



**CYNGOR BWRDEISTREF SIROL
RHONDDA CYNON TAF
COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

COMMITTEE SUMMONS

C Hanagan
Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication
Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
The Pavilions
Cambrian Park
Clydach Vale CF40 2XX

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

YOU ARE SUMMONED to a Virtual meeting of **DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE** to be held on **MONDAY, 11TH SEPTEMBER, 2023** at **5.00 PM.**

It is the intention to record 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 the 5th July 2023.

3. COUNCILLOR SUPPORT SELF EVALUATION FRAMEWORK - REVIEW OF THE MEMBERS CHARTER

To receive the report of the Head of Democratic Services providing details of the current review being undertaken in respect of the Members Charter.

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

To receive the joint report, which provides Members with proposed updates to the Elected Members ICT, Internet and Email Acceptable Use policy.

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INFORMATION REPORT

The following report is for information purposes:

5. MEMBER'S SUPPORT

To receive the report of the Head of Democratic Services providing Members with a general overview of the support arrangements available to Members from the Council Business Unit.

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6. URGENT BUSINESS

To consider any items, which the Chairman, by reason of special circumstances, is of the opinion should be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency

Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication

Circulation:-

The Chair and Vice-Chair of the Democratic Services Committee
(County Borough Councillor W Jones and County Borough Councillor M Webber respectively)

County Borough Councillors:

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

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



RHONDDA CYNON TAF

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL

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

County Borough Councillors

Councillor W Jones (Chair)

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

Officers in attendance

Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication

1 WELCOME

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

2 APOLOGIES

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

3 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

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

4 MINUTES

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

5 MEMBER'S TRAINING - DRAFT MEMBER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

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

Members were advised of the tiered approach to learning outlined within the

draft programme and the flexible approach to the delivery of learning and development opportunities which would be adapted to meet the identified needs of individuals and groups.

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

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

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

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

Following discussions the Committee **RESOLVED**:

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

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

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

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

The Committee were advised of the work undertaken to date with colleagues from Corporate Estates and the discussions taken forward with Public I who

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

forward Members concerns in respect of:

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

7 MEMBER'S SURVEY - CONSIDERATION OF FEEDBACK

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

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

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

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

Members **RESOLVED:**

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

8 DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME

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

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

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

This meeting closed at 4.29 pm

**Councillor W Jones
Chair.**

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RHONDDA CYNON TAF

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

11TH SEPTEMBER 2023

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

COUNCILLOR SUPPORT SELF EVALUATION FRAMEWORK – REVIEW OF THE MEMBERS CHARTER

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Members with the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft self evaluation framework of the WLGA in respect to Councillor Support and development.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Democratic Services Committee:
- (i) Acknowledge the high standard of support provided to Members through its previous receipt of the Charter and Advanced Charter;
 - (ii) Agree that the original Charter requirements required a review to align with new working practices and emerging legislation.
 - (iii) Consider the draft Councillor Support Self Evaluation framework outlined in section 5 (iii) of the report and provide comment in respect of the framework
 - (iv) Subject to 2.1 (iii) the Head of Democratic Services provides a response to the WLGA in respect of the Democratic Services Committee comments before the consultation deadline.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Throughout Wales, Councils are striving to provide the best possible support for their Members to enable them to meet the daily challenges faced with the number of roles required of them. Such support takes the form of skill and knowledge development, support facilities and support services.
- 3.2 The Welsh Local Government Association has a long history of working with Councils to help them develop these activities. To provide structure to the national programme of support, the Wales Charter for Member Support and Development was developed collaboratively by the Association, Councillors

representing each of the political groups and Democratic Services officers from each Council.

- 3.3 The Charter 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. Its wide adoption has raised the overall amount and standard of support given to Councillors in Wales.
- 3.4 The Charter reflected the legislative requirements for corporate governance and Councillor support and development set out in the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 and looked to:
- provide a framework for good practice across Wales,
 - be an incentive for councils to provide their Councillors with the support and development they needed, and
 - provide assurance to Councillors that they were being given the best support possible.
- 3.5 Rhondda Cynon Taf Council were one of the first Councils to receive the Charter in 2007. In 2010 the Council went one step further and were awarded the Advanced Charter due to the high level of support provided to Elected Members, which was renewed in 2014.
- 3.6 In addition to the above in 2013 the Council were awarded the Good Practice and Innovation Award. This award highlighted the excellent and innovative practices that the Council took forward with the Occupational Health and Wellbeing Unit with regard to Elected Member support, which demonstrated that the services and support had demonstrably improved the outcomes for the Council's Elected Members and the Council as a whole. It was established that this ongoing practice was over and above that required for the advanced level of the Wales Charter for Member Support and Development and therefore award winning. ([Council Submission](#))
- 3.7 Assessment for the Charter was a self assessment undertaken by the Authority and submitted to the WLGA for review and dependant on the outcome of the review the receipt of the award. The Charter was designed to establish that an essential range of support and development arrangements for Councillors were in place. The charter should have been reviewed every 3 years to ensure the ongoing support of provision. ([Self Assessment](#))
- 3.8 Assessment for the Advanced Charter was a peer assessment including a site visit undertaken by officers, and member peers from Wales and England. The Advanced Charter was designed to recognise that the arrangements required for the Charter are working effectively.

- 3.9 Since the inception of the Charter, the local government landscape has changed significantly. The role of Councillors has become even more challenging and wide ranging . The Charter criteria has now been reviewed to take into account the different ways of working following the covid pandemic and to take in account the requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 and the associated Welsh Government guidance as it becomes available.
- 3.10 There is now a need for a different framework which reflects a more progressive approach to sector led improvement and which recognises the increasingly limited resources available in councils.

4. COUNCILLOR SUPPORT SELF EVALUATION FRAMEWORK - CONSULTATION

- 4.1 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.
- 4.2 The framework is currently out for consultation with Local Authorities Democratic Services Committee. It is the intention that following consultation the framework will be provided as a shared support resource to all Councils for each Council to use as appropriate.

5 . THE PROPOSED FRAMEWORK

- 5.1 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.
- 5.2 The framework would be developed according to the following principles:

1. Aims of the framework

- i. To provide assurance to councils that Councillors are provided with the support, information, guidance, and development needed to enable them to secure the best possible outcomes for their communities.
- ii. To provide an ambitious but pragmatic national framework of good practice which recognises legislative requirements, statutory and other

guidance, the expressed needs of Councillors and widely accepted examples of what works.

2. Principles for development

- i. To develop the framework collaboratively with councils, WLGA and other stakeholders to ensure that it meets needs and reflects national aspirations.
- ii. To develop a framework which works with the wider programme for improvement and self-assessment in Wales with a potential to develop as part of the peer review programme if required. Councils may decide that this self-assessment should be led by democratic services committees.
- iii. To develop a framework that reflects the needs of all Councillors regardless of political party or independent status.
- iv. To provide opportunities for practice sharing between councils.

3. Scope of the framework

The framework would cover:

- i. support and development for Councillors in the widest sense to incorporate support provided by the whole council. Including, but not limited to, for example, democratic services, legal, digital, communications, learning and development teams, and directorates in their support for scrutiny, the executive and frontline Councillors,
- ii. the needs of all Councillors before election, as new members and as experienced politicians,
- iii. all councillor roles both within the council and in the community,
- iv. the personal and 'professional' support to Councillors within the influence of councils and
- v. the expectations placed on councils, officers, and Councillors themselves.

