



RHONDDA CYNON TAF

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

30th NOVEMBER 2020

SUFFICIENCY OF RESOURCES REPORT

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To update Members on the provision of staff, resources and accommodation available to support Members in their role as set out within the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 (the “Measure”).

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that the Democratic Services Committee:

- (i) Notes the overall support available to elected Members, as set out in section 4 of the report;
- (ii) Notes the view of the Head of Democratic Services, as set out in section 6 of the report; and
- (iii) Agrees that the levels of staff, accommodation and other resources are adequate at the present time and that a further report be presented to this Committee by the Head of Democratic Services on the sufficiency of resources for Members’ support following the Council’s Annual General Meeting in May 2021.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The Measure established the statutory requirement for Local Authorities to appoint a Democratic Services Committee to oversee the democratic services functions of the Council, ensuring that those functions are adequately resourced.

3.2 The Council’s Democratic Services Committee was established at the Council’s Annual General Meeting in May 2012.

3.3 The Council, through its Democratic Services Committee must appoint an officer as the statutory Head of Democratic Services. This Officer, who is afforded statutory protection, is responsible for determining the appropriate

level of support and facilities to enable members to effectively discharge their role as part of the democratic processes of the local authority.

- 3.4 The Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales state in their 2019-2020 Annual Report that it is the responsibility of the Council, through its Democratic Services Committee, to provide support based on an assessment of the needs of its Members.
- 3.5 In accordance with the Measure and the Committee's agreed terms of reference the Committee has a responsibility to keep under review the provision of staff, accommodation and other resources made available to the Head of Democratic Services, in order to ensure that it is adequate for the responsibilities of the post. The Head of Democratic Services in turn is responsible for making recommendations to the Committee to enable such determinations to be made.
- 3.6 At the Council's twenty third annual general meeting, Members considered the review undertaken in respect of Overview and Scrutiny 'Fit for the Future' and agreed that the Terms of Reference for each of the scrutiny Committees be reviewed and refined to assist in the WAO recommendations for the Council to 'strengthen the support for scrutiny, including scrutiny capacity and Member training'.
- 3.7 Positive changes continue to be progressed in respect of the Council's scrutiny arrangements. Despite the challenges presented by Covid, and the initial suspension of meetings during April, the Council's updated approaches to scrutiny continue to enhance committee's ownership of their work programmes.
- 3.8 The current available resources (combined with a brief synopsis of the support provided by the team within the Council Business Unit) is provided within section 4 of the report below (Democratic, Scrutiny, Executive & Regulatory and Members' Services).
- 3.9 A Survey of Members views on the support provided by the Unit was undertaken in August 2020, with the results reported to the October meet of the Democratic Services Committee. **The feedback provided a positive endorsement of the support provided to members** and demonstrated recognition of the improvements delivered over the course of the last year.

4. RESOURCES

- 4.1 The changes introduced in 2018, which significantly enhanced the support available to all members, through the amalgamation of two previously separate teams. The two previously separate team which now make-up the 'Council Business Unit' provides significantly improved capacity to support the role of non-executive members and also supported the enhancements made to democratic and scrutiny processes, which were proposed as part of the 'fit for the future' review.

