



## **RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**20<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2021**

### **COUNCIL**

#### **HYBRID MEETINGS – REVIEW OF PROGRESS TO DATE**

#### **REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, DEMOCRATIC SERVICES & COMMUNICATION.**

#### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

The purpose of the report is to provide Members with details of the meetings undertaken during July – September through hybrid webcasting arrangements and to provide the opportunity for council to be updated future arrangements for implementation supported by the Democratic Services Committee.

#### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1 It is recommended that Council:

- (i) Note the further progress made with the phased roll out approach to hybrid meetings and detailed within section 3 of the report.

#### **3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 At the Council meeting on the 30<sup>th</sup> June, Members considered a report in respect of the introduction arrangements to enable the broadcasting of committee meetings and the ability to operate through a hybrid approach.
- 3.2 Within this report, Members were provided with a proposed roll out programme for the introduction of such meetings
- 3.3 Through discussions at Council and within the Democratic Services Committee meetings, Members have positively supported the arrangements discussed in respect of a phased roll out of the hybrid approach with a series of mock demonstration meetings in advance.
- 3.4 Most recently the Democratic Services considered proposals for the future roll-out of hybrid meetings at its meeting on the [6<sup>th</sup> September 2021](#).

#### **4 HYBRID MEETINGS**

- 4.1 During the months of July and September the following mock demonstration meetings were undertaken:

- 12<sup>th</sup> July – Cabinet
- 19<sup>th</sup> July – Overview & Scrutiny Committee
- 24<sup>th</sup> August – Planning & Development Committee
- 6<sup>th</sup> September - Democratic Services Committee

- 4.2 On the 20<sup>th</sup> July the Cabinet undertook its first hybrid meeting. This meeting was also webcast although not live streamed. Since this date, all meetings of the Cabinet have been taken forward using the hybrid setting and webcast through the new recording system.
- 4.3 On the 6<sup>th</sup> September the Democratic Services Committee undertook its first hybrid meeting and have undertaken its most recent meeting using the hybrid set up.
- 4.4 The Overview & Scrutiny Committee undertook its first hybrid meeting on the 12<sup>th</sup> October.
- 4.5 A link to the recordings for these meetings can be found here. [English](#) / [Welsh](#)

## **5 REVIEW OF THE PROGRESS MADE TO DATE**

- 5.1 At both the Cabinet and Democratic Services Hybrid meetings and the demonstration meetings there was a good mix between those Members that attended the meeting virtually, through the zoom platform and those that physically attended the Chamber, adhering to the strict covid safety measures in place.
- 5.2 In preparation for all meetings the following requirements were necessary
- a) Due to Covid Safety Measures, Member and Officer attendance at the Council Chamber was required in advance to ensure no more than the allowed 26 capacity was adhered to.
  - b) A seating plan was provided in advance to Members and Officers to ensure social distancing requirements and to assist attendees when entering the Chamber with the one-way system. This seating plan was also clearly provided on the door of the Chamber.
  - c) The Circulation of a Committee meeting Covid Safety Measure document was provided to ensure all Members and Officers were aware of the safety measures needed to be undertaken prior / during and after the meeting.
  - d) Lateral Flow tests were provided to all Committee Members and Officers for them to utilise if they so wished.
  - e) A Video tutorial of the new Chamber layout was circulated to all Committee Members to again assist them with the new layout prior to the meeting. <https://youtu.be/5uqVqGxDv9g>

- f) Instruction sheet in respect of the new Microphone system was provided for those Members in attendance at the Chamber
  - g) Zoom invite details as per the usual process to those Members attending virtually.
- 5.3 The Mock demonstration meetings allowed Members to utilise the new equipment available in the Chamber, for all Members to see how best to engage in the meetings, for Chairs to gain a better understanding of how to ensure all Members felt included in the meeting, for all Members to test the translation system and for general comments and feedback to be provided.
- 5.4 As illustrated in the webcast hybrid meeting of the Cabinet and Democratic Services Committee, the recording allowed interaction with the agenda items discussed at the meeting and highlighted the names of the Members and officers that spoke during the meeting.
- 5.5 The feedback obtained by Members during the demonstration meetings and the hybrid committee meetings themselves were reported to the Democratic Services Committee. Officers from the Council Business Unit have taken forward discussions with Public I and are confident that the issues identified will be resolved.
- 5.6 The Council Business Unit are also developing advice and protocols to support good practice moving forward with the implementation of these new working arrangements.
- 5.7 During the August recess the mutli location policy guidance note has been published by Welsh Government and the Council are confident that the practices taken forward adhere to the guidance provided.