4. Context

The framework will take account of, for example: the [Local Government and Elections \(Wales\) Act 2021](#), the [Electoral Administration and Reform White Paper](#), the [WLGA Exit Surveys](#), the [WG survey of councillors](#), the [Civility in public life initiative](#), the [WG Guidance for Principal Councils and the emerging local government improvement and self-assessment framework](#).

- 5.3 The framework below is based on the proposed aims and principles and offered as a starting point for discussions between all stakeholders. Councils are invited to comment on the suitability of the framework as a shared, national foundation document that councils can use to develop their own approach to self-assessment recognising their local needs and priorities.

Democracy	Outcomes sought: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People are encouraged and enabled to stand for office. • Councillors understand their role and undertake it effectively and ethically. • Councillors can participate equally in council business. • Councillors are provided with the support, information, and resources they need. • Councillors represent the diversity of the people they serve. • Councillors are safe and protected from harm.
Theme	Questions to ask
Candidates and prospective candidates	<p>Does the council provide comprehensive information to prospective and official candidates about the role of the councillor, the council and any associated responsibilities and benefits?</p> <p>Are the approaches to the outreach to and information for prospective candidates made according to the need to encourage diversity in candidates and informed by the council's Diversity Declaration?</p> <p>Does the council signpost prospective candidates to information provided by the WG, WLGA, Electoral Commission and other organisations providing information for candidates?</p> <p>Do Councillors, the council and local parties promote fair and respectful campaigning initiatives?</p> <p>Are prospective candidates informed about support for standing such as the Access to Elected Office fund?</p> <p>Are prospective candidates informed of the expectations placed on them to take part in induction and continuing professional development some of which will be mandatory?</p>
Councillors understand their role, responsibilities, and accountabilities.	<p>Are all Councillors, when elected or when being selected for a specialist position, provided with information and guidance about all aspects of their role?</p> <p>Are all members provided with a competency framework to understand the skills and knowledge required of councillors?</p> <p>Have role descriptions (see WLGA models for examples) been formally adopted by the council and agreed by individual councillors?</p> <p>Have councillors serving on outside bodies been provided with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • guidance on their role and responsibilities, • legal information such as their accountabilities and interests, • an explanation of the expectations placed on them by their nominating council, • requirements for communication with and reporting back from the outside body?

Standards of conduct	<p>Do all councillors understand their responsibilities in adhering to the local code of conduct? Have they received local guidance and any information provided by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales?</p> <p>Do standards committees and chairs understand their particular roles and responsibilities?</p> <p>Do political group leaders promote and maintain high standards of conduct and cooperate with the standards committee?</p> <p>Have all councillors formally committed to undertake all aspects of their role with civility and respect towards each other, the public and officers in all settings and media?</p> <p>Are instances of bullying, harassment and intimidation dealt with quickly and effectively?</p>
The constitution	<p>Do all councillors understand the constitution including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the roles, responsibilities, and limits to the roles of committees, • the role of individual councillors and officers, • councillor /officer protocols, • meeting practice, • standing orders, • rules of debate, • public engagement, • roles on the council where councillor training is deemed mandatory?
Officer support	<p>Does every committee, panel, forum etc. have an appropriate level of officer support?</p> <p>Are councillors supported adequately in their collaborative and joint work with other councils or organisations, for example on corporate joint committees?</p> <p>Are councillors supported in their community and case work?</p> <p>Are all councillors provided with the information and research they are entitled to according to the requirements of the statutory guidance issued under section 8 (1A) of the Local Government Wales Measure 2011.</p> <p>i.e. All councillors are proactively and also in response to specific requests, provided with information, data, briefing and training relating to their decision making, committee work and community and casework.</p> <p>This service is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provided equitably to all members according to a published protocol which includes standards and response times, • exclusive of information for party political use, • provided confidentially where necessary and with due regard to data protection and other information law, • undertaken by the council or external agencies, • proportionate and provided within available resources. <p>Democratic services committees ensure that the service is effective and adequately resourced.</p>

	<p>Do overview and scrutiny committees have dedicated support from officers who can provide impartial research, support, and advice?</p> <p>Has the nature of any support information including research services has been clearly publicised and explained to all councillors?</p>
Equality of access	<p>Are the arrangements made for the business of the council flexible and do they enable councillors to participate fully regardless of personal circumstances?</p> <p>Do meeting times, modes and venues reflect the expressed needs of councillors as closely as possible?</p> <p>Do councillors have equal access to meetings regardless of any protected characteristics?</p> <p>Do the arrangements for multi-location meetings meet the needs of councillors?</p> <p>Are councillors and other meeting participants able to use both Welsh and English in meetings?</p> <p>Do council recess times reflect the needs of councillors with, for example, caring responsibilities?</p> <p>Are job share arrangements for cabinet members supported so that the workload is clear and appropriate?</p> <p>Are occasional physical spaces available for informal meetings on request?</p>
Support for councillors' rights, safety, and wellbeing	<p>Are councillors provided with guidance on their rights and benefits. For example, salaries, family absence, job sharing for members of the executive/cabinet, allowances, tax and benefits, pensions, indemnities, data protection and freedom of information?</p> <p>Are councillors actively encouraged to take up the salaries and allowances they are entitled to and is foregoing allowances and salaries actively discouraged?</p> <p>Does the council have an informal duty of care in place which demonstrates a proactive commitment to protecting councillors' health and wellbeing? Is this recorded and available for members to view? Does it set out the nature of any support available to councillors for example counselling and health checks and those responsible for helping councillors access this support?</p> <p>Are councillors provided with guidance on maintaining their wellbeing and personal safety? For example, lone working, bullying and harassment?</p> <p>Does the council act proactively to support councillors who experience bullying and harassment, including liaison with the police if appropriate?</p>
Diversity	<p>Has the council's Diversity Declaration been agreed by the Full Council? Is it monitored?</p> <p>Does the Diversity Declaration set out the actions that the council takes to ensure that councillors from underrepresented</p>

	<p>groups are actively encouraged to stand and given positions of responsibility wherever possible?</p> <p>Are councillors with special access requirements supported in their work in the council and community?</p>
Digital	<p>Have all councillors been provided with the equipment or funding to buy equipment, software, apps and connectivity required to undertake their role in the council offices, at home and when travelling in the council area?</p> <p>Does this include smart phones and laptops/tablets?</p> <p>Has full training been provided in the use of equipment and packages? Is technical support available?</p> <p>Are councillors sufficiently supported in their attendance at multilocation meetings?</p> <p>Are councillors supported in the use of social media through guidance on its use and online safety?</p>

Community	<p>Outcomes sought:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councillors lead, represent, advocate for, and enable their communities. • Councillors make sure that local resources are available and maximised. • Councillors encourage citizen participation and innovation. • Councillors work with communities to make them sustainable and resilient.
Theme	Questions to ask
Public awareness	<p>Does the council ensure that the public understand the role and responsibilities of councillors and of local MSs', MPs and community and town councillors?</p> <p>Do people know which tier of representative should be contacted for different local issues?</p> <p>Does the council publicise and promote the value of councillors to the community?</p>
Communities contacting councillors	<p>Are systems in place for local residents and community groups to contact their local ward councillor, and/or councillors with specific roles, if appropriate?</p> <p>Are these systems and standards for their application clearly articulated and publicised to the public and councillors?</p>
Surgeries and community meetings	<p>Is the support provided by the council for councillors to organise surgeries and community meetings adequate?</p> <p>Do the relevant officers attend community meetings when requested by councillors where appropriate?</p> <p>Is the extent of the support available to councillors clearly articulated to all councillors?</p>
Community engagement, leadership, and co-production	<p>Are councillors informed, supported and resourced to enable their communities to be sustainable and resilient through, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • formal and informal community consultation

