



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

6th September 2021

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

MEMBER SURVEY – CONSIDERATION OF FEEDBACK

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of the report is to provide Members with the feedback obtained from the Member survey undertaken during April - May 2021 which has captured information about the support provided to Members to assist them in undertaking their role and identify areas where the Council Business Unit can improve or change current arrangements.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that the Democratic Services Committee:

- (i) Consider the feedback obtained from the Member Survey 2020/2021 as outlined within the report; and
- (ii) Progress any actions deemed appropriate as a result of the feedback and comments received as outlined within the report.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 As part of the statutory responsibilities of the Head of Democratic Services, the Council is required to survey the views of its Members in relation to the calendar of meetings and the provision of support and resources to non-executive members.

3.2 In view of this requirement the Head of Democratic Services in consultation with the Democratic Services Committee has made arrangements for a bilingual survey to be conducted on an annual basis. In March 2019 Members of the Committee agreed to the drafting of the survey, which has been adapted over the last 2 years to recognise changes in working practices, such as virtual meetings and going forward hybrid meetings.

4. MEMBERS SURVEY 2021

- 4.1 In advance of the 2021/2022 Municipal Year the Council sought the views of Members in areas not statutorily required to ensure that the Council continues to provide the appropriate support to all Elected Members.
- 4.2 The outcome of the survey has informed the calendar of meetings that was agreed at the Council AGM held on the 26th May 2021 and has enabled the Chairs to make an informed decision in respect of timing of future meetings.
- 4.3 The survey was initially conducted in April 2021 but due to an initial low response the deadline was extended for another week into May to ensure all Elected Members had the opportunity to submit their views.
- 4.4 Overall 42 Members completed the questionnaire, general responses to the survey were positive with further details listed below.

5. TIMINGS OF MEETINGS

- 5.1 Members were asked to provide their preferences of start times for each of the virtual Council Committees as well as indicate their preference for Committee start times (if different) when taken forward through a hybrid approach. In general the consensus is for the start times to remain at 5pm.
- 5.2 This view was considered at the Council AGM on the 26th May 2021 during consideration of the Calendar of Meetings when Members agreed that in the majority Committees would commence at 5pm.
 - In total over 80% of the respondents cited 5.00pm as their preferred starting time for Council (83%) and other committees currently commencing at 5pm. In respect of Planning and Development Committee Members preference indicated the continuation of the 3pm Committee meeting start time (58%).
- 5.3 Some additional individual comments in respect of start times of Committees were noted by responders:
 - Councillors who work, and members of the public who are interested in attending meetings, would have difficulty attending meetings that are earlier than 5pm;
 - 4pm start times would be better in winter months
 - Due to the 5pm start times, many of these meetings finish very late, therefore earlier start times of 4.30pm would be better suited.
 - full council should be held at 6PM - this would allow councillors with 9-5 jobs to attend, without the need for their employer to give time off. Though the legislation is there to allow 'reasonable time off' to do council duties, this is very subjective

- The Committee times are fair and work well, particularly as Cttees are currently undertaken virtually and the times will benefit hybrid working
- On balance continuation of current starting times seems appropriate and beneficial to Councillors with other employment
- 5pm is better for councillors who are working and those with childcare commitments / grandparents' duties

6 HYBRID MEETINGS

- 6.1 As Members will be aware the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021, provides the opportunity to take forward hybrid meetings, which will provide further flexibility to Members in undertaking their role. 100% of respondents advised that they were confident in accessing virtual Council meetings through the zoom platform. This is a positive position and thanks are given to all Members for embracing this new way of working. This also holds the Council in good stead for moving forward to Hybrid meetings
- 6.2 During the survey 88% of members indicated that a hybrid approach would be their preferred choice.
- 6.3 83% of Members agreed that some of the Council's smaller Committees should continue as standalone virtual Committees, a decision recommended by the Democratic Services Committee during its meeting in May. (Subject to caveat arrangements)
- 6.4 The survey also took the opportunity to discuss Members approaches and conduct within virtual meetings, highlighting the future intention of live streaming meetings. 91% of Members responded that a Members etiquette policy was needed going forward to ensure appropriate conduct at all committee meetings was adhered to.
- 6.5 Some specific comments in respect of Hybrid meetings were made by individual members:
- A hybrid approach would be welcome especially for those Councillors who have a longer travel time to the Council Offices than others.
 - It offers flexibility and is more inclusive to all members.
 - Should try to go back to hold meetings in the chamber as soon as possible - I think there is more debate and discussion during them, and also allow members to socialise more (within and outside the chamber)
 - it is very useful and beneficial to be able to access Council meetings when away from home.
 - At home you are not always able to control your surroundings especially with young children around
 - With the use of IT - hybrid meetings will be of benefit to Elected Members
 - It is important that protocols are in place to ensure that Members' etiquette and behaviour is acceptable and appropriate.
 - The present Council Constitution, Standing Orders and the Code of Conduct should be robust enough to ensure that appropriate conduct is observed by

every Member - Training on the Code of Conduct and the Constitution is the cornerstone so that Members are properly equipped to engage appropriately

- I don't believe the overarching members code of conduct was written with virtual/hybrid meetings in mind and a more specific policy would be appropriate so all members know precisely what is expected of them during meetings.

