



RHONDDA CYNON TAF

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

1ST MAY 2024

**SUFFICIENCY OF RESOURCES REPORT – STATUTORY ‘OPINION’ OF THE
STATUTORY HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES**

**REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR DEMOCRATIC SERVICES &
COMMUNICATIONS**

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To confirm the Statutory view of the Head of Democratic Services, in respect of the provision of staff, resources, and accommodation available to support Members in their role as set out within the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 (the “Measure”) and Local Government & Elections Act (Wales) 2021 as amended.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Democratic Services Committee:

- 2.1 Notes the overall support available to elected Members, as set out within the report.
- 2.2 Notes the statutory opinion of the Head of Democratic Services, in respect of the sufficiency of resources, as set out within the report.
- 2.3 Endorse the proposed arrangement in respect of the cost of broadband & agenda review and its associated costs detailed in section 10 for the reasons outlined within the report.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In accordance with the Local Government Measure 2011, it is my duty, as Head of Democratic Services to provide a report detailing the support provided to Elected Members by the Council and to provide my view on the sufficiency of this support through a sufficiency of resources report. The sufficiency report for the previous municipal year can be [viewed here](#). Previous reports summarise the ongoing improvements undertaken since 2018, which significantly enhanced the support available to all Members, through the amalgamation of two previously separate teams. The improvements in capacity made at this time have not only enhanced the support available to non-executive Members, but additionally they have supported improvements in the governance arrangements of the local authority and have progressed the

recommendations of the [‘fit for the future’](#) review undertaken by the Wales Audit Office.

- 3.2 At the Council’s twenty third annual general meeting, Members considered the review undertaken in respect of Overview and Scrutiny ‘Fit for the Future’. Members agreed that the terms of reference for each of the Scrutiny Committees be reviewed and refined to assist in the WAO recommendations for the Council to ‘strengthen the support for scrutiny, including scrutiny capacity and Member training’.
- 3.3 Changes continue to be progressed in respect of the Council’s scrutiny arrangements, with further amendments being made at the Council’s 2022 AGM to allow for greater scrutiny impact in respect of supporting the Council’s performance, reduce duplication of reporting and provide a clear simplified reporting structure, more a-lined with the Council’s functions and Senior Leadership Team. This report can be accessed [here](#).
- 3.4 Members are reminded that the Council Business Unit supports a wide range of governance arrangements, including Democratic Services, Scrutiny, Executive and Regulatory functions and Members’ Support Services. The service also supports the Council’s Mayoral Office, the Office of the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Office. Support for executive functions do not form part of the statutory responsibilities of the Head of Democratic Services or the Democratic Services Committee.
- 3.5 The broader directorate is also responsible for the Council’s Communications, Marketing, Consultation and Engagement functions. More recently the department has taken responsibility for the Armed Forces Covenant and the Veterans Advice Service for Rhondda Cynon Taf, Merthyr Tydfil and the Vale of Glamorgan. Following the review of the Council’s Senior Leadership Team by the new Chief Executive, these services now form part of Legal and Democratic Services, under the Director of Legal and Democratic Services.
- 3.6 The strong links between these functions and democracy have provided an ability to provide further support to Elected Members and additional capacity to support priorities, without compromising the necessary distinction required between corporate functions, and the services and resources dedicated to elected members and democratic functions. .
- 3.7 The Council Business Unit continues to support a number of Joint Committee. This includes the Public Service Board, the newly established South East Wales Corporate Joint Committee (formerly the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal) and the Central South Education Consortium (CSEC). As well as servicing the Joint committee of the CSEC, through a service level agreement, the Council Business Unit provides wider governance arrangements to the organisation. This arrangement has enabled wider capacity to Elected Members in Rhondda Cynon Taf to be maintained and enhanced.

4 **STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS**

4.1 'The Measure', which was replaced by the Local Government & Elections Act (Wales) 2021, established the statutory requirement for Local Authorities to appoint a Democratic Services Committee to oversee the democratic services functions of the Council, ensuring that those functions are adequately resourced. The Council's Democratic Services Committee was established at the Council's Annual General Meeting in May 2012.

4.2 The Council, through its Democratic Services Committee must appoint an officer as the 'Statutory Head of Democratic Services'. This Officer, who is afforded statutory protection, is responsible for determining the appropriate level of support and facilities to enable members to effectively discharge their role as part of the democratic processes of the local authority. This role has a statutory responsibility to independently advise members and ensure that the Council has effective scrutiny arrangements in place.

