



RHONDDA CYNON TAF

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

5th JULY 2023

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

MEMBER'S 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 April 2023, prior to the Council Annual General Meeting.
- 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 surrounding the support provided to Members to assist them in undertaking their role 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 2023 as outlined within the report;
 - (ii) Consider the proposals put forward in respect of actions to be taken forward to address Members Comments, as outlined within section 9 of the report;
 - (iii) Subject to 2.1(ii) to agree for the Head of Democratic Services to take forward the actions outlined with 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 during an elected term.

- 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 2023

- 4.1 During April 2023 and ahead of the Council Annual General meeting, a survey of Members was undertaken.
- 4.2 The outcome of the survey informed the calendar of meetings that was agreed at the Council Annual General meeting held on the 10th May 2023.
- 4.3 Overall, 51 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, which was considered at the Council AGM on the 10th May 2023 during consideration of the Calendar of Meetings. Members agreed that in the majority, committees would commence at 5pm as evidenced below:
- In total 86% 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.
- 5.2 In respect of Planning and Development Committee the survey responses indicated a preference to both a 3pm (40%) and 4pm (40%) meeting start time. Following the appointment of the Chair of the Planning Committee, the Head of Democratic Services consulted with the Chair of the Committee in respect of the preferred start time, whereby it was confirmed of a continuation of the 3pm start times.
- 5.3 Some additional individual comments in respect of start times of Committees were noted by responders:
- I prefer 15.00 for Planning and Development because of the frequency and the long agendas
 - A lot of councillors work other jobs and so for full council meetings, I think it would be better to start at 6pm which might encourage more to

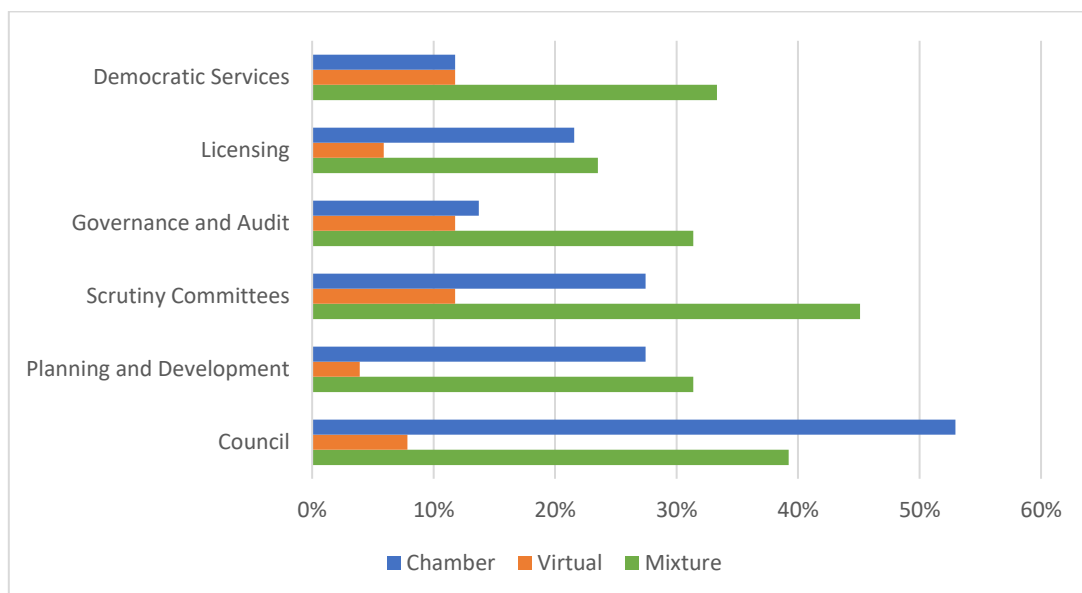
- attend the chamber
- Ref Planning and Development I've had a few complaints from residents that they're the time they are at - coinciding with school pick up time and working days
- When working as well, later meetings can often be exhausting and leaves little time. Earlier start times would help with work/life commitments
- Winter hours start early

5.4 When taking forward the proposed calendar of meetings to the AGM the Head of Democratic Services was mindful of the preference of start times for the majority of Members, the additional comments received regarding later start times and consideration was also given to the resourcing implications for hosting and supporting evenings meetings.

