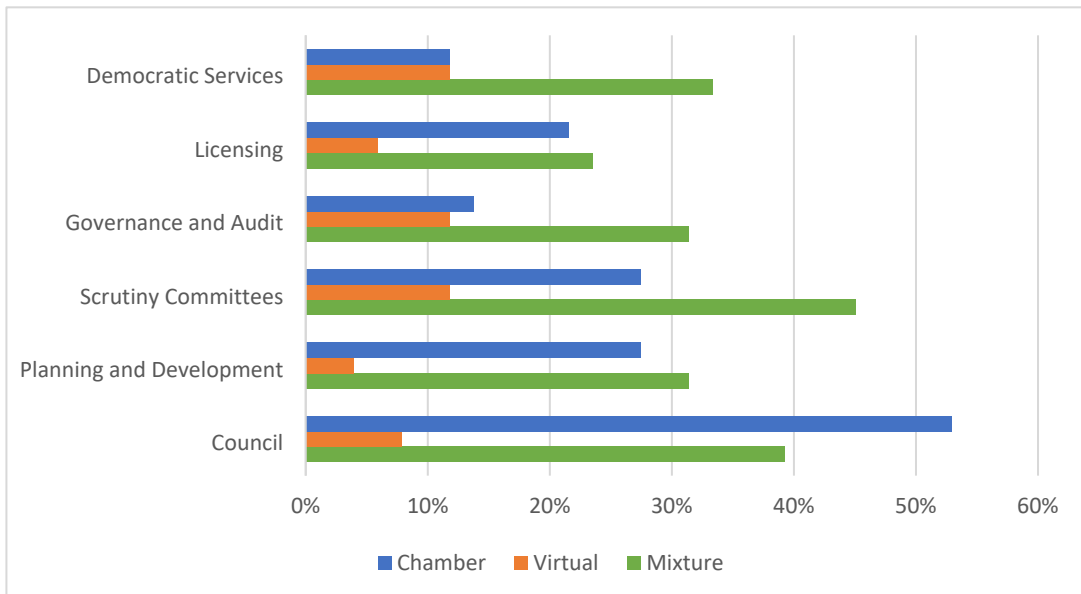
7.10 The development and promotion of new ways of working for members, including the provision of hybrid meeting opportunities and eLearning platforms which will assist and encourage all candidates and those from underrepresented groups to stand for office.

The 2021 Act enabled local authorities to hold multilocation meetings, which the Welsh Government described as a potentially important reform, particularly in the encouragement of diversity.

“Hybrid working was broadly welcomed by all witnesses, enabling those with conflicting priorities, such as work or caring responsibilities, or councillors with disabilities to attend meetings where they might otherwise not been able to. WEN Wales noted that the “permanent enshrinement” of remote working in the 2021 Act “is another positive step that provides better access for women with caring responsibilities and disabled people”

The Council has positively embraced hybrid meeting arrangements, which is reflected in the Council’s Multi Location Meeting Policy and Public Participation Strategy. The Council recognises the benefits this provision has for both Elected Members and the public in attending Committee meetings.

During the 2023 Member Survey, when Members were asked about their preference for attending in person or online or a mixture of both, Members responded as follows:



Meeting	Chamber	Virtual	Mixture
Council	53%	8%	39%
Planning & Development	44%	6%	50%
Scrutiny Committees	33%	14%	53%
Governance & Audit	24%	21%	55%
Licensing	42%	12%	46%
Democratic Services	21%	21%	58%

There is a clear view that the flexibility to attend either physically or remotely is a great benefit for Elected and Co-Opted (Lay) Members.

The professional approach by the Council to hybrid meetings has been recognised by other Authorities with the Council hosting a range of hybrid meetings for other organisations, including the WLGA Annual General Meeting.

The webcasting of meetings is a further area which promotes engagement in the democratic process, allowing the public the option to watch meetings live, without having to attend the Council Chamber, which can often be seen as a barrier, which may ignite an interest in members of the public to become a future candidate.