4.3 **Statutory functions of the Head of Democratic Services include:**

- Determining the level and range of staff support available to Elected Members.
- Ensuring Members are effectively supported to discharge their committee responsibilities.
- Advising members in respect of the Council's democratic and committee arrangements.
- Ensuring the provision and delivery of scrutiny by elected members, within the local authority
- To ensure the provision of appropriate research facilities to members
- Ensuring the resources available (i.e. accommodation and technology) are sufficient to allow Members to effectively perform their role.
- Ensuring that appropriate training and development arrangements are in place for all Elected Members.

It is key for the appropriate resources to be made available by the Council to support these important democratic functions.

4.4 Members are advised to note that the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales states that it is the responsibility of the Council, through its Democratic Services Committee, to provide support based on an assessment of the needs of its Members.

4.5 In accordance with the 'Measure' and the Democratic Services Committee's agreed terms of reference, the Committee has a responsibility to keep under review the provision of staff, accommodation and other resources made available to the Head of Democratic Services, in order to ensure that it is adequate for the responsibilities of the post and the discharge of democratic functions. The Head of Democratic Services, in turn, is responsible for making recommendations or confirming a statutory opinion to the Committee, to enable such determinations to be made. This function was introduced to ensure that sufficient resources are available to non-executive Members and for Members to effectively perform their democratic role.

- 4.6 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 Council meetings at least once during each term of administration. The Council Business Unit goes above this duty and administers the survey on an annual basis as we use the survey to better understand the needs of Members to ensure that the provision of support and resources to non-executive members is adequate. It also aims to, where necessary, highlight and improve the support available.
- 4.7 Members will be familiar with the feedback provided by the survey undertaken during the 2022/23 Municipal year, which was reported to the Committee in September 2023 and can be accessed [here](#). The 2023 / 2024 bilingual Members Survey has recently been undertaken ahead of the Council AGM, which will assist in setting the Calendar of meetings for the next Municipal Year.
- 4.8 Previous surveys evidence a positive endorsement of the current support provided to Members, with 71% of Members advising they were very satisfied and 24% satisfied with the support provided by the Council Business Unit during 2022/2023 Municipal year. 4% advised that their view on the support was 'unknown' as they felt that they had not utilised the support arrangements. Members feedback in respect Members Support was the lack of awareness of support that was available and the Council Business Unit took forward a report on the support available in response to this feedback. A Members Briefing session highlighting the opportunities for all Members was also delivered. The results also demonstrated a recognition of the improvements to the level of communication and information circulated through the Members daily/weekly updates, with 94% agreeing that the content and frequency were appropriate. Although this remains an area of continuous improvement for the Council Business Unit with the intention that further developments to the Members Portal will assist in improving communication links to Members.
- 4.9 Since the local elections 2022, the unit has noticed a significant increase in the level and complexity of support requested by members to enable them to effectively perform their role. This point is made in a positive context, to note the importance placed by Elected Members upon serving their constituents effectively, and ensuring they are well placed to perform their role within the democratic arrangements of the Council.
- 4.10 Since the implementation of the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021, additional requirements have been placed upon the team. In addition, the Unit look wherever possible to continue the momentum of improvement we have sustained since the reorganisation of the service back in 2018.
- 4.11 Members will be aware of the Statutory direction now in place for the Head of Democratic Services to be a Chief Officer. The Service Director of Democratic Services and Communication is already a member of the Council's Senior Leadership Team. As a result the profile of scrutiny and the needs of Members, to support the democratic functions of the Council, is central in the consideration of the Council corporate leadership. It is important to place on

record the support which has been provided corporately over the last five years for Democratic services, against a backdrop of reducing public sector resources over the period. This prioritisation has enabled the creation of additional capacity for Members support and the appropriate level of resource to progress major enhancements in how services are delivered.

