



RHONDDA CYNON TAF

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

27TH APRIL 2023

RESEARCH SUPPORT AND SERVICES FOR COUNCILLORS – PROTOCOL

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to remind Members of the Research provision available for Members within Rhondda Cynon Taf, and to review the Council's current protocol following the new statutory guidance issued, as suggested by the WLGA.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that Members:
- i. Note the research facility available for Members to utilise to assist them in undertaking their role
 - ii. Consider the draft protocol outlined within Appendix A of the report and subject to Members comment, agree to adopt the draft protocol going forward.
 - iii. Support the promotion of the Member Research facility to all Members and the sharing of research requests (where appropriate) to all Members in the future.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The new statutory guidance issued under section 8(1A) of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 states that "all elected members should be able to access a range of information and support" in order to undertake their roles effectively.
- 3.2 It is clear that Councils across Wales are already undertaking a range research support activity to assist Councillors in fulfilling their duties and it is intended that the new statutory guidance published, provides an opportunity for Councils to review this support and establish a clear commitment or protocol for research support and services, identifying

areas for potential improvements within the resource constraints faced nationwide.

4 STATUTORY GUIDANCE - PROTOCOL

4.1 The new statutory guidance as a minimum recommends that Councils undertake an internal review / audit of the existing research support provided to Councillors and evaluate against the examples given within guidance. It is recommended this is undertaken through the Democratic Services Committee.

4.2 In undertaking such a review, the following questions have been proposed for Members to consider. To assist Members a response to these questions based on the workings within RCT has been provided:

Question	Answer
Are background papers available to help all Councillors understand key decisions	As a form of good practice, the report template for Committee papers provides a section for background papers, to allow for access to information for Members where available. It is sometimes the case that not all Officers when drafting reports include this information.
Are all Councillors provided with regular performance management information, or is it readily available to them?	Yes, Quarterly updates are provided to the Cabinet and to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and information in respect of this information can be found on the Council website. All Members receive hyperlinks to the Committee papers.
Are Councillors signposted to useful sources of information?	Members receive a daily update of useful links and information compiled from a number of different organisations and websites. Details of open consultations from Welsh Government and RCT Council are provided to Members on a fortnightly basis and highlighted

	<p>on all the Council's Scrutiny agendas.</p> <p>A weekly 'round up' email is also provided at the end of each week. All Members are sent the links to every agenda publication and accompanying reports.</p> <p>This is in addition to any ad hoc emails / briefing sessions taken place.</p> <p>Going forward such 'live' information will be made available through the Members portal for Members to access.</p>
Is demographic information readily available to all Councillors, including information on local services and their usage?	Direct email on a ward basis regarding specific information such as Flood Investigation Reports and as above
Is there regular circulation of local and national events which Councillors may be interested in?	As above
Are Councillors able to request specific research requests, and are the parameters clearly set out?	A research criteria has been established within RCT to assist Members in their research submission, please see section 5 for details.

4.3 It is suggested that a review of the research facilities and provision of information to Members will allow the Democratic Services Committee, and the Council, to establish whether support services and sources of information could be better coordinated, better promoted, and access to information improved.

4.4 Having established the existing research support and sources of information available, this should be clearly set out to Councillors with guidance on how they can access the information available to them. It is suggested that Councils should take the opportunity to work with Councillors to identify any gaps or issues with the existing processes,

reviewing how this support and its parameters could be developed over time.

- 4.5 In light of the above and the responses provided within the table within 4.2 do Members feel that they are provided with sufficient knowledge and information to assist them in undertaking their role?

5 RESEARCH SUPPORT WITHIN RCT

- 5.1 At the Democratic Services Committee in November 2018, Members were advised how the Head of Democratic Services had for the first time secured a research officer resource within the support structure. This new role would for the first time provide a scrutiny research resource for Non-Executive Members to support their scrutiny responsibilities and wider elected member roles.
- 5.2 The [Democratic Services Committee](#) at a further meeting agreed to the following criteria to ensure accuracy with the research conducted:
- Submission to be provided in writing / email providing as much detail about the research to be undertaken as possible to assist.
 - Email to be submitted to the email address: Councilbusiness@rctcbc.gov.uk
- 5.3 Any submission for research would be reviewed by the Head of Democratic Services to ensure the request is appropriate.
- 5.4 To ensure a timely and manageable workload for the Research Officer it was proposed that a two week turn around at the minimum is afforded to the Research Officer to undertake the research. If the officer was unable to provide the Member with the research within this timeframe then timely notification would be provided to the Member.
- 5.5 The Member Research facility is promoted within scrutiny agenda's and through the Members weekly bulletin. The research facility is underutilised by Members and further promotion of this useful tool needs to be addressed. It is proposed that once the Members Portal is fully developed any submissions for research will be made available through this avenue, although written / email submissions will be taken forward until this is available.