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • joint working with community leaders to meet needs at a local level, • co-production with local people of policies and actions which lead to successful communities? <p>Is this support for councillors clearly articulated to all councillors?</p>
Casework support	<p>Are adequate systems in place to support councillors in their casework?</p> <p>Is this support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provided equitably to all members according to a published protocol, • exclusive of party-political activities, • provided confidentially where necessary and with due regard to data protection and other information law, • proportionate and provided within available resources. <p>Are councillors provided with guidance on managing casework. Through, for example casework management systems?</p>
Oversight and safety	<p>Does the council have clear protocols in place for protecting the personal safety and wellbeing of councillors which are clearly articulated to councillors and the public?</p> <p>Are the expectations and access of the community managed so that councillors are not contacted inappropriately?</p> <p>Are councillors provided with information and guidance on managing their relationships with the public and maintaining appropriate boundaries?</p>

Learning	Outcome sought: Councillors have the skills and knowledge to deliver what local people need.
Themes	Questions to ask
The Councillor Development Strategy	Does the council have an effective and defined approach to councillor development which includes the expressed needs of every councillor and the needs of the organisation and community?
Personal development reviews	Does the council provide all councillors with useful personal support and development reviews undertaken by people competent to do so?
A learning and development Programme.	<p>Does the council have an annual learning and development programme fully promoted to councillors?</p> <p>Can all councillors access the programme equally?</p> <p>Is the programme regularly monitored, evaluated, and updated?</p> <p>Are councillors able to identify positive outcomes from the training such as improved understanding and performance and specific outcomes for the community?</p>

Induction	Are all new or returning councillors provided with a comprehensive, prioritised, multi session, programme of induction which enables councillors to participate effectively during their first year of office?
Quality of development	Do councillors believe that the learning activities are sufficiently stimulating, relevant and provided in progressive and appropriate styles? Does the council have a systematic and effective approach to commissioning, developing, delivering, and evaluating its training and development activities?
Participation	Do councillors attend all the development opportunities that are relevant to them? Is any non-participation addressed?
Learning from others	Do councillors participate in shared regional and national development opportunities? Are councillors encouraged and supported to collaborate with other councils and national bodies to act as political peers, mentors and in networks to share approaches to the role of councillor, identify good practice and to contribute to sector led improvement?

6 POTENTIAL QUESTIONS FOR MEMBERS.

- 6.1 Do Members agree with the framework approach rather than the Charter Award?
- 6.2 Is recognising that each Council has differing resources and priorities important when assessing the support provided to Members?
- 6.3 As the framework is based on a foundation, would Members be confident that Council's would challenge themselves to develop the framework where possible to achieve a higher standard and approach, or is there scope that a Council could work to a minimum?
- 6.4 In respect of the draft framework above do Members agree with the topics selected of Democracy, Community and Learning and the theme approach within? Although it is suggested that the framework should be developed within each Council, is there a topic or theme that you feel should be included within the foundation of the framework?

7 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The framework recognises the varying priorities and resources between Councils and therefore looks to provide an equality of standard across all Authorities.

8. CONSULTATION AND INVOLVEMENT

8.1 The framework is currently out for consultation by the WLGA with comments to be fed back by the end of September

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

9.1 Any financial implications aligned to the suggestions put forward by Members will be considered as and when taken forward.

10 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 None

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.

12. CONCLUSIONS

12.1 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.

12.2 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.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

SEPTEMBER 2023

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

BACKGROUND PAPERS – none.



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

11TH SEPTEMBER 2023

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

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

JOINT REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND SERVICE DIRECTOR, DIGITAL & ICT

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The purpose of this report is to:

- 1.1 Present an updated Elected Member ICT, Internet & Email Acceptable Use Policy to Members for consideration and approval.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members of the Democratic Services Committee:

- 2.1 Review the proposed Elected Member ICT, Internet & Email Policy (Version 3) as contained in Appendix A.
- 2.2 Approve the revised Elected Member ICT, Internet & Email Acceptable Use Policy (Version 3).
- 2.3 Agree the process for Elected Members to consent to the policy, as per the 'Policy Acceptance Form' contained within Appendix IV of the policy.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 At the Democratic Service Committee held on 12th February 2018 the Committee adopted the Elected Member ICT, Internet & Email Acceptable Use Policy.
- 3.2 This policy was taken forward by all Elected Members following this decision and has continued to form part of the Member Induction Pack, with it most recently being incorporated in the induction pack following the Local Government Elections in 2022, to which all Members signed up to.
- 3.3 Due to the new ways of working due to legislation requirements and due to the covid pandemic consideration needs to be given to the current policy to ensure it is still fit for purpose and acknowledges the new ways of working.

4. ELECTED MEMBER ICT, INTERNET & EMAIL POLICY

- 4.1 More than ever, the Council interact with service users and the public through digital means. Along side interaction with Constituents, Officers and other Council Partners, Elected Members now have the opportunity to attend Council meetings through digital platforms such as zoom or Microsoft Teams.
- 4.2 The Council considers the use of ICT equipment, internet and email to be a valued asset for both staff and Elected Members to assist in undertaking their roles more effectively. Therefore equipping Elected Members with the correct ICT provisions is essential to assist them in undertaking their role.
- 4.3 All Members have been provided with laptops and mobile phones and it is Council policy to promote its proper and efficient use.
- 4.4 The current 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.
- 4.5 The overall purpose of these conditions is to:
- promote efficient and safe use of Council ICT equipment, internet and email facilities;
 - protect the Council and its users from legal action, either civil or criminal;
 - protect and safeguard information, and
 - ensure compliance with relevant legislation.
- 4.6 The policy applies to Elected Members when using Council internet and email (@rctcbc.gov.uk) facilities to conduct official Council business.
- 4.7 Elected Members are expected to comply with this policy at all times when using the Council's internet and email facilities, whether accessed locally or remotely (e.g. from a council office, Members home); and/or via any Council issued device (e.g. ipad, desktop computer, laptop, smartphone).
- 4.8 In respect of the usage of the Council mobile phone and accessing Council devices, Members are reminded that 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.
- 4.9 Members on Council provided devices are more protected from cyber attacks, and also cannot be impersonated as they are protected by the Council's cyber security technologies. For the reasons mentioned above, Members are 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.

- 4.10 The current policy is contained in Appendix A with suggested amendments (illustrated in red) incorporated to bring the policy in line with current working practices.

5 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Reviewing of the policy ensures that all Members have equal access to the appropriate ICT resources available.

6 CONSULTATION AND INVOLVEMENT

- 6.1 Discussions have been taken forward with colleagues within ICT to ensure the revisions are appropriate and reflect the cyber security requirements necessary.
- 6.2 The policy revisions have been shared with Group Leaders.

7 FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 7 There are no financial implications aligned to this report

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 None

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

- 9.1 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.
- 9.2 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.

10. CONCLUSIONS

- 10.1 Ensuring policies are reviewed and updated to reflect working practices allow Members to confidently undertake their roles in the confidence that they are working correctly and adhering to Council policy.
- 10.2 Reviewing the policy allows the Council to strengthen the cyber security arrangements in place for the protection of the Council and its Elected Members.