Through the Democratic Services Committee, the Council have produced an ambitious Development Programme for Members, providing Member briefing sessions on a virtual basis to allow for the convenience of Members. These sessions are recorded to allow Members to access the recording if they were unable to attend the session or to act as a refresher. Members have been provided with useful electronic handbooks by the WLGA and access to the RCT source which provides numerous eLearning opportunities.

Suggested improvements – The move of the Council Headquarters, including the Council Chamber to Pontypridd Town Centre is also viewed as a positive addition, allowing better access to Elected Members and democracy with better transport links available.

It is the intention for the Members Portal to host an area for the undertaking of E-learning modules in the future.

7.11 Continue working towards the standards for member support and development set out in the Wales Charter for Member Support and Development.

The WLGA has been working with Heads of Democratic Services to develop a voluntary self-evaluation framework for Councils to use to assess the effectiveness of the support they provide for Councillors. This framework is a modernisation of the former Wales Charter for Councillor Support and Development which it replaces.

It is proposed that the existing Charter be replaced by a voluntary self-assessment framework that focusses on the support provided for Councillors to deliver the outcomes needed by their communities. The framework aims to cover all aspects of good practice in Councillor support. However, as priorities and resources differ between councils, it would be for councils to decide locally how much of the framework to use and which sections should be prioritised.

At the September meeting of the Democratic Services Committee, Members provided feedback in respect of the proposed framework which was out to consultation. Since this date, the final version of the Framework has been circulated to Local Authorities to utilise.

Suggested improvements - The Council have always strived to provide the best support and development opportunities to its Members and this is reflected in the Council's positive track record of achieving both the Charter, Advanced Charter and the Good Practice and Innovation Award. The Council will continue to listen to its Members to guide us with the support needed and will always strive to learn and adapt to meet the needs of our Members.

The newly implemented Self Evaluation framework will be brought forward to a future meeting of the Democratic Services Committee for Committee consideration.

7.12 Continue to demonstrate a commitment to a duty of care for Councillors by:

- a) **providing access to counselling services for all councillors through the Councils Occupational Health Service and Cari Wellbeing Service.**

b) Promoting the general open-door policy for Members to contact the Head of Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer for any concerns

Through the Member Personal Development Process all Members were reminded of the access available to the Council's Occupational Health Service and the open door policy of Senior Officers for any Member concerns. Reminders of these important messages and access and referrals to the then Cari System (now Vivup system) have been proactively promoted in the Members weekly update.

The Council Business Unit has reintroduced the Member Coffee sessions in advance of Council meetings and other committee meetings, to allow Members the important opportunity to come together and network, which was an important aspect highlighted as important to Members wellbeing, which can sometimes be missed through the virtual settings that we often work in.

A number of Members Wellbeing briefing sessions have been provided over the Municipal Year, where details of Vivup amongst other important messages were promoted to Members. Arrangements were also made for Members to receive the flu jab, for those under the age of 60.

Members have been surveyed on the potential topic for further future sessions to ensure that we are providing advice and guidance that is helpful to Members.

Suggested Improvements – An area in respect of Members Well being is being developed on the Members Portal to act as a timely reminder to Members about the importance of their own health and well being, when also taking forward the work of the Council and their constituents.

The working arrangements available within the new Council Headquarters provides areas for Members to hot desk and take forward meetings within the Members area, to allow for healthy working environments and improved networking arrangements.

c) having regard for the safety and wellbeing of councillors whenever they are performing their role as councillors and ensuring that all Members are aware of the safety provisions in place for Members through the Council Business Unit in partnership with the Community Safety Partnership and South Wales Police

A report in respect of [Members safety](#) was provided to the Democratic Services Committee in April detailing important advice and guidance to Members in respect of their safety. Details of the lone working policy were also provided to Members during the Member Induction Programme as well as a Member briefing session during the induction programme.

A members briefing session with South Wales Police was arranged during September, with again first hand advice and guidance to members when undertaking their role.

