

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**MUNICIPAL YEAR 2015-2016**

**DEMOCRATIC SERVICES  
COMMITTEE  
26<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER, 2015**

**REPORT OF THE HEAD OF  
DEMOCRATIC SERVICES**

**Agenda Item No. 5(c)**

**DEMOCRATIC SERVICES –  
SUPPORT FOR MEMBERS**

**Author: Ms. Karyl May, Head of Democratic Services (Tel.No.01443-424045)**

**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To update Members on the provision of staff, resources and accommodation available to support Members in their role.

**2. RECOMEMNDATIONS**

2.1 That the Democratic Services Committee:

- (i) Notes the overall support available to elected Members, as set out in paragraph 4 of the report;
- (ii) Notes the view of the Head of Democratic Services, as set out in paragraphs 3.5 and 6 of the report; and
- (iii) Agrees that the levels of staff, accommodation and other resources are adequate at present and that a further report be presented to this Committee by the Head of Democratic Services on the sufficiency of resources for Members' support following the Council's 2016/17 Annual Meeting.

**3. BACKGROUND**

3.1 The Local Government (Wales) Measure, 2011 ("the Measure") established the statutory requirement for Local Authorities to appoint a Democratic Services Committee and also to designate a Head of Democratic Services. The Democratic Services Committee was established at the Council's Annual Meeting in May, 2012 and at its first meeting in July of the same year, the Committee designated Mr. Christopher Jones as Head of Democratic Services.

3.2 Following the realignment of Corporate responsibilities, in December of last year, Members of this Committee designated Ms. Karyl May as Head of Democratic Services and requested that at the Committee's next meeting, a report be presented concerning the Council's discharge of Democratic

Services functions and sufficiency of resources by the newly designated Head of Democratic Services.

- 3.3 In accordance with the Measure and the 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. The Head of Democratic Services in turn is responsible for making recommendations to the Committee to enable such determinations to be made.
- 3.4 The Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales ("the Panel") also states in their Draft Annual Report 2016/17 (and similarly in previous reports) – *"It is imperative for Authorities to remain aware that insufficient support undermines the ability of Members to discharge their basic duties effectively"* (page, 19, paragraph 3.21).
- 3.5 In May, 2014 the Auditor General for Wales issued the publication titled- *'Good Scrutiny? Good Question!'*. This publication concluded that – *"local government scrutiny in Wales is improving but councils need to do more to develop consistently rigorous scrutiny to increase public accountability in decision making"*. Taking on board the contents of this publication and since the last meeting of this Committee a new Scrutiny Structure has been put in place as agreed at the Council's Annual Meeting held on the 20<sup>th</sup> May, 2015. The aim of the new Scrutiny Structure is to develop more outcome focussed arrangements and at the same time enabling the continuation of a rigorous approach to scrutiny. Whilst, being mindful of the requirements of the Measure, the WAO approach and the determination of the Panel, the resources are adequate at present. As it has only been six months since the new arrangements were implemented the changes are clearly still embedding. It is therefore difficult to form a view as to the exact resources that will be required, in the future, to fulfil the democratic/scrutiny functions and further analysis will need to be undertaken to establish the level of resources required as the new scrutiny arrangements develop.
- 3.6 Nevertheless, I will provide Members with information on the current available resources and a brief synopsis of the support provided by the team within Democratic Services (Committee, Scrutiny and Members Services).

#### **4. RESOURCES**

- 4.1 The Committee, Scrutiny and Members' Services Team consists of three Officers (FTE) led by the Head of Democratic Services. They provide a politically impartial service to all Members of the Council by:

## **Democratic Services**

- Being a first point of access for Members
- Providing Advice and Guidance at meetings of the Council and the following Committees/Quasi-Judicial Bodies/Ad Hoc Committees:
  - Development Control
  - Licensing
  - Licensing Act, 2003
  - Democratic Services
  - Corporate Governance & Constitution Committee
  - Audit
  - Appointments Committee
  - Appeals/Employee Appeals/Chief Officer Appeals
  - Standards
  - Local Education Authority Governors (Appointments)
  - Voluntary Early Retirement/Redundancy Panel (VER)
  - Joint Committees – Capita, Welsh Purchasing Consortium, Central South Consortium Joint Education Service
- Preparing and ensuring the publication of Agendas, reports and minutes on the Council's website in accord with legislative timescales;
- Minute taking
- Maintaining Declarations of Acceptance of Office
- Maintaining the Register of Political Groups
- Maintaining the Register of Individual Member Interests
- Maintaining the Register of Gifts and Hospitality
- Outside Bodies Membership – administration of register and notification
- Providing guidance and support in the preparation and publication of Members' Annual Reports
- Assisting Members in undertaking individual Members Personal Development Reviews (PDRs) which informs the training/development needs.
- Ensuring the Council maintains the Advanced Level of the `Wales Charter for Member Support and Development`
- Supply of stationery
- Providing secretarial support to Members
- The Head of Democratic Services is also an active participant in the following WLGA Networks:
  - Member Support Officer (MSO)/Member Development Champions Network – both these networks aim to improve services and Member Development opportunities provided to Councillors. The MSO was primarily for Officers with elected Members forming the Member Development Champions Network. The two networks have joint meetings to share views and ideas.

## ***Supporting the Scrutiny Functions***

- Overview and Scrutiny is one of the most significant ways in which a non-executive Member can contribute to the direction of the Council and in 2014/15 the former Scrutiny Committees met on 44 occasions which did not include informal visits.
- Providing Impartial Advice and Guidance at meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and its four `themed` Scrutiny Committees/Working Groups:
  - Finance & Performance;
  - Children & Young People;
  - Public Service Delivery, Communities & Prosperity; and
  - Health & Well-Being
- Preparing and ensuring the publication of Agendas, reports and minutes on the Council's website in accord with legislative timescales;
- Minute taking
- Undertaking independent research on behalf of the Scrutiny Committees
- Assisting Members with the development and implementation of each of the Scrutiny Committees Work Programmes
- Preparation of Scrutiny Annual Report to full Council
- Identification of independent witnesses
- Ensuring that appropriate training is provided to Members of all Scrutiny Committees, as and when felt appropriate.
- Call-ins – during 2014/15 the former Scrutiny Committees dealt with 7 valid call-in requests (one request was rejected by the Monitoring Officer) – As agreed at this year's AGM all Call-ins are to be dealt with by the Council's main Overview and Scrutiny Committee and to date there has been one Call-in which related to changes to the Council's `Home to School Transport` policy.

## **5. ACCOMMODATION**

Accommodation to support the work of Members is based at the Council Headquarters, Clydach Vale and has been in place since Local Government Reorganisation in 1996. Private offices are available for each of the political groups represented on the Council, also provided at Clydach Vale, which allows Members easy access to the team within Democratic Services and at the same time allows Members to undertake work in privacy with the availability of telephone and IT facilities.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

As can be seen, the Democratic Services Team comprising three (FTE) members of staff led by the Head of Democratic Services provides a multitude of diverse support services to elected Members and the Council can be proud in being the only Authority in Wales to have been awarded all three levels of

the Wales Charter for Member Support and Development thus showing the commitment of Members and Officers working together to improve corporate governance, local democracy and local services regardless of political allegiances. However, as identified in paragraph 3.5 of this report, the resources are adequate at present of this report. It is therefore proposed a further report be presented to this Committee by the Head of Democratic Services on the sufficiency of resources for Members' support following the Council's 2016/17 Annual Meeting.

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

**AS AMENDED BY**

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

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**26<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER, 2015**

**REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES**

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

**Democratic Services – Support for Members**

Freestanding Matter