6 HYBRID MEETINGS

6.1 The Council has determined that all meetings must be able to operate as multi-location meetings to ensure that participants are able to attend remotely or physically should they wish to do so, subject to those meetings that were determined by Council, to be conducted as virtual only (June 2021 Council).

6.2 The Council have proactively taken forward hybrid meetings throughout the 2022 – 2023 Municipal year . When asked about their preference for attending in person or online or a mixture of both, Members responded as follows:



Meeting	Chamber	Virtual	Mixture
Council	53%	8%	39%
Planning & Development	44%	6%	50%
Scrutiny Committees	33%	14%	53%
Governance & Audit	24%	21%	55%
Licensing	42%	12%	46%
Democratic Services	21%	21%	58%

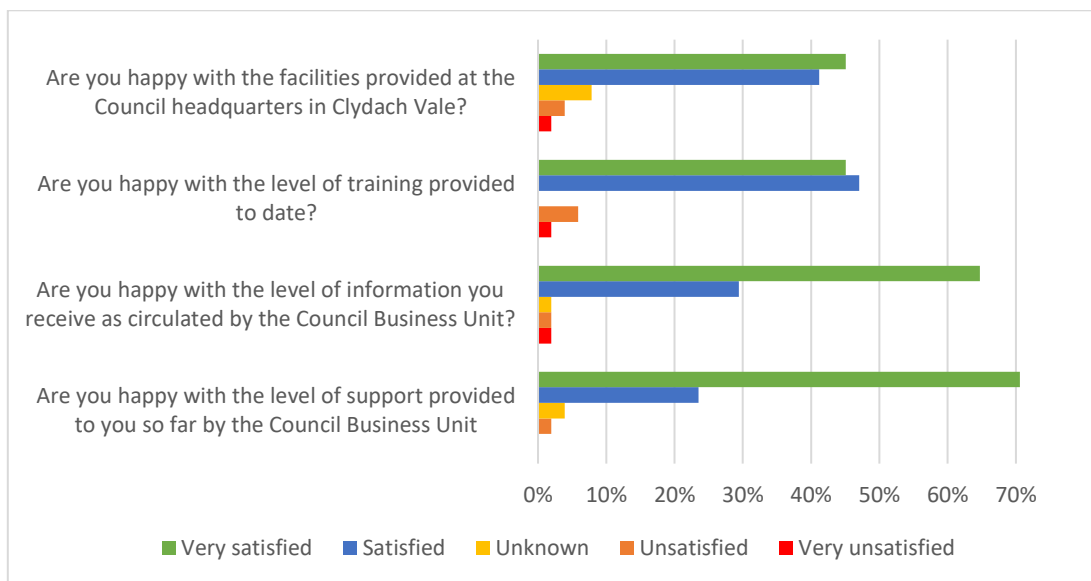
6.3 There is a clear view that the flexibility to attend either physically or remotely is a great benefit for members. The Council will continue to support the hybrid arrangements in place which will be strengthened by the Council's Multi Location Meeting Policy

7. **COUNCIL BUSINESS UNIT**

- 7.1 Members were positive in their comments upon the support provided to them by the Council Business Unit. 71% were very satisfied and 24% satisfied of the support. 4% advised that their view on the support was 'unknown' as they felt that they had not utilised the support arrangements.
- 7.2 Members feedback in respect of this question was the lack of awareness of support that was available and it is suggested that a report on the support available is provided to Democratic Services Committee, highlighting the opportunities for all Members.
- 7.3 In respect of the level of communication provided to Members through daily updates and the Member weekly update, 94% were satisfied with the level of information provided.
- 7.4 In respect of training, 45% were very satisfied and 47% satisfied with training. 6% were unsatisfied and 2% were very unsatisfied. Although it is pleasing to see the majority of Members were content with training it is important that we ensure all Members receive the training that they require to undertake their role. Going forward the development of the Members development programme which will combine a mixture of both inhouse and external training opportunities and both Hybrid training sessions and online opportunities will ensure all Members are offered the training necessary to them. The scheduling of training throughout the Municipal Year will also assist Members in their attendance at the training.