- 4.2 In addition to these changes, the need to provide research support for non-executive members was identified as weakness in the provision of services provided. As a result the Head of Democratic Services secured corporate support to fund a graduate position to provide this function to non-executive members. The Graduate placement and the supporting funding concluded in August 2020. In recognition of this important addition to the service provided to non-executive members, **permanent funding support has been secured for this additional role and the graduate placement has secured this now permanent position within the service. This position will continue to provide a scrutiny research resource for Non-Executive Members to support their scrutiny responsibilities and wider elected member roles.** The Head of Democratic Services is keen to promote this research opportunity to Members and it is hoped that this will be a useful research tool for Members to utilise going forward.
- 4.3 Due to the increasing demands placed upon the unit through the recent scrutiny review and approaches identified, funding for an additional position of a 'Senior Democratic and Scrutiny Officer' was secured and advertised at the end of 2019, with the successful candidate taking up this role in early 2020. **The role has strengthened support and expertise available within the Unit** taking forward the Council's joint scrutiny approach, outcome focused approaches to scrutiny and also to further support the Community Charter agreed at the Community Liaison Committee.
- 4.4 At the end of 2019 the Head of Democratic Services approved for the Unit to utilise a further resource going forward through a second Graduate Officer. The post was moved from the Corporate Policy & engagement team, which also sits under the Head of Democratic Services under the 'Communication' service function. This additional resource has taken forward both a democratic and scrutiny role and has led on the development of the Members Portal (previously reported to Committee) and the project management of the webcasting provision. This second additional role has provided valuable support to the Unit and has provided further beneficial learning opportunities to the Graduate Officer. This graduate placement also concluded in August 2020. **As a result of the important work this role has undertaken and in addition the responsibilities generated by the creation of the Members Portal and the broadcasting of meeting, corporate funding has also been secured to make this position a permanent role.** Further responsibilities aligned to this role going forward, will be to support the Council Business Unit to plan and prepare for the 2022 local government elections. This role will be responsible for supporting greater participation and diversity in these elections and preparing induction and members training for the new Council membership.
- 4.5 The Council Business Unit has secured funding to promote engagement by 16 and 17 years old in next year's Senedd elections and preparing for the extension of the franchise to this age group for the 2022 local government elections. This role will be responsible for supporting this important work.
- 4.6 Over the last twelve months arrangements have been made to cover the responsibilities of the Committee Services Business Manager while the post

holder undertook maternity leave. I can confirm that the Committee Services Business Manager has now returned.

- 4.7 To assist the Council Business Unit in delivering support to all Members through both the medium of Welsh and English, in 2019 two dedicated translation officer posts were secured in order to provide dedicated support to the unit on behalf of Members. This arrangement provides the Unit with prompt and timely translations which importantly frees up capacity for the Council Business Unit to focus upon supporting members and scrutiny functions. **During this period however the work 'generated' by the Council Business Unit has significantly increased. It is foreseen that as the committed improvements in the democratic processes continue to be taken forward, there may be a need to create additional capacity in this area.**
- 4.8 Going forward the Council Business Unit will consist of 9 Officers and the utilisation of 2 dedicated Welsh Translation Officers from within the Translation team and will be led by the Head of Democratic Services. (One Member of the team currently also provides support to the Council's Freedom of Information Unit and splits their time roughly, dependent on workload and service demands, on a 50:50 basis)
- 4.9 As the Head of Democratic Services is also a member of the Senior Leadership Team, the role of scrutiny and the needs of members, to support the democratic functions of the councils, has been significantly enhanced as a result of the recent changes. It is important to place on record the support which has been provided corporately over the last two years, which has enabled the creation of this additional capacity for members and the resource to progress major enhancements in how services are delivered such as the Members Portal and the recent enhancement to members facilities within the chamber and the broadcasting of meetings.
- 4.10 The roll out of the Modern.Gov programme continues to provide a more efficient and consistent practice of working across the Council Business Unit, with the production of agenda's and minutes made through the Modern.Gov issue manager, again allowing for all team members to take forward publication of documents.

5. ACCOMMODATION

- 5.1 Accommodation to support the work of Members is based at the Council Headquarters, Clydach Vale and has been in place since Local Government Reorganisation in 1996. Private offices are available for political groups represented on the Council, within the Council Headquarter base, which allows Members easy access to the team within the Council Business Unit and at the same time allows Members to undertake work in privacy with the availability of telephone and IT facilities.
- 5.2 Recent changes to the political balance of the council, means that there is sufficient private office capacity for all political groups.