Cyber security training was also provided inhouse by the digital skills team and a further session by South Wales Police was also provided during both September and October.

The Council Business unit have regularly advised of other training or briefing sessions provided by other organisations, with the most recent sessions provided by the WLGA in respect of Personal Safety for Councillors.

Arrangements have been made to trial the 'StaySafe' App, which acts as a personal alarm when Members are feeling intimidated or at risk. Demonstrations to Members that have indicated their interest in this trial have taken place. We will gauge Members feedback in respect of the app, to ascertain whether it is fit for purpose, and depending on this feedback whether we roll this out to any interested Member.

Security arrangements are in place within the Council Chamber, when Members are involved with public meetings, as there can be occasions when contentious decisions are made. Arrangements have been made for security devices to be installed at Member addresses if deemed necessary.

Suggested Improvements – Following the trial of the stay safe App, all Members will be contacted to discuss whether each Member would like to utilise this important safety feature.

The new working arrangements within the new Council Headquarters should make it easier for Members to meet with residents within designated meeting rooms within the building, with the building controlled with appropriate security arrangements, including the Council Chamber.

d) zero-tolerance approach to bullying and harassment by members including such harassment through social networks

Members have been provided with social media training opportunities to help with the managing of their Council social media accounts. Members are strongly advised to take forward a separate Councillor account and refrain from sharing any personal information on this account with their own personal social media platforms. A social Media policy has also been developed and was shared with Members during induction.

Infographics to assist Members with online civility have been promoted by the Council Business Unit, for Members to utilise.



Other resources for Councillors to utilise in respect of personal safety and online abuse are listed below:

- **Councillors' guide to handling intimidation | Local Government Association (Welsh version)**
- **Personal safety | Local Government Association (Welsh version)**
- **'Rules of engagement' infographic for councillors to use on social media to give all users a clear 'code' by which they should operate (also in Welsh)**
- **'Rules of engagement' infographic for candidates to use on social media to give all users a clear 'code' by which they should operate (also in Welsh)**
- **'Handling online abuse' infographic - a quick reference guide for councillors with steps they can take to protect themselves online and seek support where needed. (also in Welsh)**
- **Improving digital citizenship: A practical guide for councillors | Local Government Association (Welsh version)**
- **Research and Good Practice Improving digital citizenship: Research and good practice | Local Government Association (Welsh version)**

Suggested Improvements – Members are encouraged to contact the Police and the Head of Democratic Services when dealing with any online abuse and harassment.

e) Providing training and learning opportunities to support Members in undertaking their role.

Through the work of the Democratic Services Committee the Council are working to support the development of all of its Elected Members and to ensure that they are able meet the demands of their roles. As a Council we look to ensure that:

- There is a planned and structured approach to Elected Member Learning and Development;

- Elected Members have access to appropriate means to assist them to acquire relevant knowledge and develop the skills necessary for their roles;
- Learning and development, wherever possible, is linked to the roles of Elected Members;
- Access to learning and development activities is equitable;
- Elected Members are encouraged to identify their own development needs and participate fully in learning and development activities;
- Elected Member learning and development activity is adequately resourced within available budgets;
- The Member Development Programme will be produced, updated and monitored on a regular basis, to support the needs of Members.

In July 2023, the Democratic Services Committee approved the [Member Development Programme](#) for the Municipal Year, which was formed following the Member Personal Development Review and Committee requests. The programme also reflects upon the Welsh Government Competency Framework and modules identified through this framework as general good practice.

The Development Programme is a fluid document, regularly taking forward Members comments and requests, therefore additional briefing topic sessions have been delivered upon.

Training provided to Members has been a mix of in house training and external, and a mixture of formal presentation / workshop and e-learning.

Suggested Improvement - The Head of Democratic Services, working with the Council's Corporate Training Team (People Development), has identified opportunities to undertake Members training analysis meetings, to assist Members with identifying any training needs. It is suggested that we capture this information in respect of training analysis meetings through the Members survey which will be circulated in the next month.