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

ELECTED MEMBER ICT, INTERNET & EMAIL ACCEPTABLE USE POLICY

Version 2-3.0

Document Information

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Date: TBC

Owner: Tim Jones, Service Director – Digital & ICT

Author: Louise Evans, Data Protection & Improvement Officer

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Council considers the use of ICT equipment, internet and email to be a valuable asset that if used correctly can help Elected Members ~~do~~ undertake their job more effectively. Therefore, it is Council policy to promote its proper and efficient use.

This 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 overall purpose of these conditions is to:

- promote efficient and safe use of the Council ICT equipment, internet and email facilities;
- protect the Council and its users from legal action, either civil or criminal;
- protect and safeguard information, and
- ensure compliance with relevant legislation.

All ICT Facilities provided by the Council shall remain the property of the Council and must be surrendered to the Council in the event that a Member ceases to be an Elected Member. In this event access to any Council electronic device will be suspended and terminated within ten working days.

Council provided devices will be encrypted but in the event that any equipment is lost or stolen then this must be reported to the Council's ICT Service Desk as soon as possible following discovery of the loss or theft.

Access to Council emails, Council Committee papers through Modern.Gov, Teams, Zoom, the Members Portal and other such applications can only be retrieved through Council devices.

N.B Members should seek to establish a reliable and effective internet connection when attending Council Committee meetings through the hybrid facilities and attend meetings in accordance with the requirements of the Council's Multi Location Meeting Policy.

2. SCOPE

Elected Members are likely to have three different roles:

- i. They will act as a member of the council, for example as a member of a committee
- ii. They will act as a representative of residents of their ward, for example, in
- iii. dealing with complaints
- iv. They may represent a political party, particularly at election time.

This policy applies to Elected Members when using Council ICT equipment, internet and email (@rctcbc.gov.uk) facilities to conduct official Council business – i.e. role i and ii. above.

Elected Members are expected to comply with this policy at all times when using the Council's internet and email facilities, whether accessed locally or remotely (e.g. from a council office, Members home etc); and/or via any Council issued device (e.g. ipad, desktop computer, laptop, phone).

When a Member is accessing their device outside of their usual remote location, i.e. Council office, home or work location. Elected Members should advise the Democratic Services team or the ICT Service Desk. Without such notification, the Council could block a Members access to their device, due to potential cyber security threats.

The policy does not include guidance on the acceptable use of social media such as blogs, message board, social networking (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn) and content sharing websites (e.g. Flickr, Youtube). This is covered separately under the Council's Social Media Policy (see appendix III).

ICT Facilities are provided for the sole use and benefit of Council Members and must be used primarily for Council business. Use by family / friends and the like is not permitted however family members can provide assistance to Members in the use of the system as long as the Member remains in overall control of the device and does not divulge their user name or password.

3. REASONABLE PERSONAL USE

~~Should they choose to do so,~~ Members may use Council ICT equipment, internet and email facilities when undertaking duties in relation to the roles outlined above ~~and for~~ reasonable personal use provided it:

- is used in a Members own personal time;
- does not interfere with the performance of official Council duties;
- does not take a priority over Council work responsibilities;
- does not incur expense on the Council,
- does not have a negative impact on the Council in any way, nor damage its reputation, and
- complies with the guidance set out in this and wider council policies.

Subject to this policy, personal use could include but is not solely restricted to areas such as online banking, shopping, entertainment, leisure activities or bookings, personal research. Members may also use their Council email account (@rctcbc.gov.uk) within reason, in connection with any of the above activities.

Members should note that such personal use is a privilege and not a right, which can be removed at anytime.

Any personal use is carried out at the Member's own risk and the Council does not accept responsibility or liability for loss caused as a result of use.

In the course of their duties Elected Members may store and process personal data on devices supplied by the Council. They will therefore be registered with the Information Commissioner's Office as data controllers as required by the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018.

If using Council internet and email facilities when representing a member of the constituency (role ii. above) the Member should ensure that the constituent is aware of this, and that any email exchanges are **potentially** subject to Council monitoring as outlined in Section 9.

Note: Any monitoring, review and access to such email messages sent from and received by a Member via their Council email account (@rctcbc.gov.uk) will be undertaken **strictly** to the extent permitted or as required by law, and as necessary and justifiable for legitimate Council business purposes.

4. ICT POINTS OF CONTACT

The ICT Service Desk is the first point of contact for all enquires, queries and support problems relating to Council ICT equipment, internet and email facilities and/or any other ICT issues.

ICT Service Desk hours are:

- *Monday – Thursday 08:00-17:30*
- *Friday 08:00-17:00*

Contact details are:

- *Tel: 01443 570000*
- *Email: ictservicedesk@rctcbc.gov.uk*

5. TRAINING

Members must undertake appropriate ICT, **Cyber Security** and Information Management training as part of their induction programme. **Members should always take forward any mandatory training as promoted by the Head of Democratic Services and the Service Director, Digital and ICT during their term of office.**

Additional individual training needs should be discussed with the Head of Democratic Services **or through the Member Personal Development Review.**

6. WELSH LANGUAGE ACT

Welsh is an official language in Wales and the public have a right to interact with the Council and its Members in Welsh - this includes communications sent/received via email.

To find out more about your responsibility under the Welsh Language Act please refer to the Councils 'Welsh Language Scheme' and 'Welsh Language Standards RCT'

7. INTERNET & EMAIL GENERAL RESTRICTIONS OF USE

General restrictions applicable to the use of the Council's internet and email facilities are set out in Appendix I.

8. EMAIL GOOD PRACTICE

Elected Member email 'good practice' are set out in Appendix II.

9. MONITORING, AUDIT & ENFORCEMENT

The use of Council ICT equipment, Internet and email is a valuable business tool, however, misuse of these facilities can have a negative impact on the Council and Members. Appropriate monitoring, audit and enforcement is therefore required to support proper and efficient use.

- Council issued equipment, systems and any data held on them are the property of the Council.
- The Council reserves the right to access, monitor and review any Member's use of Council computer equipment, systems, facilities and data covered by this policy (and related Information Management policies) without the additional consent being required from the Member, and to bypass any security setting that a Member may make (e.g. password) subject to the authorisation of the Council's Monitoring Officer and Service Director – Digital & ICT
- Whilst all activity is recorded (e.g. internet browser history, @rctcbc.gov.uk email traffic etc), any access to, and review of such equipment, activity and data will be undertaken **strictly** to the extent permitted or as required by law, and as necessary and justifiable for legitimate Council business purposes, audit and security, or where there is reason to believe that a breach of security or a breach of policy has occurred (see section 10).
- The Council reserves the right to make and keep copies of all information, including, but not limited to emails and data documenting the use of the internet and email systems for the purposes set out above. Members should be mindful of this when using Council computer equipment and/or systems for personal use.
- The Council reserves the right to place restrictions on the use of internet and email accounts at any time.

10. BREACH OF POLICY/ENFORCEMENT

Any Member who considers that this policy and/or any other Information Security policy has not/is not being followed are encouraged to raise the matter with the Council's Monitoring Officer (or his delegated officer) in the first instance.

Subject to the recommendation of the Councils Monitoring Officer, where there is a suspected breach this will be reported to the ICT Service Desk on the Member's behalf and an investigation will be undertaken in line with the Council's procedure for 'Investigating information security incidents and events'.