- 5.3 The Head of Democratic Services has identified the need to reflect on the best arrangements for members and Officers of the Council Business, post Covid-19 to build upon agile working and the progress made with virtual meeting arrangements over the last eight months. This is identified as action for the next twelve months. It is acknowledge that the balance members adopt between normal face-to-face interaction and the new agile way, will need to be appreciated and factored into future arrangement planning.
- 5.4 The Member's library situated at the Council Headquarters within Pavilion F, continues to be underutilised, and this provision may therefore need to be reviewed in the coming year alongside its longer term future being considered in light of a move to a paperless approach and the development of the Member's Portal. The Portal will provide the ability for members to access key information, documentation and publications on-line, in a digital format.
- 5.5 As part of the Council's wider Medium Term Financial Planning, the Council has sought to reduce its accommodation portfolio, focussing staff at a number key sites. This work will become even more relevant following the swift deployment and successful operation of agile working by the Council. Despite recent relocations, the space available to Members and the Council's Democratic Functions has been increased with an additional committee room which is now fully operational. With the roll out of the paperless approach to Committee meetings as supported by both the Democratic Services Committee and Council, work will need to be undertaken to ensure that the appropriate provisions are available to Members to operate in this way within the Council Chamber and other specific Committee meeting room locations – i.e. Wi-Fi / Charging points.

6. **ENHANCED MEMBER FACILITIES – CHAMBER**

- 6.1 A project to provide improved facilities in the Council Chamber and the introduction of a webcasting solution is now nearing completion. The findings of the democratic services working group into 'support provision for members' recognised the need to upgrade the facilities available for Members including ensuring that the chamber is fully DDA compliant allowing access for all.
- 6.2 The initial timeline for the project has been impacted by Covid-19 however working in conjunction with Corporate Estates we have ensured that the majority of the work has been able to be completed during the period June-November 2020. The work has included a remodel of the chamber layout making better use of the space available and providing new furniture that provides USB charging points and increased desk space. A dedicated translation booth has also been installed which will allow Translation officers better viewing of the whole chamber and a soundproof booth to enhance the audio received by Members.
- 6.3 A significant aspect of the project also included the procurement of a webcasting solution to allow us the ability to live stream meetings online. Following the completion of the procurement exercise, a leading supplier Public I Group Ltd was awarded the contract to provide hardware including audio

equipment and cameras to enable us to live stream directly from the Chamber. During the procurement exercise the Council responded to the Covid-19 pandemic and began conducting meetings virtually through the Zoom platform. It was recognised that the option to remotely access meetings may play a role for some time and therefore it is important to note that the webcasting solution provided by Public I will fully integrate with Zoom and will allow us to provide a hybrid approach for meetings whilst still being able to live stream online.

- 6.4 Installation of the equipment by Public I has been ongoing since October and is due for completion towards the end of November. Going forward, training will be required for Democratic Services officers responsible for operating the system and there will also be training available for all Members to provide the opportunity to become familiar with the process for live stream meetings. Resource will be required from Democratic Services Officers to operate the webcasting system during meetings.
- 6.5 The roll out of the service will be incremental to allow the service to become proficient in operating live stream meetings and to gain experience using the service. It is anticipated that initially the live streaming of meetings will commence with Cabinet in early 2021.

7. **VIRTUAL MEETING SUPPORT & FUTURE BROADCASTING**

- 7.1 The Council Business Unit was required to swiftly deploy virtual meeting arrangements earlier this year in response to the Coronavirus.
- 7.2 It is important to place on record the corporate support provided by the Council's ICT service to enable the Democratic services to respond to the provisions provided by **Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Meetings) (Wales) Regulations 2020**, to hold virtual meetings.
- 7.3 When the regulations were published in April 2020, Rhondda Cynon Taf, unlike many other local authorities, did not already have infrastructure available from existing web-casting facilities, as we did not at this point broadcast any formal committee meetings. Consequently, we were required to identify a preferred technical solution and facilitate the opportunity for members and officers to gain experience and become familiar with a virtual approach. For this reason, members will recall an incremental approach was adopted, which initially prioritised Cabinet, Planning and the Overview & Scrutiny Committee. To ensure a focused approach on business-critical matters, the Overview & Scrutiny committee took a Council-wide approach in this initial phase, before thematic scrutiny committees were re-introduced. To support this approach a number of addition meetings were also undertaken virtually to share information with members.
- 7.4 I can confirm that before the summer recess at the end of July, all committee functions within this local authority had resumed. This progress includes thematic scrutiny, audit, appointments, quasi-judicial & ad-hoc committee.
- 7.5 During this same period our Joint Committee arrangements for services such

as the Central South Education Consortium and the Cwm Taf Public Service Board also resumed operation. Since summer recess, the Joint Scrutiny arrangements for the Public Service Board have resumed, as has the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee, which is hosted by this local authority. Throughout this period our Community Council Liaison Committee has met virtually on a number of occasions to ensure the engagement of Town and Community Councils and our Full Council meetings have moved to a fortnightly cycle to ensure the engagement of all elected members at this challenging time for local government and public services.