Through the Members Portal, Members will have access to the recently developed data library which will provide access to accurate and timely data, which will include details of equalities within the County Borough.

f) Surveying Members annually on the support arrangements available.

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 meetings and the provision of support and resources to non-executive members during an elected term.

In view of this requirement the Head of Democratic Services, in consultation with the Democratic Services Committee, has made arrangements for a bilingual survey to be conducted on an annual basis. In March 2019 Members of the Committee agreed to the drafting of the survey, which has been adapted over the last few years to recognise changes in working practices, such as hybrid meetings. The previous Democratic Services Committee, agreed to this broader

survey, to support service improvement going forward. Such elements are not part of any statutory requirements.

The result of the survey are reported to the Democratic Services Committee to consider the feedback contained within and to consider any action necessary resulting from the feedback contained.

The report in respect of the 2023 survey is available [here](#).

During September 2023, the Head of Democratic Services provided a Members Briefing Session to all Members reminding Members of the support arrangements available for Members to access through Democratic Services and Member Services.

Suggested Improvements – That the Council Business Unit continue to conduct the Annual Survey and take forward any areas raised by Members.

g) providing recess periods during school holidays to support councillors with caring or work commitments.

As agreed at the Council AGM on the 23rd May 2018 (Minute No.15(3) Refers) Committee meetings were to be convened outside of the School holiday periods, save for exceptional circumstances (urgent business requirements). This scheduling has proved successful for Members and it is proposed that this continues.

h) Promoting the welsh language provision available to all Members at Council meetings

Welsh Language provision is available for the Council Committee meetings for any Member or Member of the public to utilise when addressing Committee. The Council meets its Welsh Language Standards in respect of Committee meeting papers and publication.

The Council also promotes welsh language learning opportunities to all Members.

i) Sufficient provision of ICT equipment and support to allow a Member to undertake their role effectively.

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.

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.

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.

- j) Encourage all members take up the allowances and salaries to which they are entitled, particularly any reimbursement for costs of care, so that all members receive fair remuneration for their work and that the role of member is not limited to those who can afford it.**

The salary and Member allowances is promoted to all Members during the Member Induction Programme and reminder of such allowances are provided during the Member Personal Development Review.

Details of remuneration are also promoted on the Council website to promote these benefits for any perspective candidate.

Developments within the Member Portal have included the claiming of Member expenses, which will make such a process easier for Members to undertake, rather than the current paper exercise. Detail of allowances and salaries will also be promoted within this area of the Portal.

The Head of Democratic Services provides annual communication reminders in respect of the Care Allowance provision, acting as a timely reminder for all Members.

- k) Encourage Members to participate in the Local Government Pension Scheme to assist in protecting them in their retirement.**

Details of the Local Government Pension Scheme are made available to Members during the Member Induction Programme. If Members require any additional details in respect of the scheme they are able to contact relevant officers within the Council to assist with their queries.

- l) Encourage Members to discuss reasonable adjustments to assist them in undertaking their role.**

Again, following the Member Induction Programme, Members are asked if there are any reasonable adjustments they would like to assist them in undertaking their role. Reminders of such adjustments are also highlighted within the Personal Development Review. However, Members can speak to the Head of Democratic Services or any officer within the Council Business Unit to discuss any adjustment which may assist in their role.

- M) Encourage the take up of provisions available to Members in respect of allowances and mobile phone provision to assist Members in undertaking their role.**

The Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales expects Members to be provided with adequate support to carry out their duties and that the support provided should take account of the specific needs of individual Members. The Democratic Services Committee is required to review the level of support

provided to Members. All Elected Members & Co-opted Members should be provided with adequate telephone, email and internet facilities to give electronic access to appropriate information.

Members are provided with telephone provision and devices as well the opportunity for hotdesking within the new Council Headquarters..