In certain circumstances an investigation may lead to a Member's ICT access privileges being revoked and possible action being taken against a Member in accordance with the Council's Members Code of Conduct

ELECTED MEMBER ICT EQUIPMENT, INTERNET & EMAIL – GENERAL RESTRICTIONS OF USE

Council ICT equipment, internet and email facilities **must not** be used for:

- Any Party political reasons or political lobbying i.e. the process of making a concerted effort designed to achieve a political result that is against Council policy or goals. This could then in turn be harmful or cause issue for the Council (role iii. above).
- Engaging in any illegal activity or accessing / storing material that is profane or obscene (pornography), that incites illegal acts, violence or discrimination towards other people (hate literature).
- Accessing/using online gambling web sites, blogs or chat rooms that are offensive, unsuitable or inappropriate to the workplace
- Engaging in inappropriate language, designated as: obscene, profane, lewd, vulgar, rude, inflammatory, threatening, or disrespectful. This applies to any public or private messages, images, audio and to any material posted on web pages. Engaging in personal attacks, including prejudicial or discriminatory to other people.
- Posting information/material that could cause damage or a danger of disruption to Council business.
- Attempting to gain unauthorised access to the internet or go beyond their authorised access. This includes attempting to log in through another person's account or accessing another person's files. Sending emails purporting to come from some other person, whether or not that person is an employee or elected Member of the Council. Making deliberate attempts to disrupt the computer system or destroy data by spreading computer viruses or by any other means. These actions are illegal.
- Harassing another person. Harassment occurs when a person engages in unwanted conduct which has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that person. If users are told by another person to stop sending them messages, they must stop. Further guidance on harassment is available through the Council's 'Dignity at Work Policy'.
- Knowingly or recklessly posting false or defamatory information about a person or organisation.
- Posting, forwarding or replying to chain letters or engaging in "spamming". (Spamming is the word used to describe the sending of annoying or unnecessary messages to a large number of people).

Members who may be required to undertake any of the prohibited actions set out above (in relation to their official Council duties) and/or require legitimate business access to internet sites that are 'blocked' by the Councils web filtering policy should discuss their requirements with the Council's Monitoring Officer.

APPENDIX II

ELECTED MEMBER COUNCIL EMAIL GOOD PRACTICE (@rctcbc.gov.uk)

1. EMAIL ACCESS

All Members are allocated a Council email account in order to conduct Council business (role i. above). The email account is in the format of: <name>@rctcbc.gov.uk.

Elected Members are **not permitted** to use any other email account e.g. a personal gmail / hotmail account etc., to conduct **Council business**.

2. EMAIL ACCOUNT SECURITY

The Council's ICT section will provide Members with a network user id and password; this also controls access to a Members email account.

Members are responsible for their individual network and email account security and must take all reasonable precautions to prevent their account from being compromised.

3. ACCESS BY OTHERS

Members must not allow another person access to their email account unless that person is an employee of the Council and has a legitimate business need to access the account (e.g. a colleague requires access to the mailbox to monitor and respond to emails in the event of the Member being on leave).

Where access by another ('authorised') person is required, this must be provided through appropriate account security permissions. Members should contact the ICT Service Desk for further advice and guidance on how to do this.

4. STAYING SAFE WHEN USING EMAIL

Malware, short for malicious software, is software or computer code that is designed to damage files or entire computer systems, steal data, or disrupt networks. Some of the most common type of malware include viruses, ransomware, spyware, worms and spam. One of the most common routes for malware to penetrate a computer or network is through email.

Whilst ICT blocks the vast majority of unwanted or spam email through its automated monitoring systems, with scams becoming more and more sophisticated it may be possible for some spam email to reach a Member's mailbox.

It is therefore important that Members are aware of the dangers, know what to look out for and know how to protect themselves when using email.



Members are required to familiarise themselves with the Councils 'Staying safe when using email' guidance which provides practical advice and information on some of the key things to look out for that act as warning signs of scams.

If a Member suspects that malware may have infected their device or the Council's network, they must take immediate action to contain the situation and prevent the malware from spreading to other devices and parts of the Council's network.

The following **immediate action** must be taken:

Step 1:	DO NOT open the attachment or click on the hyperlink.
Step 2:	If using a mobile device, disconnect it from the WIFI. If using a PC, remove the network cable from the drop point.
Step 3:	Turn off the power on the device.
Step 4:	Report the call by telephone (01443 425080) to the ICT Service Desk providing as much information as possible in particular, in relation to the last actions undertaken on the device/PC (links clicked, websites visited etc).
Step 5:	Follow the instructions given to you by the ICT Service Desk.
Step 6:	Report the matter to the Councils Monitoring Officer and/or Head of Democratic Services or a Member of the Council Business Unit.

5. EMAIL MESSAGE SECURITY

Internal emails i.e. those sent between '@rctcbc.gov.uk' addresses are transmitted within the Council's network and are therefore deemed to be secure.

External emails, sent outside the Council's network are transmitted across the open internet and could potentially be liable to interception or loss. Extra caution should be taken when transmitting personal, sensitive and/or confidential information externally in this way.

Members must ensure that email is the most appropriate method of transfer that should be used. If email is deemed the most appropriate, Members must adhere to the good practice contained within the following guide, to reduce the potential risks associated with emailing personal information i.e. the email being sent to the wrong recipient or wrong attachment being sent etc.



Further support and guidance on this is contained within Council guidance 'Appropriate Transfer of Personal Information'.

If users are required to email personal or commercially sensitive information to external recipients on a regular basis, the use of the Council's secure email facilities may be

appropriate. Members should discuss their requirements with the Head of Democratic Services.

6 EMAIL SIGNATURES

A form of good practice is to take forward bilingual signatures on each email, outlining details relating to Elected Member contact details and the Electoral ward represented. Members may wish to take forward their preferred pronouns within their signature, although this is an individual choice and preference for each Member. Guidance and support in creating an email signature can be provided to Members through contacting the Democratic Services Team.

7. EMAIL DISCLAIMER

The legal status of an email message is similar to any other form of written communication. Consequently, any e-mail message sent from a facility provided to conduct or support RCTCBC business should be considered to be an official communication from the Council.

In order to ensure that the Council is protected adequately from misuse of e-mail, all external e-mail must carry the following disclaimer which will be **added automatically** on transmission from the Council:

Croesawn ohebu yn Gymraeg a fydd gohebu yn y Gymraeg ddim yn arwain at oedi. Rhowch wybod inni beth yw'ch dewis iaith e.e. Cymraeg neu'n ddwyieithog.

Mae'r neges ar gyfer y person / pobl enwedig yn unig. Gall gynnwys gwybodaeth bersonol, sensitif neu gyfrinachol. Os nad chi yw'r person a enwyd (neu os nad oes gyda chi'r awdurdod i'w derbyn ar ran y person a enwyd) chewch chi ddim ei chopio neu'i defnyddio, neu'i datgelu i berson arall. Os ydych chi wedi derbyn y neges ar gam, rhowch wybod i'r sawl sy wedi anfon y neges ar unwaith. Mae'n bosibl y bydd holl negeseuon yn cael eu cofnodi a/neu fonitro unol â'r ddeddfwriaeth berthnasol. I ddarllen yr ymwadiad llawn, ewch i <http://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/CY/Help/TermsOfUse.aspx>

We welcome correspondence in Welsh and corresponding with us in Welsh will not lead to a delay. Let us know your language choice if Welsh or bilingual.

This transmission is intended for the named addressee(s) only and may contain personal, sensitive or confidential material and should be handled accordingly. Unless you are the named addressee (or authorised to receive it for the addressee) you may not copy or use it, or disclose it to anyone else. If you have received this transmission in error please notify the sender immediately. All traffic may be subject to recording and/or monitoring in accordance with relevant legislation For the full disclaimer please access <http://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/disclaimer>

8. EMAIL CONTENT DISCLOSURE

Email messages sent and received in relation to official Council business may be disclosed under the Data Protection Act 2018, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, or in legal proceedings in the same way as paper documents.