6.6 In respect of the above comments, Democratic Services Committee have always championed the flexibility hybrid meetings will bring to Members, allowing Members to choose the meeting setting and environment more suitable to them. A phased approach to Hybrid meetings is now being taken forward, with a positive hybrid meeting of the Cabinet taken forward during July 2021 and demonstrations of the system conducted for Overview & Scrutiny Members, Planning and Development Committee Members and a demonstration scheduled for the Democratic Services Committee in September.

6.7 The introduction of a multi location policy has been recommended by Welsh Government following the introduction of hybrid meetings. It has been suggested that this policy is taken forward by the Democratic Services Committee once guidance by Welsh Government is provided in respect of hybrid meetings.

7. COUNCIL BUSINESS UNIT

7.1 Members were complimentary of the support provided to Members by the Council Business Unit with 100% of responses advising they were happy with the support provided with committee support, scrutiny, general member support provision, Member updates and research facilities.

7.2 When asked to provide further comments in respect of the support provision and to identify any gaps, the following comments were made:-

- An updated Officer Directory; and
- Useful to have advance notice of ward related events

7.3 In respect of the above comments, the following actions are proposed:-

- Publish an up to date Office information to reflect recent key officer changes, potentially as part of a future members portal;
- To assess the possibility of Member updates and ward specific updates through the Members Portal, linking with the Council website Newsfeed.

8. MEMBERS' PORTAL

8.1 During the 2020- 2021 Municipal Year the Democratic Services Committee received a demonstration of the Members Portal. A demonstration was also provided at a recent 'coffee morning session' which all Members were invited to attend. These demonstrations provided Members with the opportunity to gain an understanding of its functionality and purpose as well as view its

potential to provide future E-Learning training modules and become a 'One Stop Shop' for logging enquiries and reporting issues in respect of Members' individual wards.

- 8.2 In time, the portal can be further developed to incorporate interactive sections and offer a whole host of information, messages and links to other useful sites. The Democratic Services Committee will continue to be instrumental in progressing the Members' Portal and will receive regular demonstrations of the function as it develops.
- 8.3 The survey asked Members for any further developments they may like to see being taken forward within the Members Portal.
- Council Directory
 - Progress of issues raised by Members on behalf of Constituents
 - Planned road closure information

9. MEMBER TRAINING

- 9.1 Members training needs are actioned following a Members PDR with the Head of Organisational Development, discussions at Committee settings or through requests to the Head of Democratic Services. Members PDRs are taken forward in confidence with the training requirements alone shared with the Head of Democratic Services to allow these requests to be actioned.
- 9.2 90% of respondents advised that they were content with the level of training provided.
- 9.3 Further comments in respect of training included:
- The provision of bespoke training should be highlighted to Members
 - List of training opportunities available should be shared with Members
 - Verifiable training to ensure attendees learn from training sessions
- 9.4 Members are reminded that any training requested will always be accommodated, whether through a bespoke package of training provided by an external provider, a one-to-one session with an internal officer of the Council or general training provision with invites to all Members.
- 9.5 A full package of training opportunities is provided to Members during a Members induction and work is currently being undertaken in respect of this package of training for the forthcoming elections, to ensure it is fit for purpose. This information will be shared with the Committee and Group Leaders. However, regular promotion of this information will be taken forward throughout each Municipal year following Member's suggestions.

10 MEMBERS FACILITIES

- 10.1 Members were asked to comment on the facilities made available to Members within the Council Headquarters in respect of meeting room provision, private

rooms for each political party and the Council Chamber. The majority of Members responded that they were satisfied with the facilities at the Council Headquarters. Private meeting rooms for each of the political groups and independent Member are available in Block C of the Pavilions for Members to utilise.

- 10.2 As Members will be aware work has been undertaken over recent months in the Council Chamber for the provision of the webcasting facility. The webcasting provision has progressed to assist the digitalisation of the Chamber, to support the broadcasting of committees in the future, and to continue delivering the Council's 'paper-light approach' to committee management and importantly to enhance access opportunities.
- 10.3 Members were also supportive of reviewing the current arrangements following the covid pandemic and the positive move to virtual working.

11 ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

- 11.1 Members were surveyed on what additional requirements they would like to receive from Democratic Services over the next 12 months to enable them to continue to carry out their roles effectively. Many Members commented that they are content with the level of support they currently receive. Below are a few additional comments which will be addressed by the Council Business Unit team:-

- Research opportunities to support projects
- Pre-retirement course for those choosing not to re-stand for Election
- Appropriate support with any changing technology developments.

- 11.2 In response to the above, Members are reminded that a dedicated Member's research resource is available for Members to access within the Council Business unit following successful funding gained by the Head of Democratic Services. This research opportunity has been promoted through the Democratic Services Committee, Scrutiny Committees and through the Members updates. Going forward further promotion of this important research opportunity will be promoted through the Members Portal and the Council website and Members are encouraged to utilise the research tool whenever necessary.

- 11.3 Pre-retirement courses have been arranged and will be taken forward in September, with an open invite to all Members.

- 11.4 As with virtual working any changes to digital technology for Members will be fully supported by the Council Business Unit and colleagues within ICT.

12. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 The results of the survey allow for each Member to submit their comments and suggestions into the work of the Council Business Unit and provide valuable insight into the needs and support for each Member. The report encourages the

authority to examine the way that business is conducted to ensure the equality of access and involvement of all Councillors.

13. CONSULTATION

13.1 Members Survey 2020 - 2021.

14. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

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

15 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

15.1 None

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

16.1 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.

16.2 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.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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BACKGROUND PAPERS – none.

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