## **6 FUTURE ARRANGEMENTS**

- 6.1 Following the review of the work undertaken to date in respect of hybrid meetings by the Democratic Services Committee, it is considered that the Council is in a positive place going forward and has made steady progress with the introduction of the hybrid meeting approach. Member engagement has been instrumental to the progress made to date, allowing where possible equipment to be refined to suit the Committees needs.
- 6.2 It is important that this momentum of the introduction of hybrid meetings is not lost and it is proposed that the planned phased roll out as previously suggested is continued, subject to the delay to the roll out of Planning and Development Committee, due to the special requirements needed for the Committee to undertake each meeting - presentation sharing / public speakers and to allow both Members and Officers to become comfortable with the new way of working. At each point, the familiarisation of members and their confidence in conducting their role through a hybrid approach should remain the determining factor for confirming progress to a formal committee meeting under these new arrangements.

- 6.3 The resource implications on the Council Business unit to support hybrid meetings has been noted and further supports the need for the incremental approach to the roll out of hybrid meetings to continue as planned.
- 6.4 Voting arrangements will continue to be explored in advance of facilitating a full Council meeting, where an agreed approach will need to be arrived at to secure the smooth running of this meeting.
- 6.5 In respect of the covid safety measures in place within the Council Chamber and the limited capacity it is suggested that the Council continue a cautious approach with the easing of restrictions from Welsh Government. The Council will still therefore continue to promote the covid safety measures in place which include the reduced capacity in the Council Chamber and the confirmed attendance arrangements in advance of meetings to ensure that these measures are adhered too.
- 6.6 The proposed roll out of hybrid meetings will now include the following Committees, taking forward a combination of scrutiny, regulatory and governance themed committees and a revised schedule is listed below:

<b>Next Steps</b>	<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Scheduled</b>	<b>Progress:</b>
<b>Briefing on new arrangements to Cabinet members and officers</b>	To familiarise Cabinet & SLT with the new operation arrangements for webcast and hybrid meetings	Late June/early July	Complete
<b>Briefing on the new arrangements to members of the Democratic Services Committee (DSC)</b>	To familiarise the DSC with the new operation arrangements for webcast and hybrid meetings	September	completed
<b>Briefing on new arrangements to Overview &amp; Scrutiny Committee (O&amp;S) members</b>	To familiarise O&S members with the new operation arrangements for webcast and hybrid meetings	July	Complete
<b>Broadcast meeting of Cabinet</b>	Utilise the Public-I infrastructure to webcast a Cabinet meeting including hybrid attendance	July	Complete
<b>Briefing on new arrangements to Planning &amp; Development (P&amp;D) Committee members</b>	To familiarise P&D members with the new operation arrangements for webcast and hybrid meetings	August	Complete
<b>Broadcast meeting of Democratic</b>	Utilise the Public-I infrastructure to	September	Complete

<b>Services Committee (DSC)</b>	webcast a DSC meeting including the ability for hybrid attendance		
<b>Review progress to date</b>	<b>DSC to review progress and feedback from members</b>	<b>September</b>	<b>Complete</b>
<b>Broadcast meeting of Overview &amp; Scrutiny</b>	Utilise the Public-I infrastructure to webcast a O&S meeting including the ability for hybrid attendance	September	Complete
<b>Broadcast meeting of Planning &amp; Development Committee</b>	Utilise the Public-I infrastructure to webcasting a P&D meeting including the ability for hybrid attendance	September	<b>Delayed</b> Potential Date 4 <sup>th</sup> November (this date will be reviewed and brought forward if appropriate)
<b>FUTURE PLANNED ROLL OUT</b>			
<b>Briefing on new arrangements to Children &amp; Young People Scrutiny Committee</b>	To familiarise C&YP members with the new operation arrangements for webcast and hybrid meetings	November	11 <sup>th</sup> November
<b>Broadcast meeting of Children &amp; Young People Scrutiny Committee</b>	Utilise the Public-I infrastructure to webcast a C&YP meeting including the ability for hybrid attendance	November	11 <sup>th</sup> November
<b>Briefing on new arrangements to Audit &amp; Governance Committee</b>	To familiarise A&G members with the new operation arrangements for webcast and hybrid meetings	November	Date to be Confirmed
<b>Broadcast meeting of Audit &amp; Governance Committee</b>	Utilise the Public-I infrastructure to webcast a A&G meeting including the ability for hybrid attendance	December	6 <sup>th</sup> December 2021
<b>Briefing on new arrangements to Standards Committee</b>	To familiarise Standards members with the new operation arrangements for webcast and hybrid meetings	November	3 <sup>rd</sup> November 2021

