



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

5th JULY 2023

**THE COUNCIL'S OFFICE ACCOMMODATION STRATEGY – RELOCATION OF
THE COUNCIL CHAMBER**

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to receive an update from the Head of Democratic Services in respect of members facilities and accommodation, following the decision of Cabinet to relocate the Council's HQ, and Council Chamber, to 2 Llys Cadwyn Pontypridd as part of the Council's Office Accommodation Strategy.
- 1.2 This report also provides the opportunity for the Head of Democratic Services to provide a statutory opinion in respect of the proposed new accommodation arrangements for Members, following the recent Sufficiency of Resources report.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members

- 2.1 Note the work undertaken to date in respect of the relocation of the Council Chamber; and provide comment on the arrangements proposed within the report;
- 2.2 Note the revised statutory opinion in respect of accommodation resources available to Members as set out in paragraph 8.
- 2.3 Agree to receive further updates as appropriate to ensure Members are kept abreast of the office move.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 On the 15th May 2023, the Cabinet approved the Office Accommodation Strategy, which included relocating the Council's headquarters into the heart of Pontypridd town centre, utilising vacant floor space at Llys Cadwyn.
- 3.2 As part of the report the Head of Democratic Services was charged with assigning suitable and sufficient office accommodation and services to meet the resource and facility requirements of Elected Members.

4. BACKGROUND

4.1 The report presented to Cabinet in respect of the Office Accommodation Strategy can be found [here](#).

4.2 Within the report a number of objectives were identified. Strategic Objective 2 advised of the need 'To create economic growth and community benefit by focussing office accommodation in town centre locations.' To achieve this ambition it was proposed to:

- Relocate the Council Headquarters to the heart of Pontypridd, utilising vacant floor space at Llys Cadwyn, by relocating the Council Chamber and services from The Pavilions, Clydach Vale.
- Releasing the site at The Pavilions, Clydach Vale for consideration of redevelopment of the site for a new Special School subject to a consultation in accordance with the Welsh Government's School Organisation Code (011/2018).

4.3 A report in respect of utilising the current Clydach Vale site for a new Special School is due to be considered by Cabinet on the [28th June 2023](#).

4.4 The main drivers for the Cabinet supporting the above-mentioned proposals as part of the revised Office Accommodation Strategy were:

- Generate footfall in town centres by increasing the number of staff working at or visiting offices in town centre locations.
- Relocate the Council's Civic Headquarters from The Pavilions, Clydach Vale to a town centre location easily accessible by public transport which will be of great benefit to staff and residents and improve involvement and engagement between the Council and residents.

4.5 Members will recall that the Sufficiency of Resources Report presented by the Head of Democratic Services on the [13th February 2023](#), identified that it would be important for the future accommodation needs of members, to reflect the new ways of working undertaken by both Elected Members and council officers, and that committee subsequently reflected upon the need to embed these new approach into the future accommodation and resource requirements of Members.

4.6 It is important that going forward the facilities within the new Headquarter locations support the new working approaches of Elected Members as they undertake their role on behalf of their constituents.

4.7 The move to a new modern building provides the opportunity to enhance members facilities, at this new modern location, and determine a new model which will aim serve elected members for many years ahead.

5. NEW CHAMBER AND MEMBER FACILITIES.

- 5.1 The Head of Democratic Services and senior colleagues, are working closely with Corporate Estates, to ensure that the office space within the new accommodation are sufficient to support Members, but importantly address some of the weakness of the Council's current HQ, previously identified by Members
- 5.2 While the office accommodation provided at Clydach has served members well, and has evolved continually since the formation of Rhondda Cynon Taf in 1995, a number of areas for improvement have been identified. These include:
- Enhancing safety arrangements for Elected Members
 - Providing greater 'hot desking' capacity for Elected Members
 - Increasing the number of 'bookable' meeting rooms available to Members
 - Improving accessibility to Members facilities
- 5.3 Early engagement has also been taken forward with 'Public I' who previously supported the Council with enhancements made in 2020 to the current Council Chamber, which enabled the Council to comply to the new statutory requirements upon us in respect of live broadcasting and remote attendance.
- 5.4 Public I have committed to supporting the office move within the desired timescales, however there will be a period of time where Committee meetings resort to online only, whilst equipment and furniture from the current Chamber are lifted and fitted within the new accommodation.
- 5.5 When developing options for a new Council chamber, a key priority has been to facilitate the ability to re-use existing technology and furniture which were introduced as part of the chamber improvements in 2020. Where possible the current furniture and equipment will be lifted and reused within the new Council Chamber, to reduce waste and additional expenditure.
- 5.6 Proposed Floor plans have been discussed with Corporate Estates and will be shared with Members at the meeting.

