



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Democratic Services Committee meeting held on Monday, 1 March 2021 at 5.00 pm.

County Borough Councillors - Democratic Services Committee Members in attendance:-

Councillor M Webber (Vice Chair)

Councillor J Bonetto	Councillor M Adams
Councillor G Caple	Councillor J Brencher
Councillor H Fychan	Councillor J Edwards
Councillor G Jones	Councillor S Rees
Councillor L Walker	Councillor S Powderhill

Officers in attendance

Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication
Mrs D Hughes, Head of Organisational Development

43 Declaration of Interest

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

44 Apologies

An apology for absence was received from County Borough Councillor K Morgan.

45 Chairman

The Vice Chair, County Borough Councillor M Webber took the opportunity to thank County Borough Councillor M Diamond for his hard work and commitments over the last 2 years in his role as the Chair of the Democratic Services Committee and on behalf of the Committee conveyed their best wishes to Councillor Diamond following his recent resignation from the Council.

46 Minutes

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 30th November 2020 as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

47 Member Training

The Head of Democratic Services referred Members to his report which provided Committee with an update in respect of Members training following the Personal Development Reviews that were undertaken during the 2019 – 2020 Municipal Year and the training to be taken forward during the 2020-2021 Municipal Year.

Members were reminded that the Personal Development Reviews were undertaken by the Head of Organisational Development or Group Leaders and that training opportunities were established for each of the Members following the review by the Head of Democratic Services and Head of Organisational Development, with such training opportunities provided through one to one engagement sessions or open training for all Members to access, dependent on the training needs.

It was advised that during the 2019 -2020 Municipal Year invites were made to each of the Group Leaders and Independent Members to meet with the Head of Democratic Services and Council Business Manager to discuss any support that the Council Business Unit could provide to Members through training opportunities with such meetings being taken forward by some Group Leaders on a quarterly basis. The Head of Democratic Services has maintained regular contact with Group Leaders on this and other member needs during the current circumstances.

The Head of Democratic Services advised that In March 2020, during the Covid pandemic Committee meetings and Members training was put on hold. During this time the Council Business Unit worked with Members and ICT to ensure Members were equipped with the correct devices to allow them to conduct their roles and support their constituents in very difficult and uncertain times. Members were referred to Appendix A of the report which outlined the one to one training through a virtual basis which was offered to all Members and Co-opted Members via the Council Business Unit. Such training allowed Members to conduct their committee responsibilities through a virtual basis.

Members were informed that the PDR process was currently being undertaken and that the outcomes of the sessions would result in a new training schedule to be taken forward to meet Members identified training needs. The Head of Democratic Services also discussed the potential re-instating of the pre-Council training opportunities through the virtual meeting platforms.

The Head of Democratic Services discussed the importance of Members welfare and mental health and the need for Members to be aware of the support that is available to them if they wish to utilise. It was suggested that a pre-council training session is taken forward on this subject in the near future. In addition, Members were advised that the Council Business Unit would be facilitating a 'virtual coffee morning' for Members, to give Members the opportunity to come together, chat and share experiences,

which is hoped will boost Members wellbeing during the covid restrictions.

Members were reminded of the developments of the Members Portal which would sit as a central area for Members to utilise with training opportunities through the form of e-learning modules being made available within this system. The Head of Democratic Services concluded his report by advising of the Members Induction programme and the work that would be undertaken prior to the 2022 Local Government Elections in this area.

The Head of Organisational Development provided members with an overview of the themes that were emanating from the PDR process commenting on the wellbeing of Members, the benefits of future hybrid meetings, an induction process for any new Member to a committee following a committee membership change and the potential for some pension / retirement investment training. The Head of Service commented on the positive feedback received from Members in respect of the support provided over the last 12 months from the Council Business Unit and ICT.