Members should take care with the content of email messages, as incorrect or improper statements can give rise to claims for discrimination, harassment, defamation, breach of confidentiality or breach of contract.

Members should assume that email messages may be read by others and not include anything that would offend or embarrass any reader, or themselves, if it found its way into the public domain.

Deletion from an email user's inbox/sent items etc. does not mean that an email cannot be recovered; all email messages should be treated as potentially retrievable.

9. GLOBAL/MASS EMAIL COMMUNICATIONS

In order to ensure that the Council's email system is able to perform to its optimum, Members are not permitted to use the Council's email system to send 'global' emails to mass recipients (i.e. emails to 75 recipients or more).

Should Members require a communication to be sent by email to a high volume of recipients this should be arranged via the ICT Service Desk.

Members should also take care when using the 'reply to all' feature, ensuring that only intended recipients of the email are copied in to the communication response.

10. USE OF BLIND CARBON COPY (BCC)

When sending an email to multiple recipients, the 'BCC' function must be used where there is a requirement to protect the confidentiality of a recipient's identity.

11. HOUSEKEEPING

The Council has set a limit on the size of mailboxes, which includes Inbox, Sent Items and Deleted Items. Members will receive an automated reminder as that limit is approached and unless action is taken to reduce its size, no further emails will be accepted or sent for that person until action is taken.

It is the responsibility of each Member to manage his / her mailbox. Good practice is to manage email accounts like any other filing system. Members should regularly carry out 'housekeeping' of their mailbox:

- Read and delete emails regularly.
- Keep your 'Inbox', and 'Sent' folder contents to a minimum.
- Regularly delete 'Deleted items' and associated sub-folders.

12. USE OF OUT OF OFFICE ASSISTANT

Members should use the “Out of Office Assistant” if they know they will not be able to access their mail box for a period of time.

Good practice is to explain when you will be returning to work and whom the person can contact in your absence to deal with queries.

Remember the Out of Office Assistant can be read by external organisations, so ensure your message is professional in its content and bilingual.

13. EMAIL ETIQUETTE

When creating, writing and responding to email messages, Members must be polite and use appropriate language as they would with any other form of communication such as, telephone or letter.



Members must ensure that they adhere to the Councils 'Guidance for issuing emails' which is intended to promote a consistent and professional use of email etiquette across the Council.

APPENDIX III

RELATED POLICIES & PROCEDURES

1.	<u>Investigating information security incidents & events</u>
2.	<u>Welsh Language Scheme</u>
3.	<u>Welsh Language Standards</u>
4.	<u>Dignity at Work Policy</u>
5.	<u>Staying safe when using email</u>
6.	<u>Appropriate Transfer of Personal Information</u>
7.	<u>Guidance for issuing emails</u>
8.	<u>Social Media Policy</u>

ELECTED MEMBER POLICY CONSENT FORM

Policy Name	Elected Member Internet & Email Acceptable Use Policy
Version Number	2 3.0
Date	

By signing the declaration below, I confirm that I have read and understood, and will abide by the acceptable use conditions set out in the above named policy.

Member Full Name (print)	
Member Signature	
Date	

Once signed, please return this form to the Head of Democratic Services.

Document Control

Policy	ICT
Title	Elected Member Internet & Email Acceptable Use Policy
Author	Louise Evans, Data Protection & Improvement Officer
Owner	Head of ICT
Initial Policy Launch Date	12.02.2018
Review date	This policy will be reviewed as it is deemed appropriate, but no less frequently than every 12 months.

Document Approvals

This document requires the following approvals:

1. Democratic Services Committee
2. Democratic Services
3. Information Management & Security Management Team

Version Control

Version No	Date Approved	Valid From Date	Valid To Date	Changes Made
1.0	Approved by Democratic Services Committee 12.02.2018	12.02.2018	TBC	Re-write of Corporate policy to meet Elected Member needs / requirements.
2.0	Approved by Chair and Vice Chair, Democratic Services Committee	2019		Amendments to wording; (6) Email disclaimer - removed reference to GCSX, (7) DPA 1998 to 2018. Amendments to job titles.
3.0	Reviewed by Democratic Services Committee	2023		Review of policy to ensure fit for purpose.



RHONDDA CYNON TAF

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

11th SEPTEMBER 2023

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

INFORMATION REPORT - MEMBER'S SUPPORT

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Members with a general overview of the support arrangements available to Members from the Council Business Unit.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Democratic Services Committee:
- (i) Consider the information contained within the report in respect of support arrangements.

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 During the Annual Member Survey conducted during April 2023, Members were positive in their comments upon the support provided to them by the Council Business Unit. 71% were very satisfied and 24% satisfied of the support. 4% advised that their view on the support was 'unknown' as they felt that they had not utilised the support arrangements.
- 3.3 Members feedback in respect of this question was the lack of awareness of support that was available.
- 3.4 At the Democratic Services Committee on the 5th July 2023, Members considered the Member Survey results and it was resolved that a future report on Member Support Arrangements be brought forward. In addition, information contained within would also be taken forward through a Members Briefing Session.

- 3.5 A Members Briefing Session, open to all Members of the Council is scheduled for the 13th September 2023 at 5pm. Diary markers for the session have been circulated in advance.
- 3.6 The Head of Democratic Services is always keen to improve the service and the experience of Members and always seeks feedback in how services can be improved upon for the benefit of all Members, current and future.

4 HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND THE COUNCIL BUSINESS UNIT

- 4.1 The Head of Democratic Services (HoDS), which is a statutory required post is taken forward by the Service Director, Democratic Services and Communications.
- 4.2 The HoDS is responsible for the support arrangements provided to Members, ensuring all Members, regardless of post or political background are provided with the same level of support, training and development. In addition, the HoDS will be responsible for ensuring sufficient office accommodation, resources including staffing levels and facilities are in place to support Members to undertake their role. On an annual basis the HoDS will produce a report to the Democratic Services advising, in his opinion, on the resources and support to Members. The latest report can be considered here.
- 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 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 Through the HoDS, Members are supported by a team of officers within the Council Business Unit / Member Services. The Unit supports Democratic, Scrutiny, Executive and Regulatory functions and Members' Support Services. In addition, the service leads on two Joint Scrutiny Committees. The service also supports the Council's Mayoralty, the Office of the Leader of the Council, and the Cabinet Office. Support for executive functions do not form part of the statutory responsibilities of the Head of Democratic Services of the Democratic Services Committee.

5 COUNCIL BUSINESS UNIT / MEMBER SERVICES SUPPORT AVAILABLE

COMMITTEE SUPPORT

- 5.1 The Council Business Unit is responsible for developing and supporting effective decision making. The Unit is responsible for the drafting and publication of Committee Agendas, Minutes and Decision Notices for all Committees, not including working groups. Dependent on the Committee and the topic under consideration many of the reports presented to Committee are also drafted by the Unit, which can include the drafting of Committee Annual Reports.
- 5.2 Officers within the Unit work with respective Chairs and Vice Chairs and Committee Members to develop and maintain work programmes , engaging with officers and other organisations for attendance at meetings.
- 5.3 In respect of working groups, Officers will support Members through the drafting of Terms of Reference and drafting of final report of the Working Group, assisting the working group with the production of robust recommendations, for consideration by Cabinet.
- 5.4 In line with the requirements of the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2019, the unit undertakes the support arrangements of hybrid meeting provision. This entails supporting Members through the usage of the equipment in the Council Chamber, attendance through the Zoom platform, (creation of the zoom meeting, sending through of diary markers) ensuring welsh translation are available as and when needed, taking forward the recording of meetings through the webcasting equipment and publishing committee recordings on the Council website and publishing attendance at the meetings.
- 5.5 In respect of Scrutiny Committees the Unit are responsible for supporting Members with their 'pre-meetings', which involves supporting Members with key lines of enquiry when considering the reports before them. Such support improves the effectiveness of scrutiny committees, helping members to prepare questions and assists in organisation of the formal meeting itself, through development of a consensual view regarding the outcomes and objectives of the meeting. The pre-meetings are still being developed with different approaches taken forward to suit the different styles of working of each Committee.