- 4.12 Members will be familiar with the financial context and outlook reported as part of the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan. This information makes clear that all Council services will need to reflect upon how they deliver services in the future, and the need to achieve efficiency savings in service delivery moving forward over the short to medium term.
- 4.13 Supporting the improvements which have been driven forward in recent years, has been a recognition corporately, by my colleagues in the Senior Leadership Team, in particular the important role scrutiny plays, and the need to provide sufficient financial resources to the Council Business Unit, and in turn Elected Members to achieve this. It is important to highlight that the pace of improvement and change may be reduced in future years in response to the wider financial circumstances facing the Council.
- 4.14 Our focus over the next Municipal Year will be to take forward the public participation Strategy's aspirations as set out in the Council's recently adopted Public Participation Strategy, which looks to improve and promote engagement and involvement in the democratic process. A particular focus will be participation in the scrutiny process.
- 4.15 This will of course require appropriate resources to be made available, and to support members aspirations, we will be able to utilise the wider expertise available across the wider service directorate. When new approaches or ways of working are introduced within the Unit the challenge in the future becomes sustaining this activity alongside the day-to-day business activity. The availability of future resources will need to be a consideration when members are determining the level and pace of change in this specific area.
- 4.16 The service will continue to prioritise the potential provided by our continued investment in our broadcasting technology to enable participation in our democratic proceedings. Furthermore, we will look to progress the roll-out of the additional functionality which is available to support committee proceedings.
- 4.17 The department is investing a significant amount of time and effort into exploring refinements to our hybrid meeting functionality, including a one-size-fits-all voting system for both physical and online participants.
- 4.18 The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 placed a requirement on councils to provide all members with an opportunity to have a personal development review to assess their development needs. Such reviews are conducted by the Head of Democratic Services and within RCT are supported by Senior colleagues within the Council Business Unit. Such reviews are an assessment of training and development needs rather than a review of

performance. Such reviews allow the Head of Democratic Services to form a robust Member Development Programme going forward.

- 4.19 It was pleasing to note from the previous Member Survey that Members found the Personal Development Review Process helpful, and the process provided the opportunities for Officers to further understand the needs and requirements of Members, and once again, can I thank all Members for their contributions in the process. It should be noted the resource and time implications put upon Officers in undertaking such reviews.

5 STAFF RESOURCES AND ADVICE AVAILABLE TO MEMBERS

- 5.1 The resource available within the Council Business Unit consists of 9 Officers and the utilisation of 3 dedicated Welsh Translation Officers from within the Translation team. The unit is led by the Service Director of Democratic Services and Communication (Statutory Head of Democratic Services).
- 5.2 Through the Office accommodation move, it has been appropriate to move the previous site supervisor under the remit of the Council Business Unit, as the 'Council Business – Meeting Supervisor' to help support the smooth running of public meetings within the new Headquarters. This role is making a positive difference to 'Members Services' support.
- 5.3 A report provided to the Democratic Services Committee during the 2023 – 2024 Municipal Year highlights the work undertaken by the Unit, which can be accessed [here](#).
- 5.4 In summary the unit provide support to Members through:
- Timely production of agenda / Reports / minutes / Decisions Notices
 - Members Services general support – Letters / Reporting of problems / Declarations of Interest / Member Role descriptions
 - Supporting Members through hybrid / virtual meetings
 - Promotion of webcasting
 - Working Groups and production of final reports and recommendations
 - Member Research Provision
 - Members' wellbeing
 - Detailed Member Development Programme
 - Promotion of Welsh Language with the availability of dedicated Members' Welsh Language classes with the Council's Welsh language tutor
 - Continued development of the Members Portal
 - Diversity in Democracy Agenda
 - Support to the Central South Consortium
 - Improved Communication with Members through the daily and weekly updates
- 5.5 The list of formal Committee meetings supported by the Unit can be found through the following [link](#). This list is not exhaustive. Scrutiny Working group meetings, plus some Member / Officer meetings are not included within the list.

- 5.6 To date, support to the Mayor & Deputy Mayor, and the civic functions of the Council has been provided through the Council Business Unit. In response to the changing role of the Mayor post pandemic, civic activity has reduced in recent years. For example, in 2020 the Official Council Vehicle was not replaced, and the Mayoral Administrator/Chauffeur role was deleted from our structure as part of the need to identify ongoing efficiency savings.
- 5.7 The role and 'workload' of the Mayor has continued to reduce in recent years, and it is therefore the intention not to replace the role of Mayoral Secretary, when the current postholder retires in May 2024. Can I place on record my thanks to the outgoing Mayors secretary for their work and contributions over the years and wish them a happy and healthy retirement. As a consequence of the above it will be necessary to 'downscale' the role of the Mayor moving forward, and restrict activity to very specific Civic functions, to enable the service to achieve necessary savings. The deletion of this role will see a reduction in the wider capacity available to Elected Members
- 5.8 The Council Business Unit continues to provide governance support to the Central South Consortium, including responsibility for the Joint Committee. As members will be aware, since 2020 the Council has been responsible for delivery of the scrutiny functions of the Cardiff Capital Region Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee. Following agreement of the ten local authorities which make up the South East Wales Corporate Joint Committee (CJC), this Council will now provide support to the Elected Members of the CJC Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee (JSOC), including myself as acting as the advisor to the committee, and taking the roles defined to a 'Head of Democratic Services' for the purposes of providing sufficient support and resources to perform their role.
- 5.9 Due to the professional running of the Council's hybrid meetings, the Head of Democratic Services has been approached to support the delivery of hybrid and webcasting support to the SEW CJC for a number of their meetings. discussions are ongoing in respect of this provision of technical and logistical support for the CJC, which will form part of a potential service level agreement (SLA). This SLA will provide an additional financial income to the service, which can be reinvested into member support resources in RCT.
- 5.10 To assist the Council Business Unit in delivering support to all Members through both the medium of Welsh and English, three dedicated translation officers continue to support the service, in order to provide dedicated support to the unit on behalf of Members. Furthermore in a bid to increase the level of discussion through the medium of Welsh in the Council Chamber, a dedicated training resource continues to be provided to elected members, to enable all Councillors to learn or refresh their skills.
- 5.11 The Council Business Unit continues to support the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Public Services Board (PSB) Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the City Deal Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The department also provides administration support to the Cwm Taf Morgannwg PSB itself.