The Deputy Leader, as Member Champion for Members training spoke of the importance of ensuring all members training needs were met and welcomed the virtual coffee morning being facilitate for the benefits for all Members

Other Members of the Committee also discussed the excellent support they had received from the Council Business Unit, ICT and HR and one Member commented on the promotion of development days to future Candidates to promote the work of Councillors and the support provided to Members. The Head of Democratic Services commented on the work of the diversity in democracy working group and the work being undertaken to promote the role of a Councillor and to engage with future candidates and reduce barriers to democracy.

One Member commented on the need for training for Emergency Planning to be included in the forward work programme of training, which would be beneficial to all Members in light of recent flooding events witnessed across the County Borough. The Head of Democratic Services agreed on the importance of such training and spoke of the potential for a more interactive session with a mock 'emergency' scenario being delivered to Members.

Members commented on the pre Council training framework and the benefits this framework provided for many Members, although it was noted the need for flexibility with such training and the opportunity for all Members to receive bespoke training packages if and when needed. Members also discussed the opportunity for the training provided to Members to be made available on the Members Portal as a catalogue of information.

Discussions surrounding Members behaviour at meetings was highlighted and the Vice Chair commented on the need for all Members to treat each Member with mutual respect and the open-door policy with the Head of Democratic Services to address any Members concerns.

Members of the Committee welcomed the PDR process and the training opportunities identified following such reviews. It was commented that in respect of ICT many Members had undertaken a steep learning curve to adapt to the new ways of working but had felt supported with the transition.

It was suggested that for the benefit of new Members a simple guide on some of the work and practicalities of the work undertaken by Members would serve as a valuable tool, to assist Members in their new role.

It was discussed that a training session on unconscious bias would prove valuable to Members and again aspects of promoting the training opportunities to new Members / candidates and the benefits of hybrid meetings to promote the diversity agenda. The Head of Democratic Services again referenced the ongoing work of the diversity working group and the need to overcome all potential barriers.

Following detailed discussions it was **RESOLVED**:

- I. To note the training and development activities undertaken by Members outlined within section 3 of the report.
- II. To note the specific one to one training provided to all Members through the Council Business Unit in respect of virtual meetings to allow Members to continue their role through the Covid pandemic.
- III. To agree to re-commence the Pre-Council Training opportunities through the virtual meeting arrangements with the inclusion of Emergency planning and unconscious bias on the forward work programme.

48 Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021

The Head of Democratic Services provided Members with an overview of the duties placed upon the Authority through the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, which received royal assent on the 20th January 2021. Members were advised that in accordance with the requirements of the Act, a number of actions would need to be addressed to ensure RCT comply with the legislative requirements.

The Head of Democratic Services provided Members with a general overview of the Act which will change the way the Council operate across a range of areas from electoral reform, public participation, governance and performance management, democratic processes and stronger working arrangements with Town and Community Councils.

It was proposed that a report on the Act be provided at the next meeting

of the Committee for Members to discuss in detail the requirements of the Act.

Members **RESOLVED** to note the update and to receive a report on the Act at the next meeting of the Committee.

49 Lead Members and Officers for Member Support and Development Network

The Head of Democratic Services and the Vice Chair provided Members with details of the recent Lead Members and Officers for Member Support and Development Network.

Members were advised that discussions at the network focussed across an updated competency framework for councillors, which seeks to

- help candidates recognise the skills they need for the role and will be able to develop as a councillor.
- help members identify their learning and development needs and prepare for personal development interviews.
- help councils provide relevant councillor learning and development

The network also focussed on the new induction curriculum for members following the 2022 elections, with the Network suggesting that additional weight should be given to chairing multi-location meetings, public accountability including annual reporting, digital safeguarding, and the increased responsibility on Group Leaders for member behaviour. Also, that introduction to committee work should take place before the first meeting of the committee

To conclude the network meeting Members briefly discussed remote meetings, working and training, sharing experiences and plans.

The Vice Chair spoke of the inhouse training modules facilitated by the Council to support Members and the use of the WLGA to also support this training.

Members **RESOLVED** to note the update.

This meeting closed at 6.00 pm

**Cllr M Webber
Vice Chairman.**