MEMBER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME – TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES DELIVERED UPON

- 5.6 Following any Local Government Election, or bi-election new and returning Members are provided with an induction programme to assist them in undertaking their role. The induction programme is developed by the Head of Democratic Services. Following the 2022 Local Government Elections a detailed induction programme was taken forward, details of which can be found [here](#).

- 5.7 Going forward, the Head of Democratic Services along with colleagues in the Council Business Unit have identified training support and opportunities through the Member Personal Development Review programme, which was recently undertaken with Elected Members.
- 5.8 A detailed Member Development Programme was produced and approved at the Democratic Services Committee at its meeting in July.
- 5.9 Offices within the Council Business unit under the direction of the Head of Democratic Services are ensuring that the programme is delivered upon, by arranging and facilitating the training.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT REVIEWS

- 5.10 The Head of Democratic Services along with colleagues in the Council Business Unit have undertaken Personal Development Reviews (PDR) for the majority of Members. A Personal Development Review is a way for members and the Council to mutually assess the development needs and aspirations of individual members, through a confidential setting. PDR's are not a performance appraisal of councillors. A PDR is a means of supporting and developing members' skills in areas they themselves consider need improving both individually and collectively. The process also allows opportunity for Members to discuss any other areas of concern and support outside of training.
- 5.11 All individual PDR's have been considered when preparing the Member Training Development Programme, no information from individual councillors is shared outside of the individual review that would identify an individual councillor.
- 5.12 Through the PDR process officers have been keen to stress the importance of acknowledging Members Wellbeing, highlighting the Occupational Health facility available.
- 5.13 Due to the success of the PDR process the Head of Democratic Services has offered to take forward a further 'Catch Up' session with Members to ensure Members are happy with the support and training provided and to allow for a general discussion in respect of a Members wellbeing.

MEMBER CHARTER

- 5.13 Throughout Wales, Councils are striving to provide the best possible support for their Members to enable them to meet the daily challenges faced with the number of roles required of them. Such support takes the form of skill and knowledge development, support facilities and support services.

- 5.14 To provide structure to the national programme of support, the Wales Charter for Member Support and Development was developed collaboratively by the Association, Councillors representing each of the political groups and Democratic Services officers from each Council.
- 5.15 The Charter 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. Its wide adoption has raised the overall amount and standard of support given to Councillors in Wales.
- 5.16 Rhondda Cynon Taf Council were one of the first Councils to receive the Charter in 2007. In 2010 the Council went one step further and were awarded the Advanced Charter due to the high level of support provided to Elected Members, which was renewed in 2014.
- 5.17 In addition to the above in 2013 the Council were awarded the Good Practice and Innovation Award. This award highlighted the excellent and innovative practices that the Council took forward with the Occupational Health and Wellbeing Unit with regard to Elected Member support, which demonstrated that the services and support had demonstrably improved the outcomes for the Council's Elected Members and the Council as a whole. It was established that this ongoing practice was over and above that required for the advanced level of the Wales Charter for Member Support and Development and therefore award winning. ([Council Submission](#))
- 5.18 Assessment for the Charter was a self assessment ([Self Assessment](#)) undertaken by officers within the Council Business Unit and submitted to the WLGA for review and dependant on the outcome of the review the receipt of the award. The Charter was designed to establish that an essential range of support and development arrangements for Councillors were in place.
- 5.19 Assessment for the Advanced Charter was a peer assessment including a site visit undertaken by officers, and member peers from Wales and England. The Advanced Charter was designed to recognise that the arrangements required for the Charter are working effectively.
- 5.20 The current charter requirements are under review following recent legislation changes. Once the Charter requirements are confirmed the Council, through the Head of Democratic Services will look to ensure the support arrangements in place within RCT compliment the Charter requirements.

SUPPORTING COMMUNITY AND TOWN COUNCILS

- 5.21 The Council Business Unit support RCT's Town and Community Councils through the Community Liaison Committee and the Community Councils clerks meetings.
- 5.22 Rhondda Cynon Taf Council, along with 11 Community Councils and 1 Town Council have signed up to a shared Charter, following guidance received from Welsh Government.
- 5.23 The Charter was designed to build on existing good practice and embrace the shared principles of openness, to achieve the best possible outcomes for the residents and communities of Rhondda Cynon Taf. The Charter was based on equal partnership encompassing a set of principles by which all will work together.
- 5.24 Through the Charter the Council Business Unit support the Community and Town Council through the following (This list includes but is not limited to):
- (i) Regular clerks meetings and Community Liaison Committee meetings
 - (ii) Access to Training
 - (iii) Support to meet the requirements of the Local Government and Elections Act (Wales) 2021 in respect of holding hybrid meetings.
 - (iv) Access to funding to implement hybrid meetings
 - (v) Single point of contact support

INFORMATION SHARING

- 5.25 The Head of Democratic Services considers the sharing of information to Members as an integral part of the role of the Council Business Unit, which ensures that all Members receive notification of the publication of all agenda items, Cabinet Decision Notices and the publication of Key Delegated Decisions.
- 5.26 The Unit also provides Members with a daily update providing links to Council news stories as well as latest news and statements from the Welsh Government. In addition, the weekly update provides Members with a list of the week ahead with links to forthcoming meetings as well as sharing of items specific to Members, details of decisions taken forward at meetings and also the inclusion of local events and training opportunities. When important messages need to be provided to Members in an urgent matter the Unit have undertaken messages through the instant notification messaging system. Such messages have been used in respect of inclement weather.

- 5.26 The Council Business Unit are responsible for a number of inboxes such as the Council Business Inbox and Member Services Inbox. When necessary the unit will send additional communications to Members outside of the daily update when important communications need to be taken forward.
- 5.27 The Head of Democratic Services has introduced a fortnightly update to Members in respect of open consultations, to ensure all Members have equal opportunity to take forward their view on an open consultation.
- 5.28 The Council Business Unit is responsible for the updating of information on a number of Council pages on the Council website in respect of Council Business. This includes ensuring Members profile pages are updated to ensure accurate information is available to allow members of the public to contact Elected Members. In addition, details surrounding Member Role Descriptions, Declarations of Interest , privacy notices, training and attendance logs are also updated via the unit.
- 5.29 Processing of petitions delivered to the Council are taken forward by officers within the unit and details of which are published on the Council website. Other webpage content under the management of the unit include Notice of Motion, Becoming a Councillor, Your Cabinet, Work Programmes, Scrutiny, Diversity Declaration (this list is not exhaustive).