- 5.12 I am satisfied that over the short to medium-term, there remains sufficient resources to support and advise these external committees. There will however be a requirement to continually review the support requirements for these two important Joint Committees, with the establishment of the Cwm Taf Morgannwg PSB, following the addition of Bridgend County Borough into these arrangements, and the need to create bespoke scrutiny arrangements for the new Corporate Joint Committee over the coming year.
- 5.13 Funding received for the support the service provides to the Central South Consortium in particular, provides funding which supports additional capacity which supplements our base-budget resources. Any review of this support, and the level of service we provide, may have a financial impact, which will need to be addressed, to maintain the current level provision over the medium to longer term.
- 5.14 2023/2024 has seen no substantive changes in the staff arrangements, following the return during the previous municipal of year, of three key officers from maternity leave.
- 5.15 Capacity issues have arisen over this reporting period, due to the unfortunate long term sickness absence of two members of the team. I would like to thank members for their support during this time and extend our best wishes to those two members of staff. In addition, over the last twelve months an Officer within the Council Business Unit, was seconded to the Cabinet Office to provide maternity cover to the role of 'Private Secretary to the Leader of the Council'. This secondment is due to conclude at the end of June 2024 and has provided a positive developmental opportunity for the postholder.
- 5.16 It is the intention moving forward, to merge responsibility for the civic functions of the Council, into the Cabinet Office/Cabinet Support Team.
- 5.17 To offset some of the capacity challenges we face, effective use will continue to be made of Officer support and expertise which exists within the wider directorate. Better working arrangements provide opportunities for staff to undertake work across different sections across Democratic Services and Communications, and in addition the wider Legal and Democratic Services Directorate, rather than working in silo. This has supported with Staff development and also Service priorities.
- 5.18 The Council Business Unit has always worked to a high standard, supporting Members to undertake their constituency roles, or their roles within Committees. This support is also offered to our co-opted Members and Joint Committee Members across and up-to ten local authorities. The work and practices of the Council Business Unit have been recognised by Wales Audit Office as 'good working practice', although we recognise there are always opportunities to adapt ways of working to achieve better outcomes.

- 5.19 As Head of Democratic Services I am incredibly fortunate to be supported by an incredibly enthusiastic and dedicated team of officers, who enable the service to grow and improve and effectively support all Elected Members.
- 5.20 **As Head of Democratic Services, I am satisfied that through the provision of staffing arrangements set out above, that the staff resource available to Members is sufficient. In arriving at this view, I have been mindful of the wider financial context facing the Council, and the necessity upon all departments to identify efficiencies in line with the Medium-Term Financial Planning objectives of the local authority.**