8 OTHER AREAS OF CONSIDERATION IN RESPECT OF DIVERSITY OUTSIDE OF THE RCT PLEDGE.

Access to Elected Office Fund and The Elections and Elected Bodies (Wales) Bill

- 8.1 In 2021, the Welsh Government launched a pilot scheme to fund reasonable adjustments and support for disabled candidates seeking election to Senedd Cymru 2021 election and 2022 Local Government elections.
- 8.2 The fund was administered by Disability Wales and covered costs such as assistive aids, training, travel, personal assistance and communication support.
- 8.3 An independent Review of the Access to Elected Office Fund Wales Pilot has been concluded and published. The report concluded that the arrangements put in place were welcomed and valued by candidates and that there was clear support for the fund to be continued. As with any pilot there were lessons to learn. In this case key points included the limited amount of time the fund was available to candidates, the need for greater clarity about what support is available, and the need for greater awareness and promotion of the fund.
- 8.4 The Elections and Elected Bodies (Wales) Bill provides consideration of Accessibility and Diversity within Welsh Elections, which looks to legislate to ensure the fund continues to be available for future elections. The Bill includes reference to:
 - **Services to promote diversity in persons seeking elected office** - duty on Welsh Ministers to put in place arrangements aimed at improving diversity within Senedd and Local Government democratic structures by providing assistance to remove barriers to participation including initiatives and schemes for underrepresented individuals seeking election to Senedd and local government election.
 - **Financial assistance schemes to promote diversity in persons seeking elected office** - Section 29 provides for individual schemes to be created and tailored to provide support for either a single protected characteristic and / or common barriers across a range of protected characteristics and socio-economic circumstances.
- 8.5 Welsh Government carried out an evidence review of councillor remuneration in Wales and how it compares with other countries (Williams, 2021), and a survey of public attitudes (Owens, 2021). The final element of this research involved

carrying out an online survey of councillors in Wales at principal and community and town council levels. Taken together, the research findings from all three stages will broaden understanding of the role and remuneration of councillors in Wales from multiple perspectives. [Councillor remuneration and citizen engagement with councillors: survey of councillors | GOV.WALES](#)

- 8.6 The Cabinet have recently approved the Council's [Strategic Equality Plan](#), following pre-scrutiny by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, which highlights the equality objectives the Council will work towards over the next 4 years.
- 8.7 As part of the Council's approach an Equality, Inclusion and Diversity Steering Group will be established through the Leaders Scheme of Delegation to help shape the delivery of the objectives.
- 8.8 It is proposed that delivery and monitoring of the Council's Diversity Pledge is also included in the remit of the Steering Group.

9 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY

- 9.1 The work of the Democratic Services Committee Diversity working group looked to improve the equality and diversity across the County Borough and within the local democracy setting. The more representative of society and diverse our Councillors are the better understanding they will have of the needs of the local community and therefore are better equipped at carrying out their duties and responsibilities

10. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Encouraging diversity within democracy includes promotion of all languages. The Council has positively promoted and supported bilingual engagement at Council meetings and provision of Committee materials.

11. CONSULTATION / INVOLVEMENT

- 11.1 No formal consultation is necessary.

12. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 None.

13. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 13.1 The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 outlines a number of duties placed on Local Authorities in respect of the diversity agenda

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

- 14.1 The work of a Councillor is fundamental to the Council's Corporate plan, as Councillors are the mouthpiece for the communities that they serve.
- 14.2 Ensuring that there are greater opportunities for a more diverse democracy across RCT links to the Wellbeing of Future Generations goals of a more equal Wales and a Wales of cohesive communities

15. CONCLUSION

- 15.1 Trying to achieve a diverse culture is challenging and the Democratic Services Committee has proactively taken forward work in this area to promote diversity within the Council, through its former Working Group who identified potential barriers that may dissuade members of the public to stand as a candidate for election.
- 15.2 As a Council we need to ensure that any perceived barriers are eradicated and instead celebrate and promote the rewarding experiences of becoming a Councillor.
- 15.3 Ensuring Members have a clear understanding of their roles and behaviour in and outside of the Council Chamber is paramount to ensuring a safe and inclusive working environment for all.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

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