7.5 The majority of Members (86%) were content with the meeting environment and facilities within the Council Headquarters, 8% unknow and 6% unsatisfied. Members commented on the lack of refreshments at Committee meetings and this is something that the Council Business Unit have reintroduced, promoting Members to be environmentally aware and bring recyclable cups and promoting the introduction of quarterly 'coffee catch up 'sessions, which promotes networking opportunities for Members. There was a concern regarding Member security in the Council Chamber, especially regarding objectors at meetings. Members safety is of paramount importance and this will be an important consideration with the development of the new Chamber during the office relocation.

7.6 The final question in respect of the Council Business Unit related to the Council's Memorandum of Understanding, and whether Members felt they had demonstrated mutual respect regardless of political opinions. It was pleasing to see that 94% of Members felt that they received this respect. It is important that all Members are provided with respect and dignity at each meeting and the Head of Democratic Services will look to work with Group Leaders to ensure all Members are treated with respect during Committee meetings.



8. DIGITAL SUPPORT

8.1 With the increased use of digital devices, it was more important than ever, that the Council Business Unit gain a better understanding of the devices Members utilise to carry out their duties and any requirements that may assist Members further.

8.2 91% of Members advised that they were comfortable in using their devices. For those Members that did not feel as comfortable, digital training and support has been identified through the Member Development Programme, which it is hoped Members will take forward. Digital bitesize training opportunities will also be promoted to Members going forward.

8.3 General Comments by Members:

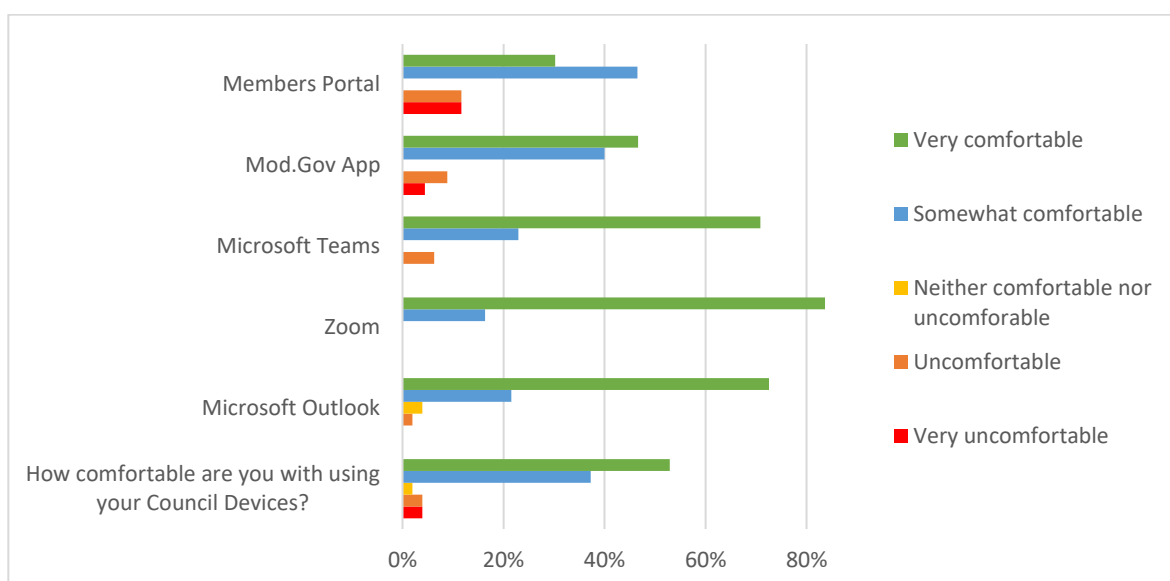
- Bite size support opportunities
- prefer not to use my council mobile phone
- Finding it difficult to use my mobile
- My technical expertise is not always great

8.4 In respect of the usage of the Council mobile phone and accessing Council emails through personal devices, Members are reminded that by limiting use to trusted Council digital devices this allows the Council to provide access to emails, teams and Council systems to Members, whilst Members are safe in the knowledge that this access is trusted.

8.5 Members on Council provided devices are more protected from cyber attacks, and also cannot be impersonated as they are protected by the Council's cyber security technologies. For the reasons mentioned above, Members will now only be able to access Council emails from a Council digital device. It is for this reason that all Members, by default, were provided with the provision of a mobile telephone from the local elections in May 2022.