6. ACCOMMODATION

- 6.1 Members will be well aware of the recent relocation of the Council Headquarters from Clydach Vale to 2 Llys Cadwyn, Pontypridd in January 2024. The opportunities presented by this move to modernise the provision of accommodation and associated services to Elected Members, and more broadly our democratic functions were detailed to the members in my report presented at the July Democratic Services Committee, which can be found [here](#). In addition, a Members site visit was undertaken ahead of the commencement of any work undertaken and a survey of Members was also carried out to take on Members views of the arrangements to be in place.
- 6.2 Our new accommodation seeks to respond to the new working arrangements of the Council, as set out in the Council's Hybrid Working Policy, which has reduced the need for physical office space, and instead 'hot desking' when attending an office location.
- 6.3 It is through this approach that the member accommodation and services available to Members has been developed and revised at Llys Cadwyn Council Headquarters. The successful operation of hybrid meeting arrangements, and online access to information for Members through means such as the Members Portal, has significantly reduced the need for physical attendance by a Member. This mirrors the change in working patterns seen across the Council and society more generally post pandemic.
- 6.4 As part of this new accommodation offer Members are able to access hotdesking facilities, political room access with hybrid meeting facilities as well as the provision for public meeting rooms within the building to allow Members to meet with local constituents through the Councils booking room system.
- 6.5 In addition to the Council Chamber the Council's Committee room is also equipped with hybrid and webcasting meeting facilities to allow for the live streaming and webcasting in a smaller meeting room environment. Through the relocation of the Council Chamber, the Council Business Unit have reflected on the Chamber layout and previous feedback from Members on the screen placement in the previous Council Chamber in Clydach Vale. The Council Chamber now provides further screens and desk monitors to improve the meeting room environment for Members in attendance in the Council Chamber.

Both the Council Chamber and Committee room are accessible with translation provision.

- 6.6 The Council Chamber accommodates a public gallery as well as a press gallery and a public foyer directly outside the Council Chamber.
- 6.7 A Members Lounge has also been provided to allow Members to take forward the important networking opportunities needed ahead of Committee meetings, as well as being a place for Members to consider reports ahead of meetings.
- 6.8 The Council Headquarters also provides the provision of a Faith Room / Wellbeing Room which both Elected Members and staff are able to access.
- 6.9 Concerns were raised by Members in respect of car parking provision ahead of the office move, however Members have been advised of the accessibility of local car parks within the immediate vicinity and where possible, as well as improved public transport links compared to the previous location in Clydach Vale.
- 6.10 Members will recall that a previous report identified the need to reflect on the best arrangements for Members and Officers of the Council Business Unit post pandemic - to build upon agile working and the progress made with virtual meeting arrangements. I believe our relocation has achieved this goal and in doing so significantly improved public access to the Council proceedings.
- 6.11 At our new location, services have returned to being provided in-person support to Members Monday-Friday.
- 6.12 The new Councillor Self Assessment arrangements, which replaces the previous Members Charters, to which RCT achieved the advance level for the support and services provided, provides greater flexibility for support, and in particular accommodation to be provided in a bespoke way, which best services our Elected Members. Members will shortly receive a report in respect of early adoption of the Self Assessment.
- 6.13 The Democratic Services Committee have played a positive role in the developments of the office accommodation arrangements and I am grateful to specific support provided as the plans developed, by the Chair of this committee.
- 6.14 The service has identified the importance of continuing the positive difference virtual arrangements have provided, in terms of Member attendance and engagement, and also allowing us to positively respond to the ambitions of Welsh Government, relating to public participation and diversity within local government in Wales.
- 6.15 As Head of Democratic Services, I will continue to review this provision over the coming twelve months to determine the appropriate accommodation provision to effectively support Members, as members and staff adapt to our new accommodation. I will continue to maintain a positive dialogue with the

Council's Director of Corporate Estates in respect of the development of our accommodation arrangements and chamber facilities.

- 6.16 **As Head of Democratic Services I am of the view that thanks to our relocation, our accommodation offer has been transformed and truly reflects modern working arrangements. Furthermore the move, has enhanced our meeting facilities, in a location which is significantly more accessible for the public. I am satisfied that the provision of accommodation remains sufficient for Members to effectively discharge their roles.**

7. MEMBER TRAINING

- 7.1 The Council Business Unit has again taken forward a wide-ranging Member Development Programme which was drafted following the previous Member Personal Development Reviews. This programme continues to be well received (as demonstrated by the previous Member survey).
- 7.2 These sessions continue to be offered remotely or through hybrid arrangements and at varying times to accommodate the varying circumstances of individual members. Where possible, this training continues to be provided in house, with outside expertise only being utilised in response to specific area, or in response to a request from a member.
- 7.3 Generic training provided to members over the course of the last municipal year, has focussed upon ensuring that each Elected Member is well placed to perform their important role in the governance arrangements of the local authority. Reports detailing the training provided to Members have been reported to the Committee as appropriate throughout the Municipal Year. Such training has included:
- Code of Conduct training
 - Understanding Local Government Finance
 - Elected Members Pension Scheme
 - Corporate Parenting and Safeguarding
 - Planning and Development
 - Licensing
 - Members Safety
 - Information Management
 - Scrutiny Questioning Skills
 - Scrutiny Chairing Skills
 - Accessing the Members Portal
 - Welsh Language Skills
 - Equality and Diversity
- 7.4 All learning modules and training materials continue to be available for Members to view through the Member's Portal as well as an additional 'useful information' page. Since the Members Induction period, a range of training has

already been progressed on a one-to-one basis or where appropriate to all Members by open invitation, in response to the areas of need identified during the post-election induction process. These sessions have been varied and relate to Members' community leadership, IT training/drop-in sessions, managing casework or are relative to specific committee training or changes in membership. Members are also offered external training courses as they arise and are identified by the Council Business Unit as appropriate.

