



RHONDDA CYNON TAF

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

27 SEPTEMBER 2021

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

**COMMUNITY LIAISON COMMITTEE - SUPPORT PROVIDED TO RCT'S TOWN
AND COMMUNITY COUNCIL'S**

**REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND
COMMUNICATION**

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Members with an update in respect of the ongoing work of the Council Business Unit in supporting RCT's Town and Community Councils through the Community Liaison Committee and the Community Councils clerks meetings.

1.2 The support includes but is not limited to:

- Regular clerks meetings and Community Liaison Committee meetings
- Access to Training
- Support to meet the requirements of the Local Government and Elections Act (Wales) 2021 in respect of holding hybrid meetings.
- Access to funding to implement hybrid meetings
- Single point of contact support

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that the Committee

- (i) Notes the updates provided within the report and the support provided to Community and Town Council through the Community Liaison Committee and the Council Business Unit;
- (ii) Provides any suggestions for strengthening communications between RCTCBC and Town and Community Councils

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 At the Council Meeting held on the 12th January, 2011, Rhondda Cynon Taf Council agreed to the establishment of a Community Liaison Committee

comprising of Cabinet Members and Chairs of the Town and Community Council's within RCT to following the publication of the "A Shared Community – Relationship Building and Charters for Unitary Authorities and Community and Town Councils" which strongly recommended that formal relationships be established between such Councils.

- 3.2 The Community Liaison Committee is chaired by the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Council Business, County Borough M Webber and is supported by the Council's Head of Democratic Services
- 3.3 To progress this formal relationship Rhondda Cynon Taf Council, along with 11 Community Councils and 1 Town Council signed up to a shared Charter, following guidance received from Welsh Government.
- 3.4 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.
- 3.5 In 2019 it was recognised that with the updates in legislation and as a form of good practice, revisions needed to be made to the 2011 Charter to incorporate the principles and wellbeing goals of the Well Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act.
- 3.6 A revised Charter was circulated to all Community and Town Councils earlier that year as a platform for discussion. Since the initial draft further amendments were made to the Charter to further strengthen the document, illustrating the work already being taken forward in line with the Future Generations goals and five ways of working and to reflect the working relationship between each of its members.
- 3.7 Assisting in these revisions the Chair of the Community Liaison Committee along with the Head of Democratic Services met with members from each of the Town and Community Councils to discuss strengthening partnership arrangements and support. 10 Town and Community Councils have signed up to the Charter and further strengthen the collaborative arrangements between the Council and the Town and Community councils of RCT for the benefit of its residents. Ynysybwl Community Council have not committed to the signing of the Charter.
- 3.8 To further strengthen the collaborative work and as part of the revised Charter In September 2019 it was agreed that a dedicated single point of contact for Community Council clerks and their members be introduced to enable a clear two-way communication and to ensure they can raise matters with the Council outside of normal communications channels available.
- 3.9 The Council recognises this role as important in resolving matters which may not have been sufficiently addressed through normal channels or require specific assistance.

- 3.10 In December 2019 the Council Business Unit appointed an additional member of staff, within the Democratic Services team, who holds the responsibility of the role of single point of contact and liaison officer with Town and Community Councils in Rhondda Cynon Taf. This includes the servicing of the Community Liaison Committee and holding regular Clerks meetings.
- 3.11 Communications between Community Councils and the Council Business Unit has remained frequent throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Where meetings would have taken place in person previously, these have continued on a virtual basis.

4. **CURRENT POSITION**

- 4.1 Since the appointment of the Community Council Liaison Officer, a Community Council Clerks network was established, with regular clerks meetings taking place. These have continued on a regular basis throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The meetings provide an opportunity for the Town and Community Council Clerks to come together to discuss common issues and to seek advice and guidance from the Service Director Democratic Services and Communications and the Community Council Liaison Officer.
- 4.2 In addition to the Clerks meetings, the [Community Liaison Committee](#) has continued to meet throughout the pandemic, with the [Local Government and Elections \(Wales\) Act 2021](#) giving the Committee the ability to meet virtually.
- 4.3 The Service Director Democratic Services has attended all meetings and provides the members with regular service area updates, in particular where national guidance and legislation has an impact on Community Councils.
- 4.4 As well as being kept up to date on matters, members of the Community Liaison Committee are also consulted on a number of issues that affect their Communities and residents including:
- The Councils Diversity in Democracy Agenda, including appointing a Community Council representative to the Working Group
 - Budget Consultations
 - Reimbursement of Costs of Care (by the Independent Remuneration Panel)
 - Implementation of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill 2021 (now enacted)

