



**RHONDDA CYNON TAF**

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**22nd SEPTEMBER 2022**

**DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**MEMBER SURVEY – CONSIDERATION OF FEEDBACK**

**REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES**

**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Members with the feedback obtained from the Member survey undertaken in June 2022, following the Local Government Elections, regarding the timing and frequency of Council meetings.
- 1.2 In accordance with Section 6 of the Local Government Measure 2011, and 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.
- 1.3 In addition, the survey captured some initial responses about the support provided to Members during their Induction programme to assist them in undertaking their role as newly elected Members (and those returning Members) with the aim of identifying 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 2022 as outlined within the report;
  - (ii) Progress any actions deemed appropriate as a result of the feedback and comments received as outlined within the report; and
  - (iii) Note and agree that simultaneous translation will only be provided at those committees where the membership includes Welsh speaking Members (and where advance notice of a public speaker wishing to converse in Welsh has been given) (as set out in section 9 of 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 few years to recognise changes in working practices, such as hybrid meetings. The previous Democratic Services Committee, agreed to this broader survey, to support service improvement going forward. Such elements are not part of any statutory requirements.

### **4. MEMBERS SURVEY 2022**

- 4.1 Following the Local Government Elections, 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 informed the calendar of meetings that was agreed at the Council meeting held on the 6<sup>th</sup> July 2022 (following consideration of a draft calendar of meetings at the Council AGM in May 2022) and has enabled the Chairs to make an informed decision in respect of timing of future meetings.
- 4.3 The survey was conducted in June 2022 and overall, 43% Members completed the questionnaire. More detail has been given to the specific areas surveyed below.

### **5. TIMINGS OF MEETINGS**

- 5.1 Members were asked to provide their preference for Committee start times for when taken forward through a hybrid approach.
- 5.2 This view was considered at the Council AGM on the 25<sup>th</sup> May 2022 during consideration of the Calendar of Meetings when Members agreed that in the majority, committees would commence at 5pm as evidenced below:
- In total over 55% of the respondents cited 5.00pm as their preferred starting time for Council meetings. In respect of other key committees currently with a 5pm start time such as Licensing Committee, Scrutiny Committees and Democratic Services Committee, the majority of Members indicated the continuation of the 5pm Committee meeting start time.
- 5.3 With regards to the Planning & Development Committee, of those that responded and are members of the committee, 46% stated that they are

happy with the current start time. It should be noted that the majority of the committee members survey supported the proposed time.

- 5.4 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 2021. (Subject to caveat arrangements)
- 5.5 Some additional individual comments in respect of start times of Committees were noted by responders:
- *Council need to recognise that some Cllrs have work and family commitments. Cabinet meetings for instance held during the middle of the day is not really acceptable. Every effort should be made to be as inclusive as possible;*
  - *Start time preferences take into account enabling members who work plus members of the public to attend*
  - *There is no option for 3.00 p.m. which is the current time for Planning and Development Committee. This would be my preference.*

## **6 HYBRID MEETINGS**

- 6.1 As reported to Council in July 2022, the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 places a requirement on the Council that meetings take place on a multi-location basis. Members are therefore able to join virtually through the Council's Zoom platform or attend in person at the Council Chamber.
- 6.2 When asked about their preference for attending in person or online, Members responded as follows:
- 86% of Members stated that they prefer to attend physically in the Council chamber and in doing so 97% of Members were happy with the level of support they had received to date to enable them to use the technology in the Council chamber;
  - 14% of Members prefer to join virtually and 94% of those Members were content with the level of support available to enable them to join a meeting virtually
- 6.3 With regards to accessing agendas and reports in advance of the Committees it was recorded that 87% of Members are happy to receive meeting reports through Modern.Gov which is a good reflection of the support and training Members received during their induction programme.
- 6.4 The Democratic Services Committee have always championed the flexibility that comes with the hybrid meetings, allowing Members to choose the meeting setting and environment more suitable to them. In keeping with the previously successful phased approach to Hybrid meetings, which was rolled

out to all Members on an incremental basis, the same will apply to the introduction of the electronic voting system.

- 6.5 The voting app button will provide transparency with decision making and a clear record of votes undertaken within our committee settings and will also provide a publicly accessible record of individual members voting and support the smooth transaction of business. (A report on the roll-out of this function is provided at agenda item 5).