MEMBER SERVICES / MEMBER REQUESTS

- 5.30 A large part of a Members role is dealing with queries and concerns from their constituents. It is therefore important that we provide Members with the skills and knowledge to respond to these queries and to provide a mechanism for such responses. The Council Business Unit therefore have the Member Services inbox which Members can use to forward on requests from constituents so that officers within can direct the queries to the relevant departments to seek a resolution to the query. There is also the Member Customer Care hotline that is available for Members to direct queries through to, although this is managed by colleagues in customer care.
- 5.31 With both the Member Services email address and the Member Customer Care pathway, officers will always try to provide a response to Members within an appropriate timescale.
- 5.32 It is appreciated that Members will work differently within each of their wards, dependent on the needs of their constituents. Some Members may find ward surgeries are a helpful tool to engage with their residents, walk throughs of the ward, while others may take forward virtual platforms for engagement. The Council Business unit through Member Services will always look to support Members with any needs they might have with such engagement.
- 5.33 Some Members have produced Ward Newsletters, which Member Services are able to support and assist with the production of such. Members are reminded that such Newsletters should be kept professional and in line with your role as councillor. The Newsletter can be no longer than 2 pages of A4

paper (if taken forward through Member Services for production) and we ask that a reasonable amount of copies are requested, although it is appreciated that this may differ depending on the size of the Members ward. Members are able to utilise this support up to a maximum of 3 times a year.

- 5.34 Members are also able to obtain stationery and other reasonable requirements to assist them in their role, which can be sought through Member Services. Such requests also relate to letterheads and business cards and of course any furniture or equipment provision to allow them to undertake their role from within their homes. If Members need assistance with the set up of any home office equipment the support is available through Member Services and or ICT.
- 5.35 Members are reminded that rooms are also available for them to utilise within the Council Headquarters and this provision will be continued within the new office accommodation in Llys Cadwyn.
- 5.36 It is important that all Members of the Council are afforded the opportunity to receive information to help them undertake their role and to make informed decisions. In recent years the Service has been successful in acquiring and retaining a Research facility dedicated for Members. This facility allows Members to request certain research projects to be undertaken on behalf of a Member, to assist them in Constituent queries or to strengthen their understanding of a subject area. The research provision is currently under utilised by Members and following a review of the facility, work to promote this through a dedicated webpage on the Council website and an area on the Members portal will be explored by the HoDS.

DIGITAL

- 5.37 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.
- 5.38 The Council Business Unit working with colleagues in ICT ensured that 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.
- 5.39 In line with the recommendations of the Independent Review Panel and the decision taken forward by the Democratic Services Committee, Members were also provided with a mobile telephony provision.
- 5.40 The Council Business Unit are always on hand to help any Member with any issue they maybe having of an ICT nature. If the unit are unable to provide assistance in the first instance then the query will be directed to colleagues within ICT.

- 5.41 The unit, along with colleagues in the Digital Skills Team are always happy to take forward any digital training requests by Members.
- 5.42 The unit have been heavily involved in the development of the Members Portal, a dedicated area which Members can access to assist them in their role. The Portal, is a developing system and in its current format has limited functionality although it is proposed that it will, in time, provide statistical information, compiled from the Council's customer reporting system ('The CRM'). Information on reported matters, such as dog fouling or pot-holes, will be compiled on a ward by ward basis, alongside information on the resolution of these complaints. The portal will also provide information on the latest business of the council being considered and matters such as planning applications which relate to the respective Members electoral division. Training on recent developments to the Portal will look to be undertaken to Members in the Autumn by the Unit and through colleagues in the Digital Skills team.
- 5.43 The Head of Democratic is always looking to improve the service for Members and to encompass new ways of working to assist Members. Going forward the Unit will be looking at developing digital voting technology.

MEMBERS WELLBEING / SAFETY

- 5.44 The welfare and mental health of Members is crucially important and Members need to be aware of the support that is available to them if they wish to utilise through the Council's Occupational Health service. Members should contact the Head of Democratic Services or Officers within the Council Business Unit who can refer a Member to the service.
- 5.45 In addition to the above the Council Business Unit have provided notification through the Council Business Units weekly update of the Care First Lifestyle scheme.
- 5.46 The scheme is available free of charge, offering immediate information, answers and advice on a range of workplace and personal issues. Care First Lifestyle is an online solution provided by Care First. All access is confidential, providing:
- Phone Counselling
 - Online Counselling
 - Advice and Information Specialists
 - Free Advice
- 5.47 If Members require access to the system then it is recommended that Members contact the Council Business Unit who can direct Members as to how to access the system. Going forward it will be the intention to add this information to the Members Portal.

- 5.48 Since the covid pandemic and the provision made available through the Local Government and Elections Act, the hosting of Committee meetings through the hybrid / remote system has provided many benefits including greater flexibility with work / life balance, yet it has also produced a number of unintended consequences, such as Members feeling isolated. It was apparent that the informal, net working discussions by Members in advance of a physical meeting at the Council Chamber has sometimes been lacking.
- 5.49 To try to address this aspect the Council Business Unit have previously conducted virtual coffee mornings, allowing Members the opportunity to come together, chat and share experiences, which we hoped boosted Members wellbeing.
- 5.50 Through the Head of Democratic Services, the Council Business has reintroduced these coffee catch ups, although in a physical setting at the Council Headquarters, which have been well received by Members.

MEMBERS SAFETY

- 5.51 The Role of an Elected Member is integral to the running of the Council and the Council, through its Council Business Unit and in partnership with the Police and Community Safety team have taken forward a number of support provisions to ensure Members personal safety.
- It is important that Elected Members recognise what is unacceptable behaviour. Members throughout their term of office are likely to have to deal with unpleasant or challenging interaction on occasion with residents in their community.
- 5.52 With the rise of usage in social media platforms written and online abuse is another avenue of abuse that Elected Members are potentially subjected to. Whilst most of the aggression councillors experience will usually sit at the 'low to modest' spectrum of unacceptable behaviour, severe abuse can tip into the legal definition of violence even if no physical interaction is involved.
- 5.53 Intimidation affects people differently but can significantly affect an individual's physical and mental health. Intimidation against Elected Members whether in person or through online abuse undermines representative democracy, stifles debate and threatens the integrity of democratic structures. It can also discourage those who may wish to represent their community in being involved in the Council, potentially impairing the diversity and vibrancy of representative democracy.
- 5.54 It is important that if a Member does feel threatened or that they are subject to unacceptable behaviour that they know how to report this behaviour as potentially criminal behaviour. Members are encouraged to contact South Wales Police through the mechanisms previously advised upon and to notify

the Head of Democratic Services or Council's Monitoring Officer to see where we can assist.

- 5.55 The Council Business Unit support Members in respect of safety with social media training detailing how Members should deal with aggressive behaviours, security provision installation at home if necessary, production of lone working policy, removal of Members home address from the Council website. The Unit are currently looking to take forward the stay Safe Phone App, which will be offered to all Members.

6 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The Council Business Unit provide support for each and every Member regardless of their political grouping. The report encourages the authority to examine the way that business is conducted to ensure the equality of access and involvement of all Councillors.

7. CONSULTATION AND INVOLVEMENT

- 7.1 Members Survey 2023.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 8.1 None

9 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 None

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

- 10.1 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.

- 10.2 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.

11. CONCLUSIONS

- 11.1 The report looks to provide an overview of the support arrangements in place for each and every Member.

11.2 Members are reminded that the Head of Democratic Services runs an open door policy and if there were any support arrangements or concerns that Members wished to discuss then Members are able to do so at any point through the Municipal Year

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

SEPTEMBER 2023

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

BACKGROUND PAPERS – none.

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