- 7.5 Recent training sessions have included Winter Maintenance Planning, Emergency Planning, Anti Racism training and also one-to-one sessions on understanding the Members' Portal, Time Management and pre council surgeries for IT queries. In addition, following the relocation of the Council Chamber induction visits, including training on the new voting system within the Council Chamber were also provided.
- 7.6 The Development Programme for this Municipal Year has largely been delivered upon, albeit the intention to take forward informal sessions with Members, to share good practices and useful 'hints and tips' was postponed due to the move to virtual meetings due to the Office relocation. Refresher training in respect of Declarations of Interest has also been scheduled for the next Municipal Year. My thanks to all those Members who attended and engaged in the sessions provided as well as to Officers for providing their time and knowledge to assist Members in their role.
- 7.7 Following the election of 35 new members at the last local elections I am mindful that there will be greater resource requirement towards Member development, which will require continued focus by the Democratic Services Committee.
- 7.8 The opportunity for Members to undertake a confidential Personal Development Review (PDR) will be shortly rolled out. The outcomes of PDRs will inform the Member Development Programme (and future E-Learning modules) and can, where required, provide an understanding to matters such as corporate governance, statutory requirements, and service-related areas. Discussions will address how well supported councillors feel in their current role(s), how the Council can provide councillors with opportunities to further develop their knowledge, skills and experience to ensure that they are supported in achieving their ambitions, how the Council could further support councillors with their health, wellbeing and safety and how well the Council's IT provision for councillors supports them in their role(s).
- 7.9 Work is currently underway to develop arrangements for future training following the Council Annual General Meeting in May 2024 which will be further complimented following the PDR process. This work will again require a significant amount of resource from the Council Business Unit as we work to ensure we deliver a programme that is fit for purpose for all Members, and builds upon the foundations laid post-election, and the experiences Members have gained during the their term of office.
- 7.10 **As a result of the breadth of learning and development support provided to Members over the last twelve months, the commencement of the**

Member's PDR process, and comments received through the Members Statutory Annual Survey, as the Head of Democratic Services I am content that the training support available to Members is sufficient.

8. DIGITAL SUPPORT

- 8.1 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.
- 8.2 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.
- 8.3 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. Members can take forward the option of receiving a contribution from the Council for any personal telephony arrangements if they do not wish to utilise the handset provided by the Council.
- 8.4 One of the most significant risks we face as a Council is the risk posed by cyber criminals. This risk is detailed on our Council risk register.
- 8.5 One key area is that of digital identity. Unfortunately, Members details are more easily sourced due to the nature of the role they undertake and are listed on the public facing website. Therefore, Members become an easier target for cyber-attacks. 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.
- 8.6 Members, on Council provided devices, are better protected from such attacks, and also cannot be impersonated as they are protected by the Council's cyber security technologies. For the reasons mentioned above, Members are now only 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.
- 8.7 The digital advancements made in the Council Chamber provides better engagement in the democratic process for the public through the live streaming of meetings. The hybrid arrangements also make attendance at meetings for Members more accessible.
- 8.8 A new digital voting system has been made available in the Council Chamber to assist in the transparency of the governance and decision making of the Council. Further work and discussions are ongoing by Officers within the Council Business Unit with relevant companies in respect of a universal 'hybrid' voting system and updates are provided to the Committee as appropriate.

- 8.9 As previously mentioned, through the new office accommodation arrangements, political meeting rooms and general meetings room are set up with basic hybrid facilities which Members can access. Dedicated ICT support has also been made available at Llys Cadwyn during the Member Induction process.
- 8.10 Advancements have been made through the Members Portal, following feedback from Members and through work with the Committee's Member Portal Champions. Members, through the system can now submit expense claims electronically. In addition is the development of a training calendar and access to a data library. Future developments will look to provide a 'case management' system within the Portal as we continue to work with colleagues in the digital team.
- 8.11 Members safety in undertaking their role is of paramount importance. The Unit therefore provides where necessary, safety and security provision at some Members residential address, as a precautionary safety measure. In addition the Unit are also funding a trial of the Stay Safe App which is hoped will be rolled out to all Members during the Municipal Year.
- 8.12 **In light of the above provisions made available to Members, I am content that the digital support provided to Members is sufficient.**

9. HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES – OPINION

- 9.1 I am of the view that there continues to be sufficient support within the Council Business Unit to support non-executive Members. The approaches set out above will also provide the opportunity for more focused staff resource to support our individual functions (Council/Regulatory/Scrutiny/Member Support and Research).
- 9.2 Available resources will continue to focus upon strengthening our scrutiny and democratic support capacity. As we develop our scrutiny functions, in line with the new Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act, it will be necessary to continually review the level of support available. It will also be important to build upon the positive steps already being taken to support Member communication.
- 9.3 The significant investment in Members' facilities as part of the new Council HQ and chamber improvements and broadcasting of meetings should be positively noted.
- 9.4 The improvements achieved to date, demonstrated by the Member Development programme, demonstrate that our training and development support for Members continues to improve.

- 9.5 As I am also a member of the Senior Leadership Team, I will continue to champion the role of scrutiny and the needs of Members, to support the democratic functions of the Council.
- 9.6 **On the basis of this detail, I am of the opinion, as the Council's statutory Head of Democratic Services, that the resources to be made available for Members will remain sufficient, thanks to the appropriate staffing resources being in place and the provisions in place through the Council's accommodation offer.**

10 EFFICIENCY SAVINGS

- 10.1 Members will be aware that in the context of the financial challenges facing the local authority, all Council departments are reviewing all areas of expenditure, with the aim, where possible, to delivery important efficiency savings without impacting on frontline service delivery to the public. As has been reported to members, this process is becoming increasingly challenging for Council services, and members will note the reductions in expenditure already being progressed in respect of the Council's Mayoralty arrangements.
- 10.2 The Statutory requirements upon the Council in respect of members resources, makes specific reference to the provision, including ICT resources. In 2018 the IRP determined that 'all elected Members should be provided with adequate telephone and email facilities and electronic access to appropriate information at no cost to the individual Members'.
- 10.3 At the Council's Democratic Services Committee held on the [23rd July 2018](#), a report was approved proposing that all Elected Members be remunerated for costs associated with the provision of home broadband as it was a key enabler to accessing email facilities and electronic records, following the Committee's consideration of the 10th Annual Report of the IRP. Despite the changes in work patterns which developed in response to the Covid Pandemic, the Council has continued to provide financial support to cover these costs.
- 10.4 In 2018 Council determined in response to the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (IRP) that all Elected Members should receive a payment of £37 per month (before tax and national insurance deductions) as a contribution toward the cost of home broadband
- 10.5 Currently 37 members utilise this provision, with a base budget in place for up to 75 members to receive this support.
- 10.6 Since this original determination by the IRP, the level of member remuneration has been reviewed. The current Annual Report of the IRP does not specifically reference a requirement to meet these costs.

- 10.7 More generally, since this point in time the Council as a whole has moved to a hybrid model of working with Council Officers working remotely without additional support or remuneration to meet costs such as broadband.
- 10.8 Furthermore, since the local elections in 2022, all Members have been issued with a mobile telephone with data allowance (as part of the Council's strengthened Cyber Security arrangements) in addition to an electronic device such as laptop and/or Tablet to assist them in their role. Members are also encouraged to embrace hybrid working arrangements when performing their role, in support of the wider principles within the Council's accommodation strategy, including recently introduced bespoke hot-desking arrangements for Councillors at our new civic headquarters.
- 10.9 It is noted that in the IRP Annual report, the recommendation in respect of Broadband payments to Principal Council Elected Members is no longer specifically referenced, although in the latest report, such a reference was made to such payments for Town and Community Councillors only, who it is presumed, are not in receipt of such support arrangements as Principal Council Elected Members as outlined above.
- 10.10 Clarification was sought from the IRP in February in respect of this previous determination of the Panel and its current standing. No formal response has been received however.
- 10.11 It is proposed to withdraw this support, delivering a saving of £16,428. The annual budget for this member support is £33,300.
- 10.12 In addition to the Broadband allowance, further opportunities have been identified in the printing costs associated with the Council Business Unit. We have therefore reviewed our current arrangements in respect of the distribution of Committee Agendas. This review sought to ensure that we continue to maintain an efficient and cost-effective processes, and to ensure we continue to aim for paper-less approach where appropriate. I am confident members of the Democratic Services Committee will support a concerted re-focus upon our 'paper-light approach to committee business.
- 10.13 The specific needs of members was reviewed following the local election in May 2022, and for specific reasons we provide hard copies of Committee agenda's to Councillors who have previously indicated that need. It is important to stress that this print copy does not replace the electronic summons for a committee meeting.
- 10.14 Whether Members receive an additional hard copy of an agenda or not, all Committee agendas are published electronically, and members receive notification through the current email channels, signposting to the Committee Documents either through the Council website or through the Modern.Gov App.