6. PROPOSED FACILITIES AT LLYS CADWEN

- 6.1 Democratic Services and Members facilities, including the Council Chamber will be located on floor 3 at 2 Llys Cadwen. This floor will also be occupied by Legal Services and the Council's Monitoring Officer.
- 6.2 Floor 4 will be occupied by the Council's Senior Leadership, Cabinet Office and the Council Communications services. Corporate Policy and Engagement will also reside on this floor, alongside hot desking space for senior managers.

MEMBERS ACCOMODATION

- 6.3 Members will occupy a shared space with Democratic Services. This will provide positive benefits in terms of building relationships between Councillors and the staff which are dedicated to support Elected Members. Hot desking facilities will be available to Members and the Democratic services team.

- 6.4 This set-up includes a dedicated meeting room for Members or political groups to book as and when required. Open space is provided for Members to utilise, with provision for Members to hot desk. This working environment will also look to encourage networking between Members, which has been lost somewhat through virtual way of working. The facilities will be located alongside the Council Chamber, which include direct Members only access between the Members area and the chamber. Within the Democratic Services area, provision has been made for refreshment points for Members to utilise.
- 6.5 It is proposed that a continuation of the current arrangement is provided within the new office accommodation setting, as the rooms are still largely under utilised.
- 6.6 For the first time, a multi Faith Room where prayers can be offered, which will be provided to staff and Elected Members jointly.

CHAMBER

- 6.7 2 Pillars sit within the Council Chamber and consultation with Corporate Estates and Public I have been taken forward to ensure that the pillars do not obstruct the view within the Council Chamber, in particular members view of the top table or the hybrid viewing screens. We will work to Public I's viewing guidelines to ensure viewing distances are appropriate and consideration is being taken forward in respect of small desk monitors to be incorporated as part of the desks within the Chamber to reduce any chance of visual disruption. A new 'Loop system' will be made available within the Council Chamber and Committee room area to allow for discreet hearing provision, providing an enhancement upon the technology currently utilised in Clydach Vale.
- 6.8 A new translation booth will provide better space for translation colleagues.

PUBLIC & PRESS ACCESS

- 6.9 The proposed floor layout will enable alternative access to the Council Chamber for Elected Members away from the Public gallery. Although the Council are keen to encourage the public to be involved in the democratic process, Member Safety is always of paramount importance. It has been highlighted that where possible alternative access should be provided for Elected Members and Members of the public, to avoid any potential confrontation when contentious items are discussed during Committee meetings. As with current arrangements, suitable safety measures will be in place within the new Chamber.
- 6.10 Public speaking arrangements will be enhanced through the provision of a suitable area / lectern for the public to utilise when addressing Committee. Ensuring provisions are provided to live stream Committee meetings into the additional committee room if maximum occupancy is taken up within the public

gallery of the Council Chamber and for this live streaming to be made available with in the foyer area, to assist Members of the Public.

- 6.11 The Head of Democratic Services has queried the parking provision arrangements for Members at the new location. We have been advised by colleagues that parking provision is available within Llys Cadwyn, although this is limited and therefore it likely that blue badge holders will be prioritised within this space. Pontypridd Town Centre benefits from three 24 hour car parks, and three further car parks that range from 7am – 7pm opening times.
- 6.12 It is anticipated that with the good public transport options surrounding the town centre and the continued developments with the metro both staff and Elected Members, where possible, will utilise such modes of transport when visiting the Council Headquarters. Storage facilities are also available on site for bike storage for those Members wishing to commute through this mode of transport, with shower facilities also available.

7. GOING FORWARD

- 7.1 The Council are working to a timescale of relocation by the beginning of the New Year (2024).
- 7.2 It is proposed that a site visit of the new location of the Council Chamber and Member facilities at Llys Cadwyn is taken forward at the earliest opportunity to strengthen Members involvement in the Chamber relocation.
- 7.3 Regular updates in respect of the relocation will be presented to Committee Members as appropriate by the Head of Democratic Services.
- 7.4 To enable the relocation of broadcasting and hybrid meeting 'kit' to the new location, there may be a period towards the end of the calendar year, where some committee meetings may need to operate on a virtual basis only.

8. SUFFICIENCY OF ACCOMODATION RESOURCES

- 8.1 The relocation of the Council HQ, and accommodation for Elected Members from Clydach Vale to Pontypridd constitutes a key change in the provision of facilities to Councillors.
- 8.2 For this reason, it is important that the Head of Democratic Services revised the statutory opinion provided to Democratic Services, in-line with the Local Government Measure 2011 (As amended by the Local Elections Act 2021).
- 8.3 In [February 2023](#), the Head of Democratic Services, determined the accommodation provided to Elected Members as sufficient, noting how the revised arrangements in Clydach Vale, had already responded to changing way in which members accessed support.
- 8.4 The move to 2 Llys Cadwen, will provide significant improvements in respect of the accommodation offered to Members. The proposed use of space on floor 3,

will enable new working practices of both Officers and Elected Members to be embedded into the office space available, and increases the 'space' and meeting options available to Elected Members.

- 8.5 Members will recall that the previous sufficiency of resources report, indicated that the current office arrangements, which mean that the Council would not comply with Members Advance Charter.
- 8.6 Since consideration of this report, WLGA, Welsh Government and Heads of Democratic Services from across Wales, have been working to revise the Charter to reflect new ways of working in this digital age.
- 8.7 While the detail of the revised charter are still to be published, these office arrangements, will enable Rhondda Cynon Taf to be well placed to become an early adopter of the new Members Charters in 2024.
- 8.8 **For the reasons set out above, as Head of Democratic I can confirm that I remain of the view that the accommodation provided to Elected Members is 'sufficient' and will be remarkably enhanced following the relocation to Pontypridd.**

9 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY

- 9.1 An equality and diversity impact assessment was undertaken as part of the report to Cabinet in respect of the Office Accommodation strategy.
- 9.2 The delivery of the Office Accommodation Strategy will be built on user centred design principles and where possible will be fully accessible and support equality and accessibility.

10. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 A Welsh Language Impact Assessment was undertaken as part of the report to Cabinet in respect of the Office Accommodation strategy.

11. CONSULTATION / INVOLVEMENT

- 11.1 The Chair and vice chair of Democratic Services has visited the new accommodation and has been consulted upon in respect of the work undertaken to date.
- 11.2 Group Leaders have also been consulted as part of the scheduled meetings undertaken with the Head of Democratic Services.

12. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 As outlined within the Cabinet report, the Office Accommodation strategy would deliver annual and recurring revenue savings of £435k. This level of saving is supported by rental income generated at Llŷs Cadwyn now being in excess of

that assumed in the original business case enabling the Council to benefit from this.

- 12.2 Where possible the Head of Democratic Services is keen to ensure that existing furniture and equipment is reused within the new office accommodation. Further discussions will be taken forward with Public I to discuss the costs associated with the refitting of equipment and any additional screens / microphones / monitors if deemed needed. Fit out costs will be funded from a combination of existing office accommodation budgets, any capital receipts generated from the delivery of the strategy and the annual revenue savings in the short term.

13. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 13.1 The Council's power to dispose of land and buildings is contained in Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972
- 13.2 The Council's power to acquire land and buildings is contained in Section 120 of the Local Government Act 1972

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

- 14.1 The Office Accommodation Strategy contribute towards the priorities in the Corporate Plan:
- Ensuring **People: are independent, healthy and successful;**
 - Creating **Places: where people are proud to live, work and play;**
 - Enabling **Prosperity: creating the opportunity for people and businesses to: be innovative; be entrepreneurial; and fulfil their potential and prosper**
- 14.2 The Well-being goals which are particularly relevant to the Office Accommodation Strategy include:
- **A Healthier Wales:** a society in which people's physical and mental well-being is maximised and in which choices and behaviours that benefit future health are understood
 - **A Globally Responsible Wales:** a nation which, when doing anything to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales, takes account of whether doing such a thing may make a positive contribution to global well-being
 - **A More Equal Wales:** a society that enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances (including their socio-economic circumstances)

14.3 The Office Accommodation Strategy is consistent with the sustainable approach promoted by the with the five ways of working:

- Long term – the strategic approach takes into account that factors can change over time, we will continue to evaluate and monitor trends and will utilise a range of effective interventions to support our objectives for the long term
- Prevention – the strategic framework recognises that the Council needs to protect its assets to ensure that the land and building portfolio does not deteriorate or fall into disrepair and complies with statutory requirements. We will collaborate and share data and experiences with other public bodies to encourage early intervention
- Integration – a key feature of the Council's strategic approach to asset management is to ensure it is joined up, integrated, and coordinated with the Council's Digital and Workforce plans and the Council's Town Centre Regeneration Strategy
- Collaboration – intrinsic to the vision and objectives is collaboration with other public services and third sector organisations to make the best use of the public estate
- Involvement – communities and Council services will be involved with the delivery of objectives and have their say

15. **CONCLUSION**

15.1 The Council's Office Accommodation Strategy and Operating Model & Working Arrangements Policy sets out a clear direction of travel and framework for our longer-term ambitions for the Council's office accommodation portfolio for the period 2023/2030.

15.2 It is important that Members are equipped with appropriate meeting requirements to ensure that Members can conduct their role.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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