



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE
Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Democratic Services Committee held on Thursday, 22
September 2022 at 5.00 pm.

County Borough Councillors - Democratic Services Committee Members in attendance:-

Councillor W Jones (Chair)

Councillor M Webber	Councillor J Bonetto
Councillor S J Davies	Councillor A J Ellis
Councillor S Hickman	Councillor S Morgans
Councillor S Powderhill	Councillor B Stephens
Councillor S Trask	Councillor J Turner
Councillor K Webb	

Officers in attendance:-

Mr C Hanagan, Service Director Democratic Services & Communications

1 Welcome & Apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the Democratic Services Committee of the new Municipal Year.

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors L Addiscott, R Evans, G Jones and C Preedy.

2 Declaration of Interest

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, there were no declarations made pertaining to the agenda.

3 Minutes & Matters Arising

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 3rd March 2022 an accurate reflection of the meeting.

4 Terms of Reference

The Head of Democratic Services provided Members with a PowerPoint presentation outlining the terms of reference of the Democratic Services Committee, its functions, its increased membership, which reflects the importance of the committee and also the work to be taken forward over the Municipal Year, to assist new Members, post Local Government Election.

Members were reminded of the statutory responsibilities of the Committee including the appointment of the Head of Democratic Services to ensure the support and advice is provided to all Elected Members. Also, the need to review the support and resources available to non-executive members of the council. The Committee is also responsible for ensuring personal development and training opportunities for Members over the next five years.

The Head of Democratic Services referenced some of the key aspects of work that the Committee has previously been involved with, to champion the needs of all Members and all associated matters such as consideration of the IRP annual report and its focus on diversity and participation. When considering the year ahead, the Head of Democratic Services referred to the sufficiency of resources report and assessing the effectiveness of the Member induction programme and ongoing training arrangements for new and returning Members in addition to phase two of the training provision.

The Chair and Vice Chair both commented on the year ahead and how they intended to work together for the wellbeing of all Elected Members. Many Members praised the support provided by the Council Business Unit particularly during the Member induction period following the Local Government Elections.

The Chair welcomed the overview of the role of the Committee, and it was **RESOLVED** to acknowledge the contents of the presentation.

5 Draft Work Programme 2022 - 2023

The Head of Democratic Services presented the draft work programme for the Municipal Year 2022/23 and sought Members' approval for the items contained within.

Members considered the relevance of the items listed and commented on the importance of assessing the effectiveness of the Fair and Respectful campaign pledge post-election in a subsequent meeting of the Democratic Services Committee.

Members **RESOLVED** to approve the work programme for the 2022-23 Municipal Year subject to correcting the spelling mistake 'draft' listed under the November 2022 section.

6 Modern.Gov App- Voting Button

The Head of Democratic Services presented his report which provided Members with details of the Modern.Gov in-app voting system and in addition, an update on the intention to roll out the app. Members were advised that as the webcasting and hybrid approach has been successfully embedded into the Council's democratic process it is considered timely to roll out the voting app which will enhance the Council's voting process and ensure that a more sophisticated method of recording votes is established for both virtual and physical attendance.

The Head of Democratic Services emphasised the need to ensure that all Members are confident with the technology before the app is used in a multi meeting environment and advised that an incremental and phased roll out (as detailed within the timeline set out at section 4 of the report) would be undertaken before a review within the next few months by the Democratic Services Committee. He advised that it was important to proceed at the pace of those Members least familiar with digital technology to ensure the smooth

running of the process.

The Head of Democratic Services advised that further to inclusion of the in-app voting arrangements in the Council's Constitution in 2021 housekeeping arrangements would need to be developed for each meeting. For example, in the Senedd, proceedings are paused to undertake the vote and re convened in public session to announce the outcome of the vote which may assist with a clear and definitive process. He added that the Democratic Services Committee would continue to receive updates and progress reports on the webcasting of hybrid meetings as well as the in-app voting system before undertaking the latter at a meeting of full Council.

In conclusion, the Head of Democratic Services commented that the Modern.Gov in-app voting system will enable a clear and concise recording of Members' voting preferences and support the transparency of the voting process.

Further to Members' consideration, it was proposed by the Vice Chair that an additional recommendation should be included to reflect that appropriate training and support is provided to all Members (and on a one-to-one basis if needed) during the roll out as appropriate.

It was **RESOLVED** to:

1. Acknowledge the progress made (following the demonstration to Committee Members);
2. Agree the phased roll out approach to the voting app as detailed within section 4 of the report; and
3. Ensure that appropriate training and support is provided to all Members (and on a one-to-one basis if necessary) during the incremental roll out.

7 Members' Survey Results

The Head of Democratic Services provided Members with the feedback obtained from the Member Survey undertaken in line with Section 6 of the Local Government Measure 2011 as amended within the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021 and presented an opportunity to gain a broader understanding of the requirements and experiences of Members at this stage.

Members were reminded that the survey results on the timings of meetings have been determined and although the feedback is not binding, it is a useful consideration for the Committee Chairs when discussing their respective committee meetings. Other key areas were referred to by the Head of Democratic Services, such as Members' preferences whether to attend meetings in person or online which supports the Council's hybrid approach. He reflected that Members' preference is dependent on the type of Committee. With the Planning & Development Committee, where there is a higher level of public engagement or with Full Council involving all 75 Members, there is a greater preference to attend in person.

With regards to the support Members receive from the Democratic Services team,

the high level of satisfaction reflects that the current level of support and current resource remains sufficient and also demonstrates the need to maintain this positive level of support to newly elected Members post-election.

The Head of Democratic Services acknowledged that the Members Induction and training received had been positive throughout June, but he reflected that the induction had on times been too intense and needed to reflect Members' other commitments and this feedback would be useful for future planning.

In conclusion, the Head of Democratic Services referred Members to section 9 of the report, Welsh Language in meetings. He advised that previously and in accordance with the demographics at that time there was a requirement for the Welsh translation service to attend every meeting. According to the Welsh Language Standards Act, where an Elected Member/member of the public wishes to or may wish to converse through the medium of Welsh, there is a requirement to provide the Welsh translation service. In line with the survey responses which has highlighted a change in demographics and in order to directly support our Welsh speaking Members in meetings, The Head of Democratic Services proposed that the simultaneous Welsh translation service would be better used specifically for those committees where the membership includes Welsh speaking Members rather than providing an automatic provision. He added that it is intended to shadow Welsh speaking Members (and in instances where advance notice from a member of the public wishing to converse through the medium of Welsh has been given). This also includes any Members who wish to take the opportunity at any stage and bespoke Welsh Language training will be offered to all Members to develop their Welsh language skills. A further Welsh language survey will also be undertaken to assess the ongoing requirements of Elected Members.

The Vice Chair spoke of the Welsh Language Steering Group and its contribution and for the need to take into consideration the timing of the survey, so soon following the Local Government Elections when considering the total percentage of responses. The Head of Democratic Services confirmed that the resource impact is considered by Chairs of Scrutiny when organising Scrutiny Working Groups during 'office hours' recognising both the impact on the democratic services team and on the out of office hours and availability within the calendar of meetings.

The Chair thanked the Head of Democratic Services for the report and spoke of the important role of the Democratic Services Committee, to support all members of the Council. He acknowledged the need to ensure that appropriate resources are in place within the Council Business Unit to undertake such support.

Following discussions, it was **RESOLVED** to

- (i) Acknowledge the feedback obtained from the Member Survey 2022 as outlined within the report; and
- (ii) 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).

This meeting closed at 5.40 pm

**CLLR W JONES
CHAIR.**