10.15 It is proposed that following the Council's 29th Annual General meeting we will cease the practice of sending hard copy agenda's in the post, unless Members advise us of their individual circumstances where hard copies are still necessary. While we will aim to assist in such circumstances, to ensure we do not digitally exclude or disadvantage any Member, a general 'personal preference' will no longer be considered a reason for providing an additional hard copy.

Recommendation of the Head of Democratic Services in respect of proposed efficiency savings.

10.16 As Head of Democratic Services and in consideration of the above I propose that this financial support of payment of broadband allowance is withdrawn from Elected Members. As outlined, this recommendation would be based on the enhanced digital technology now provided to Members, and being conscious of the disparity which now exists between Council staff and Elected Members. (As stated staff alike using their own home broadband arrangements with no additional payments to support this arrangement).

10.17 The withdrawal of hard copy of agenda's would allow further savings in respect of associated printing costs associated by the Council Unit, whilst also reducing the carbon footprint of the Council. However, we will ensure that Members do not become digitally excluded if hard copies are necessary.

10.18 I would encourage Members views on these proposals and recommendation.

11. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The report outlines the need for all Members to have equal access to support regardless of political allegiance. The report encourages the authority to examine the way that business is conducted to ensure the equality of access and involvement of all people as Councillors.

11.2 As a Council we are mindful of equality of provision for Elected Members and Staff and have therefore proposed the withdrawal of the current broadband payment to Elected Members.

11.3 In respect of the review of publication of Committee Agendas we will not digitally exclude any Member, following any specific advice provided.

12. CONSULTATION

12.1 The Head of Democratic Services has consulted with the Council's Chief Executive and the Cabinet Member for Council Business in addition to the Councils Section 151 officer.

13. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

13.1 The arrangements described above can be met from existing resources within the Democratic Services and Communications revenue budget and the ongoing annual budget requirements.

13.2 As outlined in the body of the report there has been a deduction in the Mayors budget, following cessation of the post of Mayors secretary and supporting budget due to the need for efficiency savings.

13.3 Due to ongoing financial pressures and the need for further efficiency savings across all areas of the Council the proposal to withdraw the Broadband payments for the reasons outlined within the report are now recommended.

13.4 Members who have opted to receive the broadband payment are currently provided with an allocation of £37 per month in respect of broadband allowance

13.5 The review of agenda paper based publication will also provide opportunities for efficiency savings in this area.

14. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

14.1 The legal implications are set out in the report in respect of the requirements of the 2011 Local Government Measure and subsequently the Local Government & Elections Wales Act 2021.

14.2 The Local Government & Elections Act (Wales) 2021 places additional responsibilities upon the service, many of these being a statutory requirement to fore fill. These include:

- *Providing the opportunity for scrutiny to consider all key decisions being considered. (This will significantly increase the reporting requirements to committees)*
- *Formalised support arrangements to our colleagues in Town and Community Councils. Strengthened support arrangements have been provided to Community and Town Councils of the Borough, especially as they took forward their virtual arrangements and we continue to provide this support as these Councils embark upon their own hybrid meeting journey.*
- *A requirement to enhance public participation requirements, including the production of a public participation strategy annually.*
- *Duty to make petition scheme and record and report responses to such matters*
- *Electronic broadcasting of meetings*
- *The ability for members to attend a meeting virtually*
- *A requirement to promote diversity*
- *Direction in respect of the information and reporting requirements to the Council's Overview & Scrutiny Committees*

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

- 15.1 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.
- 15.2 Ensuring all Members are supported and have equal access to support and development links to the future generations wellbeing goals of a more equal Wales and a Wales of cohesive communities.

16. CONCLUSION

- 16.1 Through the resources outlined in this report, I am confident that we are providing sufficient support and resources to all of our Elected Members, however we will continually strive to improve the services provide to further assist Members in the important role that they undertake on a daily basis.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

1ST May 2024

**SUFFICIENCY OF RESOURCES REPORT – STATUTORY ‘OPINION’ OF THE
STATUTORY HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES**

**REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR DEMOCRATIC SERVICES &
COMMUNICATIONS**

BACKGROUND PAPERS - Democratic Services – Support for Members

Freestanding Matter