6 GOING FORWARD

- 6.1 Going forward, and following the new statutory guidance it is suggested that the following items are considered when Members submit a research request:
- Does the information request help toward the achievement of corporate priorities?
 - Is the information request of a political nature?
 - Would the information enable a Councillor to undertake their ward role to a higher standard, and would the information bring benefits to Councillors from more than one electoral ward?
 - What are the budget and resource implications of the request?
- 6.2 Upon completion of a research request, it is recommended that the information be made available to all Councillors, where appropriate. It may be the case that the research request is of a confidential nature and therefore will not be shared if deemed appropriate. Wherever possible it is also proposed that information or briefings be published and made available to the public, if not of a confidential or sensitive nature. It is hoped that the sharing of Member Research reports will also encourage other Members to use the resource available
- 6.3 In establishing a local protocol for research requests, Councils should:
- clearly define the types of research requests that can be achieved
 - clearly state limitations to the service
 - have a defined process in place to accept or reject research requests
 - make any information gathered through such requests available to all councillors, and if appropriate, the public.
- 6.4 In light of the above, a proposed Research criteria is provided in appendix A of the report.
- 6.5 Although, there is a need for a robust criteria for research requests it is also important that the criteria does not become too prescriptive to dissuade Members from using the facility. Therefore the criteria proposed for RCT Council will still remain relatively open with requests being approved by the Head of Democratic Services or other appropriate officer in their absence.

7 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY

- 7.1 The role of an Elected Member is integral to the effective running of the Council and it is essential that all Members are provided with any support

necessary to undertake their role. The support provision of 'research' is a positive provision which will assist all Members in undertaking their role.

8 WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no language implications associated with this report. Members are able to submit requests in the language of their choice.

9 CONSULTATION

9.1 None required

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

10.1 There are no financial implications aligned to this report.

11. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

11.1 section 8(1A) of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011

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

12.1 The role of an Elected Member links to the Corporate Plan priorities and supporting Members to undertake their role through access to additional information will assist both Members and residents.

13 CONCLUSION

13.1 Providing Members with additional information to assist them in undertaking their role is an important tool available that all Members should have access to. It is clear that the research facility within RCT is under utilised and further promotion of the resource needs to be taken forward.

13.2 It is important that the Council review their current criteria for research requests

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, DEMOCRATIC SERVICES & COMMUNICATION

Free Standing Matter.

Democratic Services Committee – [November 2018](#)

Democratic Services Committee – [July 2019](#)

DRAFT**Member Research Criteria.**

The primary objective of research is the deepening and broadening of knowledge and understanding by responsible and professional means. It is important that all Members of the Council are afforded the opportunity to receive information to help them undertake their role and to make informed decisions.

The Council provides Members with a high range of information through its Committee reporting and links to such information are shared with all Elected Members.

The Council Business Unit compliment this information by providing daily updates to Members, sharing local and national information including details of local events within areas.

The Council are mindful that Members may also require additional or alternative information to undertake their role and the provision of a Research Officer is available within the Council Business Unit for Members to access. Research requests should not be of a political nature.

Research Requests:

When submitting research requests we ask all Members to complete the following information. Members are reminded that the Head of Democratic Services will review all submissions before agreeing to the research being carried out:

Question	Elected Member Response	Head of Democratic Services Response
Does the information request help toward the achievement of the Council's corporate priorities and / or the Well-Being of Future Generations Act?		
Is the information request of a political nature?		
Would the information enable you to undertake your ward role to a higher standard, and		

would the information bring benefits to Councillors from more than one electoral ward		
Would the information enable you to undertake your Council Business role (Scrutiny / Committee Member) to a higher standard and also be beneficial to other Members of that Committee		
Are there any potential budget and resource implications of the request, in addition to the time or the Council's research officer?		
Is the research request of a confidential nature? Where appropriate Research requests will be shared with other Members and published in the public domain if felt appropriate.		

To ensure accuracy with the research conducted any submission for research will need to follow the criteria outlined below:

- Submission to be provided in writing / email providing as much detail about the research to be undertaken as possible to assist.
- Email to be submitted to the email address: CouncilBusiness@rctcbc.gov.uk

Members are reminded that subject to the nature of the request, the research response will be made available to all Members of the Council and if appropriate to the public through the Council website.