<b>Broadcast meeting of Standards Committee</b>	Utilise the Public-I infrastructure to webcast a A&G meeting including the ability for hybrid attendance	November	19 <sup>th</sup> November 2021
<b>Briefing on new arrangements to Appeals Committee</b>	To familiarise Appeal Committee members with the new operation arrangements for webcast and hybrid meetings	October	18 <sup>th</sup> & 22 <sup>nd</sup> October
<b>Hybrid meeting of Appeals Committee</b>	Utilise the Public-I infrastructure to run a hybrid meeting of the Appeals Committee	October	22 <sup>nd</sup> October
<b>Wider briefing on new arrangements to all members, including committee by committee engagement</b>	Subject to review To familiarise members not already briefed on new ways of working (including specific session for Chairs & Vice-Chairs)	November	
<b>Wider committee roll-out</b>	Subject to review work towards Implementing webcasting and hybrid arrangements across all functions	December / January	

6.7 It is proposed that the due to overlapping of Memberships on certain Committees the future roll out of the system will be a smooth and quicker process as Members will have potentially already used the system when undertaking their role on a different Committee.

6.8 The roll out will look to run a meeting of Council by the New Year. This will involve further planning due to the reduced capacity seating arrangements in the Council Chamber and discussions will be taken forward with Group Leaders in respect of this matter.

## 7. LIVE STREAMING

7.1 As previously reported the Cabinet Democratic Services Committee and most recently Overview & Scrutiny Committee have successfully undertaken hybrid meetings and will continue to take forward this approach to meetings.

7.2 The recordings of the meetings are pushed live on the same day (following morning if an evening meeting) with a dual feed (one English one welsh) being made available in the public domain. The recording provides interactive features for viewers providing information regarding the agenda item being discussed and the Members and Officer contributing to the discussions.

- 7.3 The next step will be to sync the meetings with the Modern Gov system so that the public will be provided with even further information in respect of a meeting including access to the agenda link (agenda and report information) and a Members Modern Gov Profile.
- 7.4 Currently through the work of the Council Business Unit details of those Members and officers contributing through the zoom platform are added retrospectively to the recordings.
- 7.5 Going forward, it will be the intention that the Cabinet meeting in October is live streamed to the public and that the same live streaming will be taken forward for the Democratic Services Committee in November.
- 7.6 This roll out will continue with other Committees as the phased roll out of hybrid meetings is progressed.
- 7.7 In light of the above we will need to monitor the usage and hours used for webcasting and live streaming to ensure that we remain within the contracted hours taken forward with Public I.

## **8 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY**

- 8.1 The provision of a webcasting service would promote democracy and encourage public engagement. By removing potential barriers for members of the public to attend meetings at the chamber, webcasting opens up opportunities for wider public engagement and transparency. The aspect of hybrid and virtual meetings also promotes the democracy agenda, allowing the undertaking of Council business by Members to be more accessible and manageable.

## **9 WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 The developments within the Council Chamber and webcasting infrastructure will further strengthen the welsh language within the democratic process. Members of the public will be able to live stream meetings or watch pre-recorded meetings and choose the floor language used. ie When Members / Officers converse at a meeting through the medium of welsh they can either choose to hear these discussions in welsh or the alternative of the English translation, which is currently unavailable through the current zoom recordings.

## **10 CONSULTATION**

- 10.1 The opportunities offered by web-casting have been considered by members as part of the business of full Council, Cabinet, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, the Corporate Governance and Constitution Committee, formal meetings of Chairs & Vice-Chairs.

- 10.2 Promoting public engagement in the democratic processes, including webcasting, has also been discussed in the recently introduced meeting between the Chief Executive and Political Group Leaders, which the Head of Democratic Services attends.

## **11 FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)**

- 11.1 The associated funding to deliver these improvements were included as part of the Council's 2020/21 Budget, following support provided previously by the Democratic Services Committee. Additional funding has also been sought from Welsh Government in respect of further advancements with webcasting equipment as outlined within the report.

## **12 LINKS TO CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT.**

- 12.1 The provision of webcasting would link to the Corporate Plan priorities with particular reference to 'living within our means' and an 'efficient and effective Council', ensuring transparency with our decision making process for the benefits of our residents.
- 12.2 Ensuring that there are greater opportunities for public engagement through webcasting links to the Wellbeing of Future Generations goals of a more equal Wales and a Wales of cohesive communities. This proposal would further support the ability of this council to involve communities in key decisions.

## **13 CONCLUSION**

- 13.1 Through the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 Councils will be legally required to webcast meetings to strengthen local democracy and encourage public participation.
- 13.2 The provision of webcasting, has received cross-party support in the Council for the reasons set out, in particular for supporting positive engagement with the public going forward.
- 13.3 The Council has made good progress with the introduction of hybrid meetings in a short period of time. It is proposed that this progress is maintained through the phased roll out approach previously agreed by the Committee.



**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

**AS AMENDED BY**

**THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985**

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**20<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2021**

**REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES**

**BACKGROUND PAPERS – none.**