



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

SCRUTINY CHAIRS & VICE CHAIRS MEETING

UPDATE REPORT

8th FEBRUARY 2023

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES & COMMUNICATIONS

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs with a general update in respect of the provisions and support available to scrutiny Members to assist them in undertaking their role.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Scrutiny Chairs & Vice Chairs:

- 2.1 Consider and comment on the information contained within the report; and
- 2.2 Agree to take forward the Chair's Blogs on the Council website, starting with the Blog of the Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee in the first instance for the 2022/23 Municipal year;
- 2.3 Confirm agreement of the hybrid meeting arrangements sets out in section 6, as part of the revised Multi-location meeting policy, shortly to be determined by the Democratic Services Committee.

3. SCRUTINY CHAIRS BLOGS

- 3.1 The Council's scrutiny webpages are a dedicated platform for the scrutiny business of the Council and contain relevant information relating to the scrutiny committees, work programmes and annual reports. The pages are revised and maintained by the Council Business Unit to ensure they are current and engage with residents.

- 3.2 As undertaken in previous years, it is the intention to re-commence the Scrutiny blogs, with a blog provided from each of the Scrutiny Chairs. The blogs provide a valuable yet informal opportunity to promote the work of each of the scrutiny committees to local residents in plain language and in an informative way. The Blogs will reflect the huge volume of scrutiny undertaken this year and ahead of the Scrutiny annual report. It will be an opportune time to promote the work of the scrutiny committees.
- 3.3 Should the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice agree to reintroduce the Chairs' Blogs, it is proposed that the sequence commence with the Blog of the Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, as the overarching Scrutiny Committee.
- 3.4 The scrutiny web pages also provide a platform for the both the Cwm Taf Public Service Board Joint Scrutiny Committee and the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal Joint Scrutiny Committee, which are both supported by RCT. It is important that such pages are made available to demonstrate the work undertaken by the scrutiny committees in holding the Boards / Cabinet to account.

4. RESEARCH PROVISION

- 4.1 Members will be aware that Local Authority provides a scrutiny research resource for all Elected Members in order to support their scrutiny responsibilities and wider elected member roles. Members are reminded to utilise this support provision whenever needed, as independent research can assist in populating scrutiny work programmes or support scrutiny working groups.
- 4.2 The facility is able to provide research and provide statistical data, historical information, charts, policies or background material at the request of Elected Members. Data can be provided to use in meetings or presentations. **For any research requirements please contact** Scrutiny@rhondda-cynon-taff.gov.uk

5 OPEN CONSULTATIONS

- 5.1 For Members' information the open consultations will now be circulated on a two-weekly cycle, in place of a monthly cycle, to better capture the relevant consultations for Scrutiny Committees and ensure that Members have the opportunity to feed into them as an individual or as a whole committee as appropriate.
- 5.2 The open consultations will be circulated to all Members and include those from Welsh Government and RCT Council and will continue to be highlighted on the Scrutiny agendas at every meeting, offering Members the opportunity to raise any queries or questions in respect of the information.

6 HYBRID/VIRTUAL MEETINGS

- 6.1 In accordance with the requirements of the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act the Council's webcasting of meetings has been in place for some time and all Scrutiny Committees are offered on this basis subject to the Chair's requirements. It remains the decision of the Chair, in consultation with the Head of Democratic Services, as to whether the meeting will be held on a hybrid basis or solely as a virtual meeting. This direction is taken by the Scrutiny support officers and calendar meetings disseminated accordingly.
- 6.2 On occasion, and when it is clear that there is no appetite from Members to attend the Chamber, and with less than 3 Members attending physically, the meeting will be moved to a virtual platform only. This decision will be initiated by the Service Director, Democratic Services in consultation with the Chairs and Vice Chairs and will be taken as quickly as possible to provide sufficient notice to Members, Officers and external stakeholders
- 6.3 The requirement for at least 3 Members to be in attendance in the chamber for the meeting to continue as a hybrid arrangement will be confirmed in the Council's Multi-Location Meeting Policy which will be presented to the Democratic Services Committee in due course. The policy also sets out other virtual etiquette requirements such as keeping cameras on throughout the meeting and using an appropriate background and not from a vehicle or a similar location which may impact on sound and vision.
- 6.4 Following endorsement from the Democratic Services Committee, the policy will be adopted and will support Members' expectations and engagement during the meeting.

7 SCRUTINY PRE-MEETINGS

- 7.1 As highlighted in the Scrutiny training for Chairs and Vice Chairs, which formed part of the Member Induction process, pre meetings were heralded as a form of good practice for the scrutiny committees. They can assist to ensure the Committee is prepared, ensure they have the necessary information to hand and understand their role. The pre meeting can also ensure a good questioning strategy is in place, avoiding any duplication of questions and enabling every member of scrutiny to have their say. This is an important role for both Chair and Vice Chair.
- 7.2 The Scrutiny pre meetings have been in place since the Council AGM with a view that they will be reviewed at the end of the municipal year to assess their effectiveness and impact. Each Committee will have gained a different experience from their pre meetings but most with the view that it provides time for the committee to prepare its questioning strategy for the meeting ahead to determine what information they need and what outcome they desire.
- 7.3 As the scrutiny committees are adapting to their new Chairs, Vice Chairs and membership, it is hoped that these will continue as a form of good practice and an opportunity for the Chair and Vice Chair to engage with their committee members and that each committee will find its most appropriate format in terms of timings and style of pre meeting.

8. CABINET/SCRUTINY ENGAGEMENT

- 8.1 In order to progress better engagement, challenge and information sharing it is proposed that the Cabinet/Scrutiny engagement sessions are implemented. This dialogue will create more opportunity for scrutiny to have a wider understanding in terms of future business and priorities to be considered in the short, medium and longer term.
- 8.2 Notwithstanding the Council's ongoing commitment to improve the scrutiny function, inviting the relevant Cabinet Members to attend the scrutiny committees will provide Scrutiny Members with the opportunity to challenge the Executive, as they provide further details relating to the potential issues facing the Council's services, as well as the opportunities currently being pursued.
- 8.3 It is important that these opportunities involve an element of challenge regarding any arising matters or issues relating to the portfolio the Cabinet Member is responsible for and to ensure that the appropriate mechanisms are in place to effectively scrutinise the Executive.

9. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no Equality and Diversity implications arising from this report and no Equality Impact Assessment is deemed necessary for the purposes of this report.

10. CONSULTATION

- 10.1 Not applicable.

11. FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 There are no financial implications as a result of the recommendations set out in the report.

12. LINKS TO THE COUNCILS CORPORATE PLAN AND FUTURE GENERATIONS – SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

- 12.1 The updates contained within the report will strengthen the Council's consideration and scrutiny of its work, through 'the lens of the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations Act'. These arrangements will be embedded into the business of the Council as set out in the Policy Statement agreed by Cabinet on [2 November 2016](#).
- 12.2 The proposals outlined within the report will work to ensure a sustainable and robust scrutiny structure is in place which will effectively challenge policy decisions taken forward.