- 7.6 The effort required by the Council Business Unit to achieve this progress should not be under-estimated, nor should the significant additional resource required to enable and facilitate virtual meetings and to continue supporting members through this process. **The impact live-broadcasting of meetings, following the insulation of web-casting technology and other associated services, will have upon staff resources and capacity to support members will need to be considered and reviewed. It is positive that additional capacity has also been created to support these improvements.** This Council's Head of Democratic Services, continues to raise the importance of additional resources to deliver the ambitions contained with the new Local Government Bill, through the discussions of the WLGA with Welsh Government officials.
- 7.7 The services has identified the importance of continuing the positive difference virtual arrangements have provided in terms of member attendance and engagement, and also to allow us to positively respond to the ambitions of the Welsh Government in terms of public participation and diversity within local government in Wales.

8. **MEMBERS TRAINING**

- 8.1 The Democratic Services Committee has advocated the Members' Portal and will continue to monitor its progress and roll out to all members of the Council in due course. The Portal has been developed in conjunction with the Customer Services team and Council Business Unit and will be showcased at timely intervals to members of the Democratic Services Committee who will ensure its compatibility and relevance in advance of a wider roll out.
- 8.2 In addition to its day to day functionality the Members Portal will also facilitate a comprehensive training schedule through a package of E-Learning tools which will be accessible for Members to use at their own convenience and pace. This would replace the traditional training methods which can often prove difficult for Members due to work/personal commitments. It is proposed that the training modules will be tailored to Members' needs and will be relevant to council business and monitored for its relevance and impact.
- 8.3 The results of the members' survey undertaken as part of the statutory responsibilities of the Head of Democratic Services indicated a number of areas and topics which Members wish to prioritise as E-Learning modules such as Safeguarding and Lone Working for Elected Members. Until the portal

is fully integrated E-Learning opportunities will continue to be available via the RCT Source.

- 8.4 Supporting Members through the virtual transition has been key to its successful roll out and has been progressed via a number of individual sessions addressing specific ICT related concerns and through virtual group workshops. Between the 15th May and the 25th June the Council Business Unit supported 33 individual sessions with Members and two group sessions were held on the 15th and 16th June to which all Members and Co-opted Members were invited.
- 8.5 Other virtual training opportunities have included Treasury Management (via an external facilitator offered to all Elected Members), Fundamentals Zoom Webinars (for members of the Pension Fund Committee) and a Council wide virtual briefing on the Council's Winter Maintenance Plan. The availability of specific training for newly appointed Members to the Regulatory and Scrutiny committees is ongoing and the developmental needs of the Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs is regularly reviewed. Refresher Code of Conduct training is always available to Members on a one to one basis as and when requested, with advice on hand from the Council's Monitoring Officer and Head of Democratic Services.
- 8.6 Recently, the opportunity for Members to undertake a confidential Personal Development Review (PDR) has been extended via the Group Leaders. The outcomes of the PDR's will inform the Member Development Programme (and future E-Learning modules) and can, where required, provide an understanding in matters such as corporate governance, statutory requirements and service related areas.

Information Sharing

- 8.7 Members have responded positively to the information sharing which the Council Business Unit undertakes in the form of the Members Daily Updates. The updates have been fundamental in engaging Members with headline information from the local authority, Welsh Government, Welsh Local Government Association, the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Health Board and many other key partner organisations during the Coronavirus pandemic. **This update is one which has not previously been utilised to communicate with members, however the intention is for this update to continue in more normal circumstances, to ensure members are update on key public information.**
- 8.8 Being provided with timely information is important to help Members undertake their role. The Members Portal will play a key role in providing information on the latest business of the council being considered and matters such as planning applications which relate to a specific electoral division.