4.5 **LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND ELECTIONS (WALES) ACT 2021**

- 4.6 The Community Liaison Committee and the Clerks meetings have been a vital source of information sharing for the Town and Community Councils, in particular to the clerks in supporting them to implement the regulations in the

Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 in relation to developing a hybrid model for their Council meetings.

- 4.7 The Community Council Liaison Officer attended a meeting of Llantrisant Community Council at their Council offices together with a member of the ICT department to see first-hand how the Community Councils were currently operating and the challenges they face to meet the regulations of the Act.
- 4.8 Officers observed the set-up of the meeting, the suitability of meeting venue, reliability of the WIFI connectivity and the undertaking of the Council meeting using video conferencing software and a laptop, web cam, projector and screen.
- 4.9 Following this meeting the ICT officer was able to draw up a list of recommended equipment and software for Community Councils to explore and present to their Councils to determine their own requirements to enable their Councils to develop and implement hybrid meetings. The list included equipment and software to suit varying Council budgets and dependent on the number of members expected to join their meetings.
- 4.10 A hybrid Clerks meeting was held the following week in the Councils newly refurbished Council Chamber. Two clerks attended the meeting in the chamber whilst others joined the meeting online. The clerks were presented with the list of recommended equipment and were also able to utilise the expertise of the ICT Officer who was also in attendance at the meeting. The clerks were also offered the opportunity to attend a number of the Councils offices that had been refurbished and set up to hold multi-location meetings with the Councils ICT Officer.
- 4.11 The Council Business Unit were also recently successful in a funding bid to the Digital Democracy Fund as reported in agenda item 5 to support a digital framework to assist in the delivery of virtual and hybrid meetings for Town and Community Councils. Expressions of interest to access the funding were sought from Community Councils and following a positive response this will be distributed to them in the Autumn.

4.12 FURTHER SUPPORT

- 4.13 Ongoing support, advice and training is continuously offered to the Town and Community Councils through the clerks who have been provided with a dedicated email address and phone number to contact the Community Council Liaison officer. Some of the support provided to the Community Councils is detailed below:
- Communications with latest COVID-19 guidance and how this impacts Community Councils such as reopening of their Community Halls, completing risk assessments, essential works during periods of national lockdown and reopening offices.

- Support with recruitment including providing model job descriptions, team structures and conducting interviews. As an interim measure, clerk support was provided to one Community Council until a successful recruitment process was undertaken (October – June 2021).
- Escalation of queries to relevant teams/ departments
- Access to the Councils design teams to support in the promotion of Community Council events
- Support in the resolution of complaints/ disputes

4.14 **TRAINING**

4.15 Following feedback from the clerks meetings, a number of training opportunities including training sessions and various materials have been provided to them that is detailed below:

- Providing support, guidance and training manuals on the operation of ZOOM to enable Community Councils to undertake hybrid meetings. This included a series of meetings demonstrating its functions to ensure Clerks were able to run their meetings efficiently.
- Providing access to RCT’s internal training modules on “the source”
- Two training sessions on how to use Microsoft Teams
- Access to the Councils wellbeing and occupational health teams

4.16 It is planned that with the forthcoming elections in May 2022 that the Community Liaison Committee will be consulted on a proposed programme of training for new and existing members which will be offered and rolled out to support Community Councillors in their role in the Community.

5 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 There are no Equality or Diversity implications aligned to this report

6. **CONSULTATION**

As part of each item various consultation meetings have taken place with Members / Officers and are advised upon within the report.

7. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)**

7.1 None.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 None

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

9.1 Working in partnership with the Town and Community Council's within Rhondda Cynon Taf links with the three priorities within the Corporate plan of People, Economy and Place, as it will help people and Communities to help themselves and assists in building a sustainable Rhondda Cynon Taf.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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27 SEPTEMBER 2021

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES