



**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**1<sup>ST</sup> MAY 2024**

**DIVERISTY IN DEMOCRACY.**

**REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES**

**1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to remind Members of the previous work of the Committee in respect of Diversity in Democracy and the resulting actions undertaken to increase Diversity within Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council through the Council's Diversity Pledge.
- 1.2 The report also illustrates the need for a continued focus by the Council with the diversity agenda.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that Members

- 2.1 Note the content of the report and the work undertaken to date in respect of Diversity within Democracy
- 2.2 Acknowledge the suggested improvements highlighted within the report, to further improve the diversity in democracy agenda within the Council.
- 2.3 To note the creation of the Equality, Inclusion and Diversity Steering Group within the Leaders Scheme of Delegation which will further assist in the delivery of actions identified within the Council's Diversity Pledge.

**3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 The need to ensure that Diversity in Democracy is continually promoted by the Council to achieve a Council that is reflective of the County Borough and Members are reflective of the people that they serve.

**4. BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 It is important for democratic institutions and public services to reflect the diversity of the population they represent and serve. The diversity agenda has been

growing across all aspects of public life and it is important that we as a Council are committed to increasing diversity, which includes tackling the barriers which prevent an individual's active participation in local democracy.

- 4.2 At the Democratic Services Committee meeting on the 1st October 2020, Members considered the written statement from the then Minister for Housing and Local Government on [phase 2 of the diversity in democracy programme](#). Following consideration of the statement, Members resolved to take forward a working group to consider aspects of the plan in respect of diversity.
- 4.3 The work of the Diversity working group looked to improve the equality and diversity across the County Borough, within the local democracy setting. It was acknowledged that the more representative of society and diverse our Elected Members are, the better understanding they will have of the needs of the local community and therefore are better equipped at carrying out their duties and responsibilities.
- 4.4 The Working Group produced an interim report in May 2021, which identified areas of 'awareness raising' ahead of the 2022 Local Government Elections. The Group also recognised the good practice of establishing a Memorandum of Understanding and assisted in the drafting of the Council's Diversity Pledge, with both documents subsequently endorsed by Council.
- 4.5 Due to the forthcoming 2022 Local Governments Elections and the need to progress some of the recommendations already identified by the Working Group an [interim report](#) was produced which resulted in 16 recommendations.
- 4.6 Following the interim report, the Working Group continued to meet and received input from numerous organisations, who provided detail and context of the barriers faced, although no further recommendations were taken forward.
- 4.7 It is important to note that the Working Group recognised that in respect of diversity in democracy, there were and still are many things outside of the Council's control and work needed, and continues to be needed, to be taken forward in conjunction with political parties and other stakeholders to promote the diversity agenda .
- 4.8 Since this work, the Senedd's Local Government and Housing Committee published its [report](#) on Diversity in Local Government on the 17<sup>th</sup> October 2023. The report's aim was to assess progress on diversity in local government since the 2022 Elections. The Chair of the Committee noted that "Despite recent developments, continued momentum towards increasing diversity in local government remains a concern."
- 4.9 The Minister for Finance and Local Government, within the above inquiry commented that there was "an awful lot of progress in recent years", noting the diversity in democracy programme and the "significant changes" through the 2021 Act, although acknowledged that further progress is needed.

## **5. HOW DOES DIVERSITY IN DEMOCRACY LOOK – 2022 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS?**

5.1 The Welsh Government, with the support of Data Cymru, carried out of a survey of local government election candidates for the May 2022 elections.

5.2 A total of 1,077 responses were received. Of these, 309 were elected as County Councillors and 444 were elected as Community Councillors, 352 were not elected in either capacity and 116 had an unknown outcome. It should be noted that the numbers do not add up to 1,077 as candidates can stand for, and be elected as, County and Community Councillors at the same time.

5.3 There were 3,291 County candidates and 6,639 Community candidates in the 2022 local government elections. Overall, 38% of County candidates were elected as County Councillors and 82% of Community candidates were elected as Community Councillors.

### **Sex**

5.4 Of the 1,077 candidates who responded to the survey, 40% were female and 60% were male.

5.5 Around three-fifths (60%) of the 309 candidates elected as County Councillors in 2022 were male and around two thirds (69%) of the 261 candidates who stood for election as County Councillors in 2022 but were not elected were also male. Among the 444 Community Councillors elected in 2022, around three-fifths were male (57%) and a similar proportion of the 138 Community candidates who were not elected, (58%) were male.

### **Age**

5.6 Half of the 1,077 candidates who responded to the survey (50%) were aged 60 years or over, around two-fifths (38%) were aged between 40 and 59 years, a tenth (10%) were aged between 25 and 39 years and the remaining 2% were aged between 18 and 24 years.

5.7 Around half (46%) of elected County Councillors and 56% of elected Community Councillors who responded to the survey were aged 60 years or older. Only a very small proportion of those elected County Councillors (2%) and Community Councillors (1%) were aged between 18 to 29 years. Among the 399 County and Community candidates who were not elected in 2022, 5% were aged between 18 to 29 years.

### **Ethnicity**

5.8 Overall, 96% of the 1,077 candidates reported they were from a White ethnic group.

- 5.9 Only 1% of candidates reported they were from an Asian, Asian Welsh or Asian British ethnic group, 1% reported they were from mixed or multiple ethnic groups and around 1% reported they were from Black, Black Welsh, Black British, Caribbean or African ethnic groups. Around 2% of respondents chose not to answer this question.

## **Religion**

- 5.10 Around half (54%) of the 1,077 candidates who responded to the survey noted their religion as Christian (including all denominations), a further 40% said they had no religion and 3% answered 'other' and provided a range of responses, including Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh. The remaining 4% chose not to answer this question.
- 5.11 There was little variation across the answers provided by elected County and Community Councillors and candidates who were not elected.

## **Sexual orientation**

- 5.12 The survey found that 88% of the 1,077 candidates who responded to the survey identified as 'heterosexual or straight', 6% identified as 'lesbian, gay or bisexual' and the remaining 1% identified as 'any other sexual orientation'.
- 5.13 Among the 309 elected County Councillors who responded, 6% stated they were lesbian, gay or bisexual, while 8% of the 261 County candidates who were not elected in 2022 identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual. The proportion of elected Community Councillors and Community candidates who were not elected in 2022 and who identified as being lesbian, gay or bisexual were 5% and 6% respectively.

## **Disability**

- 5.14 The majority of the 1,077 candidates who responded (82%) reported that they did not consider themselves to be a disabled person, while 14% of candidates did consider themselves to be a disabled person. A small proportion (3%) of respondents indicated that they preferred not to say.
- 5.15 Of the 309 County Councillors who responded, around a tenth (13%) considered themselves to be a disabled person, while 15% of the Community Councillors who responded considered themselves to be a disabled person.
- 5.16 Around a third (35%) of the 1,077 candidates who responded to the survey indicated that they had at least one health condition or impairment. Of these 379 candidates, around a quarter (26% or 97 respondents) listed conditions or impairments in more than one category. Around a fifth (17%) of all candidates also noted that they had a long-term health condition.

## **Education**

- 5.17 Around two thirds of the 1,077 candidates who responded to the survey (63%) held a highest qualification equivalent to Level 4 or above (e.g. a degree, post graduate or professional qualification), a further 29% held a qualification equivalent to Level 1-3 and the remaining 5% held no qualifications.
- 5.18 The results were very similar across both elected County and Community Councillors and candidates who were not elected in 2022.

## **Employment**

- 5.19 Around two-fifths (43%) of the 1,077 candidates noted they were employed, either full-time (30%) or part-time (13%), 38% of candidates were retired, a further 14% were self-employed and 2% were unemployed. The remaining 10% provided a range of other responses, including that they were either full-time or part-time students, on maternity leave, long-term sick or disabled, unpaid carers or unpaid workers in a family business.
- 5.20 Of the 309 County Councillors who responded, around a half (47%) were employees, 14% were self-employed, and around a third (32%) were retired. Two-fifths (40%) of the 444 Community Councillors who responded were employees, 13% were self-employed, and 43% were retired.
- 5.21 Around half of all candidates who responded (46%) stated that their current, or most, recent employment was in the public sector (including local government, central government, NHS, education and other public sector), 43% worked in the private sector, 8% worked in the voluntary sector and 1% in 'other' sectors (including agriculture).

## **Welsh language**

- 5.23 A large proportion (91%) of the 1,077 candidates who responded indicated that their preferred language was English, while around a tenth (9%) said their preferred language was Welsh.
- 5.24 The survey indicated that 28% of the candidates that responded could understand spoken Welsh, around a fifth (22%) could speak Welsh, 23% could read Welsh, and 18% could write in Welsh.

## **Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council**

- 5.25 Rhondda Cynon Taf is the 3rd largest Council area in Wales made up of communities with different needs and aspirations. Covering a wide geographical area it has a population of just over 237,000 people. Like much of Wales we have a population that is growing older with an increase of people aged over 65, with 1 in 5 people in this age group. The majority of the county's population identify as White Welsh and British, though the ethnic minority population has slightly grown in recent years. Over half of the population have no religion, of the rest of the population Christianity is the predominant religion.

- 5.26 Following the 2022 Local Government Elections, the Council introduced 35 new Members to the Council. Of the 75 Members of the Council, 35 Members are Female (47%) with 40 Members being Male (53%).
- 5.27 In respect of Positions within the Council:
- 1 Male Leader of the Council and 1 Female Deputy Leader
  - Other Political Groups – 1 female political leader and 3 Male political Leaders. 2 Female deputy leaders of Political Groups with 2 Male deputy political Leaders.
  - 3 Members of the Cabinet are Female with 5 Members of the Cabinet being Male
  - 10 Female Members are Chairs of Committee with 17 Male Members are Chairs of Committee
  - 15 Female Members are Vice Chairs of Committee with 10 Male Members are Vice Chairs of Committee <sup>1</sup>
  - 1 Madam Mayor
  - 1 Male Presiding Member with 2 deputy Presiding Members (1 Female / 1 Male).
- 5.28 Through the Diversity & Democracy Report 2023 the WLGA advised that greater progress had been made in improving gender diversity following the 2022 elections, but noted that it was more difficult to assess diversity across other protected characteristics.
- 5.29 Traditionally, the average age of councillors in Wales was around 60 and has remained stubbornly within that range for many years. Within RCT following the Local Government 2022 Election, there has been a clear shift in the age range of Members, with the majority of Members being below the age of 60.
- 5.30 In light of the above information RCT Council favours well in comparison to many other Local Authorities with its gender balance ratio. However, there is still lots the Council must do to attract other diverse candidates in coming forward and engaging within the democratic process.
- 5.31 In respect of ethnicity, the Council has improved in this area, although is still non reflective of the County Borough as a whole.
- 5.32 The number of Elected Member with Welsh as their first language has decreased since the 2022 Election, although the Council promotes the use of the Welsh Language across all aspects of its work and the wider County Borough.

## **6. WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO DEMOCRACY?**

- 6.1 The role of a councillor is stimulating, rewarding and regarded as a privilege by many. The role however is a challenging and demanding one and is not one that should be considered lightly; it is a complex and demanding role, which requires a significant time commitment and can therefore have implications on people's family lives and work-life balance. It can impact on a professional career and on an individual's income and future financial security. It is also a role that can expose individuals (and their families) to regular personal criticism, insults and even threats, particularly through social media.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Vice Chair position to be appointed and 1 vice chair on a rotational basis with other Local Authority.

6.2 A number of studies have been compiled to look at the barriers to democracy with such studies highlighting:

- Child care and other caring responsibilities
- Time-commitment and meeting times
- Public criticism and online abuse
- Public's understanding of local government and the role and responsibilities of councillors and the Council itself is limited therefore portraying a political and organisational culture
- Remuneration and Employment
- Role models and incumbency

6.3 Members of the previous Democratic Services Working Group also considered the following as potential barriers:

- Disability access
- Technical / Digital Barriers
- Language Barriers
- Support and guidance for independent candidates

## **7 WHAT ARE WE DOING TO CONTINUE THE DIVERSITY AGENDA, AS LINKED TO THE COUNCIL'S DIVERSITY PLEDGE AND PREVIOUS WORK OF THE DIVERSITY WORKING GROUP.**

7.1 The Council recognises that Diversity within Local Government creates an inclusive environment, accepting of every individual's differences, enabling all Councillors to achieve their full potential and as a result, allowing Council services to reach their fullest potential for the benefit of its residents. At the Council meeting of the 26<sup>th</sup> May 2021 the Council formally committed to being a Diverse Council, using the work of the Democratic Services working group as its foundation. A link to the Council's pledge can be found [here](#).

7.2 The following provides details of the actions listed within the pledge and the work carried out to date in respect of this work.

### **7.3 Diversity Champions**

**Current Position:** Each Political Group Leader agreed to undertake the role of a Diversity Champion ahead of the 2022 Local Government Elections and as a Council, Members agreed to take forward the Fair & Respectful Election Campaign Pledge. The Council's Deputy Leader has continued to take forward the 'Member Equalities Champion' role, as highlighted within the Diversity Pledge, due to her role as Cabinet Member for Council Business and strong work with equalities across the Council.

At a recent meeting of Group Leaders, it was reaffirmed that each of the opposition Group Leaders would continue to undertake the role of a Diversity Champion within their political grouping.

**Suggested improvements** - It is suggested that the Council's Equalities Manager attends a Group Meeting in respect of Diversity.

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#### 7.4 Engaging with 3<sup>rd</sup> Sector Organisations and underrepresented groups / Learning Events.

**Current Position:** Through the work of the Diversity Working Group, Members met with various organisations to listen and learn of the barriers to diversity in democracy, felt by different groups. Such organisations included Race Alliance Wales and the Diverse 50:50 Campaign.

Prior to the Election, the Head of Democratic Services took forward engagement events at the Council Chamber and virtual events for prospective Candidates, providing a platform for learning opportunities into how the Council works and further information into the role of a Councillor.

During Democracy Week (October 2023) the Council invited individuals from Innovate Trust to the Council Chamber to support them with their understanding of the work of the Councillor, the role of a Councillor and the importance of registering to vote. This event has helped us build and learn how we can better engage and promote democracy to everyone to ensure we build a diverse democracy for the future.

It is the intention that further workshop settings with various groups to help educate and engage people across the County Borough in the democratic process will be scheduled. The Council's Public Participation Strategy has recently been endorsed by Council which will assist in taking forward aspects of this work.

**Suggested improvements:** To have any beneficial impact, such engagement needs to commence early before any Local Government Election, to allow any interested individual sufficient time to get involved in a political party prior to selection processes or to stand independently.

Since the 2022 Local Election, the number of engagement opportunities has been minimal due to the Council Business Unit heavily supporting newly Elected Members in their new roles. However, the Head of Democratic Services is committed to taking forward such events from the next Municipal Year, working with the Council's Community Development Officer and wider team, providing virtual platforms and engagement sessions in local settings to create, comfortable environments for such engagement. A calendar of such events will look to be created and promoted on the Council's Public participation section of the website which is being developed, linked with the Councils Public Participation Strategy.

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#### 7.5 Council Website

**Current Position:** Through the work of the DSC Working Group, a review of the Council's democracy pages was undertaken. Opportunities were taken forward to promote the role of a Councillor, through written advice on the relevant



webpages and video recordings of past and present Members, sharing their experiences of being a Members and providing information on the support arrangements in place, including details in respect of remuneration and how to stand for Election. Links to such pages can be found [here](#).

**Suggested improvements:** Further improvements to the Council democracy pages on the Council's website has been identified, with the addition of further videos and infographics to be added to the pages to display some of the information in a more engaging and accessible manner. One of the most recent videos in respect of democracy can be found [here](#).

## 7.6 Promotion of the role of a Councillor at Council Job and Career Fairs

*"We agree that promoting awareness of the role of a councillor and how people can stand for election is key to increasing interest in local politics. "*

**Current Position:** Members of the Council Business Unit, along with colleagues in elections, attended the RCT Jobs Fair within Llys Cadwyn during October and more recently in March, to promote the role of a Councillor and to raise the importance of voting. There was positive engagement at the sessions, through educating people across the County Borough about the role and future possibilities of standing as a candidate at future elections and the importance of establishing a diverse Council.

The Council sought funding from the democracy engagement fund to help support such events through a promotional banner and ipads to promote the opportunity for online voter registration. The Grant looked to encourage and support people to participate in democracy, helping funded organisations ensure as many people as possible are engaged, motivated, and empowered to take part in democracy, giving them the tools to make their voice heard and impact positively on the Wales around them. However, the Council were unsuccessful with their bid submission.

**Suggested improvements:** Visual displays to be reviewed to seek further engagement at future events. It is also suggested that where possible Member engagement is also provided, so the public can hear first hand about the role of a Councillor.

## 7.7 Welsh Government candidates' and Councillors' survey.

As part of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, local authorities are required to conduct a standardised survey of Councillors and candidates for election to the office of Councillor in their areas. The survey is to include both County and Town and Community Councillors and candidates and asks a prescribed set of questions that included (but was not limited to) questions about sex and gender identity; sexual orientation; language; ethnicity; age; disability; religion or belief; health; education and qualifications; employment; and work as a Councillor. Data Cymru conducted the 2022 survey on behalf of the local authorities. The main aim of the survey was to provide timely information on the

demographic profile of local authority Councillors and candidates. The intention is that the survey will be repeated during each ordinary election to track changes in Councillors' and candidates' characteristics over time.

Through the Diversity pledge the Council gave a commitment to ensuring that all members and candidates complete the Welsh Government candidates' and councillors' survey distributed at election time.

As required, the Council provided Welsh Government with the details of all candidates standing for election, to allow them to receive the survey.

**Suggested Improvements** – Further promotion of the survey and the need for completion will be promoted to all candidates and newly elected Members whenever possible following publication of the survey, including promotion during the Member Induction Programme.

Within the Elections and Elected Bodies (Wales) Bill, Section 26 relates to the Survey of councillors and unsuccessful candidates in local elections. It is suggested that in addition to the core questions in the survey, which apply to each local authority in Wales, it allows local authorities to include questions aimed at identifying the impact of any local initiatives established to improve the diversity of candidate standing in the election for which the survey is being undertaken.

## **7.8 To take forward improved equality monitoring of Members**

Through the Diversity Working group, Members considered the proposal to take forward an independent Members diversity survey which would serve as a benchmark for the Authority going forward. During the work of the group the Diversity and Inclusion Manager brought forward research conducted in respect of socio-economic questions to be included within a potential survey for Members consideration, prior to a complete survey being considered.

Following the research, the following areas were recommended for Socio-economic background monitoring to which Members of the working group agreed:

- a. Parents/Guardian Occupation
- b. Type of secondary school attended
- c. Parents qualification/university attended
- d. Eligibility for Free School Meals

**Suggested Improvements** – The proposed survey presented to the Working Group in 2021 be reviewed by the Diversity and Inclusion Manager to ensure that it is still fit for purpose. Once finalised this survey to be conducted within the current term of office for Members.

## **7.9 Working with Diversity Champions to encourage each political group to set ambitious targets for candidate selection from under-represented groups at the 2022 local elections.**

At the most recent Political Group Leaders meeting (February 2024) Group Leaders agreed to act as diversity champions within each of their Council's political groups.

**Suggested Improvements** - Through the regular Political Group Leaders meeting, agenda Items in respect of diversity target setting will be incorporated for future meetings.

Offer support and recourses, to support political groups to encourage a diverse range of individuals to consider standing on behalf of a political party. It should be recognised that larger political groups, who represent larger UK or national parties already have structures in place to undertake selection of candidates for the 2027 local elections. This work would therefore include discussions, in a non-political way, aimed at supporting smaller political groups and independent candidates to promote diversity, aimed at ensuring the broadest range of backgrounds are considered for standing for elected office.

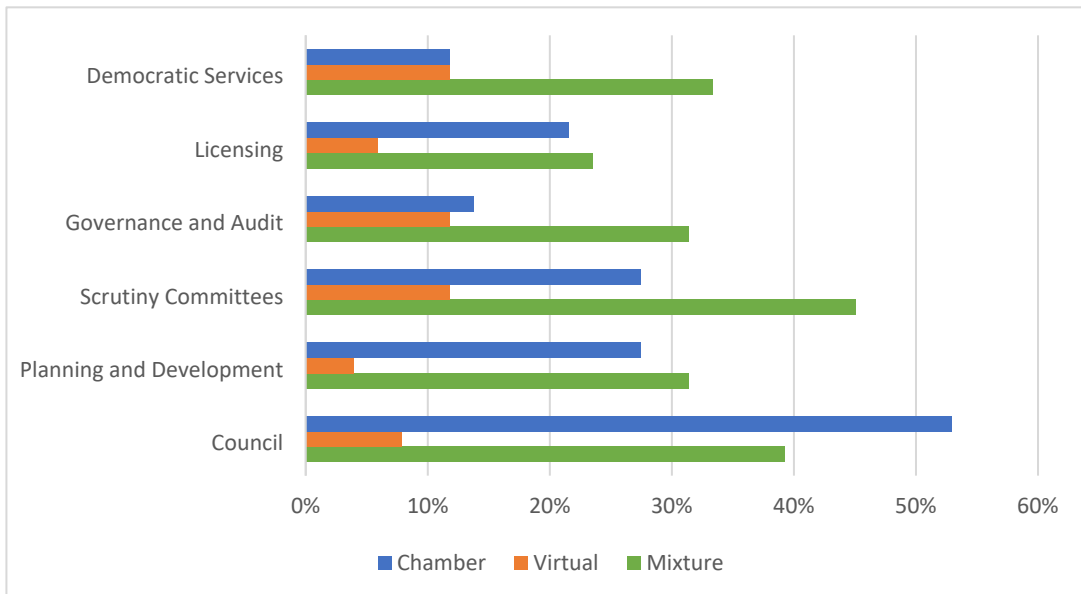
**7.10 The development and promotion of new ways of working for members, including the provision of hybrid meeting opportunities and eLearning platforms which will assist and encourage all candidates and those from underrepresented groups to stand for office.**

The 2021 Act enabled local authorities to hold multilocation meetings, which the Welsh Government described as a potentially important reform, particularly in the encouragement of diversity.

“Hybrid working was broadly welcomed by all witnesses, enabling those with conflicting priorities, such as work or caring responsibilities, or councillors with disabilities to attend meetings where they might otherwise not been able to. WEN Wales noted that the “permanent enshrinement” of remote working in the 2021 Act “is another positive step that provides better access for women with caring responsibilities and disabled people”

The Council has positively embraced hybrid meeting arrangements, which is reflected in the Council’s Multi Location Meeting Policy and Public Participation Strategy. The Council recognises the benefits this provision has for both Elected Members and the public in attending Committee meetings.

During the 2023 Member Survey, when Members were asked about their preference for attending in person or online or a mixture of both, Members responded as follows:



| Meeting                           | Chamber | Virtual | Mixture |
|-----------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| <b>Council</b>                    | 53%     | 8%      | 39%     |
| <b>Planning &amp; Development</b> | 44%     | 6%      | 50%     |
| <b>Scrutiny Committees</b>        | 33%     | 14%     | 53%     |
| <b>Governance &amp; Audit</b>     | 24%     | 21%     | 55%     |
| <b>Licensing</b>                  | 42%     | 12%     | 46%     |
| <b>Democratic Services</b>        | 21%     | 21%     | 58%     |

There is a clear view that the flexibility to attend either physically or remotely is a great benefit for Elected and Co-Opted (Lay) Members.

The professional approach by the Council to hybrid meetings has been recognised by other Authorities with the Council hosting a range of hybrid meetings for other organisations, including the WLGA Annual General Meeting.

The webcasting of meetings is a further area which promotes engagement in the democratic process, allowing the public the option to watch meetings live, without having to attend the Council Chamber, which can often be seen as a barrier, which may ignite an interest in members of the public to become a future candidate.

Through the Democratic Services Committee, the Council have produced an ambitious Development Programme for Members, providing Member briefing sessions on a virtual basis to allow for the convenience of Members. These sessions are recorded to allow Members to access the recording if they were unable to attend the session or to act as a refresher. Members have been provided with useful electronic handbooks by the WLGA and access to the RCT source which provides numerous eLearning opportunities.

**Suggested improvements** – The move of the Council Headquarters, including the Council Chamber to Pontypridd Town Centre is also viewed as a positive addition, allowing better access to Elected Members and democracy with better transport links available.

It is the intention for the Members Portal to host an area for the undertaking of E-learning modules in the future.

**7.11 Continue working towards the standards for member support and development set out in the Wales Charter for Member Support and Development.**

The WLGA has been working with Heads of Democratic Services to develop a voluntary self-evaluation framework for Councils to use to assess the effectiveness of the support they provide for Councillors. This framework is a modernisation of the former Wales Charter for Councillor Support and Development which it replaces.

It is proposed that the existing Charter be replaced by a voluntary self-assessment framework that focusses on the support provided for Councillors to deliver the outcomes needed by their communities. The framework aims to cover all aspects of good practice in Councillor support. However, as priorities and resources differ between councils, it would be for councils to decide locally how much of the framework to use and which sections should be prioritised.

At the September meeting of the Democratic Services Committee, Members provided feedback in respect of the proposed framework which was out to consultation. Since this date, the final version of the Framework has been circulated to Local Authorities to utilise.

**Suggested improvements** - The Council have always strived to provide the best support and development opportunities to its Members and this is reflected in the Council's positive track record of achieving both the Charter, Advanced Charter and the Good Practice and Innovation Award. The Council will continue to listen to its Members to guide us with the support needed and will always strive to learn and adapt to meet the needs of our Members.

The newly implemented Self Evaluation framework will be brought forward to a future meeting of the Democratic Services Committee for Committee consideration.

**7.12 Continue to demonstrate a commitment to a duty of care for Councillors by:**

- a) **providing access to counselling services for all councillors through the Councils Occupational Health Service and Cari Wellbeing Service.**

**b) Promoting the general open-door policy for Members to contact the Head of Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer for any concerns**

Through the Member Personal Development Process all Members were reminded of the access available to the Council's Occupational Health Service and the open door policy of Senior Officers for any Member concerns. Reminders of these important messages and access and referrals to the then Cari System (now Vivup system) have been proactively promoted in the Members weekly update.

The Council Business Unit has reintroduced the Member Coffee sessions in advance of Council meetings and other committee meetings, to allow Members the important opportunity to come together and network, which was an important aspect highlighted as important to Members wellbeing, which can sometimes be missed through the virtual settings that we often work in.

A number of Members Wellbeing briefing sessions have been provided over the Municipal Year, where details of Vivup amongst other important messages were promoted to Members. Arrangements were also made for Members to receive the flu jab, for those under the age of 60.

Members have been surveyed on the potential topic for further future sessions to ensure that we are providing advice and guidance that is helpful to Members.

**Suggested Improvements** – An area in respect of Members Well being is being developed on the Members Portal to act as a timely reminder to Members about the importance of their own health and well being, when also taking forward the work of the Council and their constituents.

The working arrangements available within the new Council Headquarters provides areas for Members to hot desk and take forward meetings within the Members area, to allow for healthy working environments and improved networking arrangements.

**c) having regard for the safety and wellbeing of councillors whenever they are performing their role as councillors and ensuring that all Members are aware of the safety provisions in place for Members through the Council Business Unit in partnership with the Community Safety Partnership and South Wales Police**

A report in respect of [Members safety](#) was provided to the Democratic Services Committee in April detailing important advice and guidance to Members in respect of their safety. Details of the lone working policy were also provided to Members during the Member Induction Programme as well as a Member briefing session during the induction programme.

A members briefing session with South Wales Police was arranged during September, with again first hand advice and guidance to members when undertaking their role.

Cyber security training was also provided inhouse by the digital skills team and a further session by South Wales Police was also provided during both September and October.

The Council Business unit have regularly advised of other training or briefing sessions provided by other organisations, with the most recent sessions provided by the WLGA in respect of Personal Safety for Councillors.

Arrangements have been made to trial the 'StaySafe' App, which acts as a personal alarm when Members are feeling intimidated or at risk. Demonstrations to Members that have indicated their interest in this trial have taken place. We will gauge Members feedback in respect of the app, to ascertain whether it is fit for purpose, and depending on this feedback whether we roll this out to any interested Member.

Security arrangements are in place within the Council Chamber, when Members are involved with public meetings, as there can be occasions when contentious decisions are made. Arrangements have been made for security devices to be installed at Member addresses if deemed necessary.

**Suggested Improvements** – Following the trial of the stay safe App, all Members will be contacted to discuss whether each Member would like to utilise this important safety feature.

The new working arrangements within the new Council Headquarters should make it easier for Members to meet with residents within designated meeting rooms within the building, with the building controlled with appropriate security arrangements, including the Council Chamber.

**d) zero-tolerance approach to bullying and harassment by members including such harassment through social networks**

Members have been provided with social media training opportunities to help with the managing of their Council social media accounts. Members are strongly advised to take forward a separate Councillor account and refrain from sharing any personal information on this account with their own personal social media platforms. A social Media policy has also been developed and was shared with Members during induction.

Infographics to assist Members with online civility have been promoted by the Council Business Unit, for Members to utilise.



Other resources for Councillors to utilise in respect of personal safety and online abuse are listed below:

- **Councillors' guide to handling intimidation | Local Government Association (Welsh version)**
- **Personal safety | Local Government Association (Welsh version)**
- **'Rules of engagement' infographic for councillors** to use on social media to give all users a clear 'code' by which they should operate (also in Welsh)
- **'Rules of engagement' infographic for candidates** to use on social media to give all users a clear 'code' by which they should operate (also in Welsh)
- **'Handling online abuse' infographic** - a quick reference guide for councillors with steps they can take to protect themselves online and seek support where needed. (also in Welsh)
- **Improving digital citizenship: A practical guide for councillors** | Local Government Association (Welsh version)
- **Research and Good Practice Improving digital citizenship: Research and good practice** | Local Government Association (Welsh version)

**Suggested Improvements** – Members are encouraged to contact the Police and the Head of Democratic Services when dealing with any online abuse and harassment.

**e) Providing training and learning opportunities to support Members in undertaking their role.**

Through the work of the Democratic Services Committee the Council are working to support the development of all of its Elected Members and to ensure that they are able meet the demands of their roles. As a Council we look to ensure that:

- There is a planned and structured approach to Elected Member Learning and Development;



- Elected Members have access to appropriate means to assist them to acquire relevant knowledge and develop the skills necessary for their roles;
- Learning and development, wherever possible, is linked to the roles of Elected Members;
- Access to learning and development activities is equitable;
- Elected Members are encouraged to identify their own development needs and participate fully in learning and development activities;
- Elected Member learning and development activity is adequately resourced within available budgets;
- The Member Development Programme will be produced, updated and monitored on a regular basis, to support the needs of Members.

In July 2023, the Democratic Services Committee approved the [Member Development Programme](#) for the Municipal Year, which was formed following the Member Personal Development Review and Committee requests. The programme also reflects upon the Welsh Government Competency Framework and modules identified through this framework as general good practice.

The Development Programme is a fluid document, regularly taking forward Members comments and requests, therefore additional briefing topic sessions have been delivered upon.

Training provided to Members has been a mix of in house training and external, and a mixture of formal presentation / workshop and e-learning.

**Suggested Improvement** - The Head of Democratic Services, working with the Council's Corporate Training Team (People Development), has identified opportunities to undertake Members training analysis meetings, to assist Members with identifying any training needs. It is suggested that we capture this information in respect of training analysis meetings through the Members survey which will be circulated in the next month.

Through the Members Portal, Members will have access to the recently developed data library which will provide access to accurate and timely data, which will include details of equalities within the County Borough.

**f) Surveying Members annually on the support arrangements available.**

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.

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.

The result of the survey are reported to the Democratic Services Committee to consider the feedback contained within and to consider any action necessary resulting from the feedback contained.

The report in respect of the 2023 survey is available [here](#).

During September 2023, the Head of Democratic Services provided a Members Briefing Session to all Members reminding Members of the support arrangements available for Members to access through Democratic Services and Member Services.

**Suggested Improvements** – That the Council Business Unit continue to conduct the Annual Survey and take forward any areas raised by Members.

**g) providing recess periods during school holidays to support councillors with caring or work commitments.**

As agreed at the Council AGM on the 23rd May 2018 (Minute No.15(3) Refers) Committee meetings were to be convened outside of the School holiday periods, save for exceptional circumstances (urgent business requirements). This scheduling has proved successful for Members and it is proposed that this continues.

**h) Promoting the welsh language provision available to all Members at Council meetings**

Welsh Language provision is available for the Council Committee meetings for any Member or Member of the public to utilise when addressing Committee. The Council meets its Welsh Language Standards in respect of Committee meeting papers and publication.

The Council also promotes welsh language learning opportunities to all Members.

**i) Sufficient provision of ICT equipment and support to allow a Member to undertake their role effectively.**

Through the new ways of working imposed on the Council through the pandemic, and the new statutory required hybrid approaches to meetings, the provision of ICT equipment to Members is now more important than ever.

Post-election, all Members were equipped with a digital device to allow them to undertake their Elected Member role, and to attend Committee meetings via the virtual Zoom platform, with appropriate training provided to each Member through the Council Business Unit and ICT colleagues.

In line with the recommendations of the Independent Review Panel and the decision taken forward by the Democratic Services Committee, Members were provided with a mobile telephony provision.

- j) Encourage all members take up the allowances and salaries to which they are entitled, particularly any reimbursement for costs of care, so that all members receive fair remuneration for their work and that the role of member is not limited to those who can afford it.**

The salary and Member allowances is promoted to all Members during the Member Induction Programme and reminder of such allowances are provided during the Member Personal Development Review.

Details of remuneration are also promoted on the Council website to promote these benefits for any prospective candidate.

Developments within the Member Portal have included the claiming of Member expenses, which will make such a process easier for Members to undertake, rather than the current paper exercise. Detail of allowances and salaries will also be promoted within this area of the Portal.

The Head of Democratic Services provides annual communication reminders in respect of the Care Allowance provision, acting as a timely reminder for all Members.

- k) Encourage Members to participate in the Local Government Pension Scheme to assist in protecting them in their retirement.**

Details of the Local Government Pension Scheme are made available to Members during the Member Induction Programme. If Members require any additional details in respect of the scheme they are able to contact relevant officers within the Council to assist with their queries.

- l) Encourage Members to discuss reasonable adjustments to assist them in undertaking their role.**

Again, following the Member Induction Programme, Members are asked if there are any reasonable adjustments they would like to assist them in undertaking their role. Reminders of such adjustments are also highlighted within the Personal Development Review. However, Members can speak to the Head of Democratic Services or any officer within the Council Business Unit to discuss any adjustment which may assist in their role.

- M) Encourage the take up of provisions available to Members in respect of allowances and mobile phone provision to assist Members in undertaking their role.**

The Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales expects Members to be provided with adequate support to carry out their duties and that the support provided should take account of the specific needs of individual Members. The Democratic Services Committee is required to review the level of support

provided to Members. All Elected Members & Co-opted Members should be provided with adequate telephone, email and internet facilities to give electronic access to appropriate information.

Members are provided with telephone provision and devices as well the opportunity for hotdesking within the new Council Headquarters..

## **8 OTHER AREAS OF CONSIDERATION IN RESPECT OF DIVERSITY OUTSIDE OF THE RCT PLEDGE.**

### **Access to Elected Office Fund and The Elections and Elected Bodies (Wales) Bill**

- 8.1 In 2021, the Welsh Government launched a pilot scheme to fund reasonable adjustments and support for disabled candidates seeking election to Senedd Cymru 2021 election and 2022 Local Government elections.
- 8.2 The fund was administered by Disability Wales and covered costs such as assistive aids, training, travel, personal assistance and communication support.
- 8.3 An independent Review of the Access to Elected Office Fund Wales Pilot has been concluded and published. The report concluded that the arrangements put in place were welcomed and valued by candidates and that there was clear support for the fund to be continued. As with any pilot there were lessons to learn. In this case key points included the limited amount of time the fund was available to candidates, the need for greater clarity about what support is available, and the need for greater awareness and promotion of the fund.
- 8.4 The Elections and Elected Bodies (Wales) Bill provides consideration of Accessibility and Diversity within Welsh Elections, which looks to legislate to ensure the fund continues to be available for future elections. The Bill includes reference to:
  - **Services to promote diversity in persons seeking elected office** - duty on Welsh Ministers to put in place arrangements aimed at improving diversity within Senedd and Local Government democratic structures by providing assistance to remove barriers to participation including initiatives and schemes for underrepresented individuals seeking election to Senedd and local government election.
  - **Financial assistance schemes to promote diversity in persons seeking elected office** - Section 29 provides for individual schemes to be created and tailored to provide support for either a single protected characteristic and / or common barriers across a range of protected characteristics and socio-economic circumstances.
- 8.5 Welsh Government carried out an evidence review of councillor remuneration in Wales and how it compares with other countries (Williams, 2021), and a survey of public attitudes (Owens, 2021). The final element of this research involved

carrying out an online survey of councillors in Wales at principal and community and town council levels. Taken together, the research findings from all three stages will broaden understanding of the role and remuneration of councillors in Wales from multiple perspectives. [Councillor remuneration and citizen engagement with councillors: survey of councillors | GOV.WALES](#)

- 8.6 The Cabinet have recently approved the Council's [Strategic Equality Plan](#), following pre-scrutiny by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, which highlights the equality objectives the Council will work towards over the next 4 years.
- 8.7 As part of the Council's approach an Equality, Inclusion and Diversity Steering Group will be established through the Leaders Scheme of Delegation to help shape the delivery of the objectives.
- 8.8 It is proposed that delivery and monitoring of the Council's Diversity Pledge is also included in the remit of the Steering Group.

## **9 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY**

- 9.1 The work of the Democratic Services Committee Diversity working group looked to improve the equality and diversity across the County Borough and within the local democracy setting. The more representative of society and diverse our Councillors are the better understanding they will have of the needs of the local community and therefore are better equipped at carrying out their duties and responsibilities

## **10. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 Encouraging diversity within democracy includes promotion of all languages. The Council has positively promoted and supported bilingual engagement at Council meetings and provision of Committee materials.

## **11. CONSULTATION / INVOLVEMENT**

- 11.1 No formal consultation is necessary.

## **12. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 12.1 None.

## **13. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED**

- 13.1 The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 outlines a number of duties placed on Local Authorities in respect of the diversity agenda

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

- 14.1 The work of a Councillor is fundamental to the Council's Corporate plan, as Councillors are the mouthpiece for the communities that they serve.
- 14.2 Ensuring that there are greater opportunities for a more diverse democracy across RCT links to the Wellbeing of Future Generations goals of a more equal Wales and a Wales of cohesive communities

## **15. CONCLUSION**

- 15.1 Trying to achieve a diverse culture is challenging and the Democratic Services Committee has proactively taken forward work in this area to promote diversity within the Council, through its former Working Group who identified potential barriers that may dissuade members of the public to stand as a candidate for election.
- 15.2 As a Council we need to ensure that any perceived barriers are eradicated and instead celebrate and promote the rewarding experiences of becoming a Councillor.
- 15.3 Ensuring Members have a clear understanding of their roles and behaviour in and outside of the Council Chamber is paramount to ensuring a safe and inclusive working environment for all.

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

**AS AMENDED BY**

**THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985**

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**