## **7. COUNCIL BUSINESS UNIT**

- 7.1 Members were positive in their comments upon the support provided to them by the Council Business Unit. The response was a unanimous 100% of Members advising they were happy with the support provided by the Unit both in terms of general support provisions to perform their role and in also terms of the advice and support provided at committee meetings. They felt that all responses to Members' queries were both quick and effective.
- 7.2 This response demonstrates that the current level of support and resources remains sufficient; it also demonstrates the need to maintain this positive level of support to newly elected Members post-election.
- 7.3 When asked whether Members were content with the level of information circulated to them such as the daily/weekly updates and consultation information in relation to Welsh Government and RCT services, 97% of Members responded favourably. Notwithstanding this response, the Head of Democratic Services recognises that further improvement is required in this area.

## **8. MEMBER INDUCTION & TRAINING**

- 8.1 Following the recent Local Government Elections, a full programme of training opportunities was provided to newly elected and returning Members which included a number of mandatory training sessions such as:

- How the Council works
- Democratic processes
- Rules of proceedings
- Code of Conduct training
- Meeting participation

General and bespoke training sessions, which were either delivered through external providers such as the WLGA, James Button (Licensing) or internally with Council Officers:

- Understanding Local Government Finance\*
- Elected Members Pension Scheme
- Corporate Parenting and Safeguarding
- Planning and Development
- Licensing

- Members Safety
- Information Management
- Scrutiny Questioning Skills
- Scrutiny Charing Skills
- Accessing the Members Portal
- Welsh Language Skills
- Equality and Diversity\*

\*Both training sessions will be held in September 2022

- 8.2 These training sessions were undertaken both virtually and through the hybrid approach and at various times to accommodate Members with their personal and business commitments. All power point slides/handouts were disseminated following the training sessions and in cases where Members were unable to attend, individual 1-1 sessions were arranged. It is the intention that all recordings and training materials will be published on the Members Portal within the next few weeks.
- 8.3 Feedback forms were circulated to Members following the sessions in order to fully evaluate them, a process which will assist the Council Business Unit to understand how effective the training sessions have been as well as to identify any gaps in learning.
- 8.4 Members were also surveyed on their recent comprehensive Induction Programme to ascertain the relevance/length/content of the sessions and where, if any, improvements can be made for future induction training programmes. Overall, 87% of Members said they were satisfied with the delivery, timings and content of the training with 13% of Members stating that they wished to highlight some specific issues for further consideration such as:
- *Too many {sessions} together in a week, needs to be more spaced out as Members who are employed find it difficult to attend;*
  - *Again, maybe look at the timings of the training so everyone has a chance to attend, maybe one day time and then in the late afternoon.*
- 8.5 Over the coming months every Member will be given the opportunity to have a Personal Development Review (PDR) and any training needs will be actioned following the review conducted by the Head of Democratic Services (or by the Group Leaders if requested). Members' PDRs are taken forward in confidence with the training requirements alone shared with the appropriate service area to allow these requests to be actioned.
- 8.6 Members are reminded that any training requested, either through the PDR's or through Democratic Services 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 of the Council.

## **9 WELSH LANGUAGE IN MEETINGS**

- 9.1 In order to ensure that the Council's commitment to promoting and facilitating the Welsh language continues, Members were surveyed on their language preference for correspondence and for the purposes of conducting meetings through their preferred language. 90% stated that English is their preferred language with 10% preferring to converse/receive information through the medium of Welsh.
- 9.2 The existing council chamber conferencing system, which includes simultaneous interpretation and webcasting, currently promotes the use of the Welsh language at every opportunity and has successfully embraced the simultaneous translation facility across its webcasting and virtual meetings to support and promote the Welsh language for both our Elected Members and public speakers.
- 9.3 The survey results have shown that in order to directly support our Welsh speaking Members in meetings, the simultaneous Welsh translation service would be better used specifically for those committees where the membership includes Welsh speaking Members. This will also be offered where Democratic Services has been informed in advance of any public speakers wishing to converse through the medium of Welsh.
- 9.4 This will mean that the Council's commitment to providing the simultaneous translation facility for those Members who have indicated that they wish to converse through the medium of Welsh in a committee setting, will remain unchanged and Members will continue to experience the same high-level service. The Head of Democratic Services is seeking to discuss these amendments with Group Leaders.
- 9.5 The survey also revealed that 16% of Members are currently learning Welsh. In order to promote the Welsh language and increase the confidence of new learners, the Council Business Unit in conjunction with Welsh Language Services will be offering all Members the opportunity to undertake bespoke and dedicated Elected Member Welsh classes. Information on these free sessions led by the Council's Welsh Language Tutor will be circulated in September 2022.

## **10. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 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.

## **11. CONSULTATION AND INVOLVEMENT**

- 11.1 Members Survey 2022.

**12. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)**

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

**13 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 13.1 None

**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 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.**