8.6 It is suggested that digital support opportunities through open drop in sessions are provided going forward so that Members can sit with colleagues of ICT and the Council Business Unit to help develop usage of the Council mobile device.

8.7 Both during the Member Personal Development Review process and within the survey, Members were surveyed on the appetite for a case management system, to assist Members with constituent queries and casework. 73% of Members within the survey welcomed the introduction of such a system with 22% unsure how such a system would assist. Feedback through the PDR process was also positive and will be something that the Head of Democratic Services will scope going forward.



9. ADDRESSING MEMBERS COMMENTS – PROPOSALS GOING FORWARD

- 9.1 The completion of the survey by 51 of the Council's 75 Members, is a positive increase from previous years, and an open thank you is provided to all Members who provided this valuable input.
- 9.2 The responses have provided numerous opportunities for reflection or have supported projects already being taken forward. The following approaches are proposed to address Members comments within the survey
- 9.3 **Timing of Meetings** – The calendar of meetings is a decision by the Council however the Head of Democratic Services will always strive to present a calendar that is accessible for Members and Members of the Public. Trying to achieve a Committee calendar which balances the numerous commitments taken forward by Members, plus a healthy work life balance, in addition to any work and or caring commitments is difficult, however, with the opportunities available through hybrid meeting arrangements it is felt that the proposed and agreed times at the Council AGM support opportunities for attendance.
- 9.4 **Training** - The Member Development Programme presented to the Democratic Services Committee will hopefully address the comments raised in respect of training opportunities. It is important that the development programme remains a fluid document and is monitored by the Committee to ensure its delivery. As advised during the Committees April Committee meeting, it is proposed that a second phase of PDRs are taken forward towards the end of year with Members and will be an opportunity for the Head of Democratic Services to gauge Members responses to the development programme and whether it is delivering for each and every Member.
- 9.5 **Member Support** – A report detailing the support provisions available to Members will be taken forward to Democratic Services to further assist Members in the knowledge of support. The contents of the support will be shared with all Members following consideration by the Committee through the Members updates. In addition it is proposed that a Member briefing session is also taken forward which will look to encompass additional areas that may be useful to Members, such as referrals through the Member Customer Care hotline.
- 9.6 **Member Refreshments** – The Council Business Unit will look to host the recently re-introduced coffee catch up sessions on a bi-monthly basis. Members are encouraged to be environmentally aware and to support the Council through the use of 'travel mugs' when attending the sessions. In addition, refreshments will also be made available for Members to access when able, at the start of the majority of hybrid committee meetings.
- 9.7 **Members safety** – Although the Council are keen to encourage the public to be involved in the democratic process, Member Safety is always of paramount importance The Council Chamber is only accessible to Elected Members and Officers and access to the public gallery within the Chamber is only permitted

once the site supervisor allows. The Chamber is fitted with suitable alarm arrangements for Members safety. Going forward, the safety of Members will be a consideration in the development of the new chamber as part of the office accommodation review.

9.8 **Memorandum of Understanding** – Although it is pleasing to note the positive response in relation to this question, the Councils agreement to the undertaking of the Memorandum of Understanding was taken forward prior to the 2022 Local Government Elections. It is therefore deemed appropriate that all Members are encouraged to sign up to the Memorandum of Understanding and that the agreement is presented under each of the Members Profiles on the Council website. Discussions surrounding this will be taken forward by the Head of Democratic Services and Group Leaders.

9.9 **Digital Support** – Support in respect of Members devices is encompassed within the Member Development Programme. It is important to emphasise the opportunities that the Council Business will look to provide to Members with open drop in sessions, potentially utilising the coffee catch up session to maximise on this attendance so that Members have opportunities for any digital support they might require.

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 2023.

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.

15. **CONCLUSIONS**

15.1 The Members survey is a valuable tool that allows the Head of Democratic Services to align arrangements within the service to better support Members.

15.2 It is hoped that the opportunities identified in section 9 of the report will address any issues raised by Members.

15.3 Members are reminded that the Head of Democratic Services runs an open door policy and if there were any support arrangements or concerns that Members wished to discuss then Members are able to do so at any point through the Municipal Year and not just through the Members survey.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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July 2023

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BACKGROUND PAPERS – none.