- 8.9 Whilst the importance of good communication with Elected Members is paramount, particularly under virtual conditions, it is also worth emphasising that the very nature and fast-moving pace of social media can sometimes mean that it is not always possible to communicate upon a specific matter with all elected members or wider stakeholders.
- 8.10 The Council Business Unit will continue to work on the principles of good communication and provide regular updates and training opportunities to all Elected Members to maintain the effective working relationship between Corporate Officers and Members that was highlighted in the positive responses to the Members' survey.

9. HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES – OPINION

- 9.1 Whilst, being mindful of the requirements of the Measure and the recent WAO recommendations I believe as Head of Democratic Services, the recent changes that have taken place have enhanced the provision of support available to members.
- 9.2 The changes made in 2018 continue to provide greater sufficiency of resources for the Council Business Unit functions, and importantly have provided greater staff resilience and expertise with which to support Members. There is now a greater provision of support available to non-executive members than has previously been , and it is important to place on record the corporate support provided and the priority given to supporting non-executive members functions. Most importantly the current provision has provided greater capacity to support the Members' role in the governance of the Council.
- 9.3 The additional corporate support to make permanent positions within the team, from two roles supported through the graduate placements scheme will continue to provide important additional capacity and expertise. This includes making permanent the role of a dedicated scrutiny research officer. This will also provide the capacity to support planning and preparation for the 2022 elections and the support available for future Councillors.
- 9.4 The development of a Members Portal, providing a one point access point for Members to utilise will also assist Members in their role will make a positive difference to members. The corporate support to deliver this service should be noted.
- 9.5 The dedicated translation support provided to the Council Business Unit has proven to be very successful and invaluable to the service provided to Members. However consideration will need to be given in the future to further strengthen this support.
- 9.6 I believe that the changes taken forward continue to provide greater resilience within the new Council Business Unit to accommodate both staff and Members without compromising the support provided. It also provides the opportunity for more focused staff resource to support individual functions.

- 9.7 It should be noted that the resource available to non-executive members is greater than it has previously been since the inception of Rhondda Cynon Taf, demonstrating the enhanced scrutiny role now being undertaking and additional responsibilities being taken forward to support member's roles and the democratic functions of the Council.
- 9.8 As we develop our scrutiny functions and role, in-line with the recommendations of the 2019 scrutiny review, it will be necessary to continually review the level of support available to facilitate the greater influence of scrutiny and the more outcome based approach which is desired. It will also be important to build upon the positive steps being taken to support member communication.
- 9.9 The significant investment in Members' facilities as part of chamber improvements and broadcasting of meeting during this year should be positively noted. How resources and support are targeted in the future environment, potentially one with a hybrid approach will need to be considered and appropriately resourced over the next twelve months.
- 9.10 As I am also a member of the Senior Leadership Team, I will continue to champion the role of scrutiny and the needs of members, to support the democratic functions of the councils.
- 9.11 **On the basis of this detail, I am of the opinion, as the Council's statutory Head of Democratic Services, that the resources made available for members are sufficient, thanks to the additional resources secured, in response to previous determination by myself as the Proper Officer and in response to the recommendations of the Democratic Services Committee. This enhanced support continues to improve the provision, capacity and availability of support to all non-executive members.**

10. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 This report supports the need for all Members to have equal access to support regardless of political allegiance. The report encourages the authority to examine the way that business is conducted to ensure the equality of access and involvement of all people as councillors.

11. CONSULTATION

- 11.1 No consultation is required on this matter.

12. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 12.1 None.

13. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 The legal implications are set out in the report.

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

- 14.1 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.
- 14.2 Ensuring all Members are supported and have equal access to support and development links to the future generations wellbeing goals of a more equal Wales and a Wales of cohesive communities.

15. CONCLUSION

- 15.1 Through the additional resources outlined in this report I am confident that we can positively respond to future developments contained within the local government bill and plan and prepare effectively for the 2022 Local Government elections.
- 15.2 Over the course of the next twelve months the support and shape of the service will need to be considered in light of the implementation of the Members Portal and the support needed to effectively utilise the new technology now available

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

30 NOVEMBER 2020.

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

BACKGROUND PAPERS - Democratic Services – Support for Members

Freestanding Matter