



RHONDDA CYNON TAF

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

12TH NOVEMBER 2018

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES – SUPPORT FOR MEMBERS

REPORT OF THE INTERIM HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To update Members on 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”).

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that the Democratic Services Committee:

- (i) Notes the overall support available to elected Members, as set out in section 4 of the report;
- (ii) Notes the view of the Interim Head of Democratic Services, as set out in section 6 of the report; and
- (iii) Agrees that the levels of staff, accommodation and other resources are adequate at the present time and that a further report be presented to this Committee by the Interim Head of Democratic Services on the sufficiency of resources for Members’ support following the Council’s Annual General Meeting in May 2019.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The Measure 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.

3.2 The Council’s Democratic Services Committee was established at the Council’s Annual General Meeting in May 2012.

3.3 Mr. C. Hanagan was appointed as the Interim Head of Democratic Services by the Committee at its meeting on the 23rd July 2018 following the retirement of the previous post holder (Minute 5 Refers).

- 3.4 During the meeting on the 23rd July Members 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 Interim Head of Democratic Services.
- 3.5 The Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales state in their 2018-2019 Annual Report 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.
- 3.6 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.
- 3.7 At the Council's twentieth annual general meeting, Members took on board the comments of the Auditor General with the publication 'Good Scrutiny? Good Question!' which 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*". At this meeting Members agreed to take forward a different scrutiny approach, based on a thematic model, in order to develop more outcome focussed arrangements whilst at the same time enabling the continuation of a rigorous approach to scrutiny.
- 3.8 In October 2018 the Wales Audit Office published its report titled, Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC 'Overview & Scrutiny - 'Fit For the Future?'. In the report the Auditor General for Wales recognised that '*The Council has increased the role of overview and scrutiny in its improvement and governance arrangements, but could strengthen support for the scrutiny function.*'
- 3.9 The current available resources (combined with a brief synopsis of the support provided by the team within the Council Business Unit) is provided within section 4 of the report below (Democratic, Scrutiny, Executive & Regulatory and Members' Services).

4. RESOURCES

- 4.1 A consequential change of the appointment referred to in paragraph 3.3 above meant the amalgamation of two previously separate teams. The Executive & Regulatory Business Unit now sits alongside Democratic Services centralised into one office. This has led to the creation of a single team designed to support all Members and now known as the 'Council Business Unit'.

- 4.2 In recognition of the latest Wales Audit report and the opportunity afforded through the Council's Graduate Scheme, the Interim Head of Democratic Services applied for and secured a Graduate Officer placement within the Council Business Unit, and the appointed officer commenced their role in September 2018. This position has been made available through the budget efficiencies released through the retirement of the previous Head of Democratic Services.
- 4.3 The Graduate Officer will provide scrutiny and secretarial support to a specified Scrutiny Committee and will also, for the first time, provide a scrutiny research resource for Non-Executive Members to support their scrutiny responsibilities and wider elected member roles. It will be important for the Committee, and myself as Interim Head of Democratic Services, to evaluate how this role develops and assess how Members utilise this role to inform and support scrutiny activity.
- 4.4 To assist the Council Business Unit in delivering support to all Members through both the medium of Welsh and English a dedicated translation officer post has also been secured in order to provide dedicated support to the unit on behalf of Members. Importantly this appointment will free up capacity for the Council Business Unit to focus upon supporting members and scrutiny functions.
- 4.5 Going forward the Council Unit will consist of 5 Officers, 1 Graduate Officer and 1 dedicated Welsh Translation Officer and will be led by the Interim Head of Democratic Services. (One Member of the team currently also provides support to the Council's Freedom of Information Unit and splits their time roughly, dependent on workload and service demands, on a 50:50 basis).
- 4.6 Although Officers specialise in each of their areas of expertise i.e. Scrutiny / Executive / Regulatory / Democratic the merging of the teams will allow sharing of knowledge and expertise to allow all officers to support Members going forward in all areas as required and thereby ensuring a more resilient team approach.
- 4.7 As the Interim Head of Democratic Services is also a member of the Senior Leadership Team, the role of scrutiny and the needs of members, to support the democratic functions of the councils, has been significantly enhanced as a result of the recent changes.
- 4.8 The roll out of the Modern.Gov programme also provides for a more efficient and consistent practice of working across the Council Business Unit, with the production of agenda's and minutes made through the Modern.Gov issue manager, again allowing for all team members to take forward publication of documents.
- 4.9 The Council Business Unit provides a politically impartial service to all Members of the Council as follows:

Democratic Services

- Being a first point of access for Members
- Provide advice and guidance to Members in respect of their decision making functions of the Council
- Providing Advice and Guidance at meetings of the Council and the following Committees/Quasi-Judicial Bodies/Ad Hoc Committees:
 - 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)
 - Pension Fund Committee
 - Community Liaison Committee
- Preparing and ensuring the publication of Agendas, reports and minutes through Modern.Gov and on the Council's website in accordance 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
- Ensuring the Council maintains the Advanced Level of the `Wales Charter for Member Support and Development`
- Supply of stationery
- Providing secretarial support to Members
- Providing support and one to one training with Members with the paperless approach to Committee meetings through the Modern.Gov app
- The Interim Head of Democratic Services also participates 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.
 - Support Joint Overview and Scrutiny Functions
 - Co-ordination of Council Business across all decision making functions

- Support the role of scrutiny as a part of the Council's Senior Leadership team.

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.
- Providing Impartial Advice and Guidance at meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and its four `themed` Scrutiny Committees and any associated Working Groups:
 - Finance & Performance;
 - Children & Young People;
 - Public Service Delivery, Communities & Prosperity; and
 - Health & Well-Being
- Providing support to the Public Service Delivery, Communities & Prosperity when sitting in its role as the Council's Crime & Disorder Committee.
- Preparing and ensuring the publication of Agendas, reports and minutes through Modern.Gov and on the Council's website in accordance 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 –to be dealt with by the Council's main Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Executive & Regulatory

- Providing the Secretarial Support to Cabinet Committee meetings and Cabinet Steering Group meetings as specified within the Leaders Scheme of Delegation.
- Planning & Development Committee and any site visits required
- Licensing Committee
- Licensing Act, 2003
- Joint Committees – Llwydcoed Crematorium, Capita, Central South Consortium Joint Education Service
- Cwm Taf Public Services Board
- Publication of Key Officer Delegated Decisions
- Preparing and ensuring the publication of Agendas, reports and minutes through Modern.Gov and on the Council's website in accordance with legislative timescales
- Minute taking
- Preparing and publication of Decision Notices

- Developing and maintaining Committee Work Programmes
- Production of Annual Reports – Corporate Parenting Board to Cabinet.
- Providing guidance and support in the preparation and publication of Members' Annual Reports
- Providing support and one to one training with Members with the paperless approach to Committee meetings through the Modern.Gov app

Joint Scrutiny

- On a 12 month rotation with Merthyr Tydfil Council, support both Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil Council Elected Members along with partners, with the scrutiny of the Cwm Taf Public Services Board.
- Providing support to the Elected Member representing the Council on the City Deal Joint Scrutiny Committee, taken forward by Bridgend Council.

5. ACCOMMODATION

- 5.1 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 the Council Business Unit and at the same time allows Members to undertake work in privacy with the availability of telephone and IT facilities. A Member's library is also situated at the Council Headquarters within Pavilion F, although its contents and the materials provided will need to be reviewed. As part of the Council's wider Medium Term Financial Planning, the Council has sought to reduce its accommodation portfolio, focussing staff at a number key sites. Despite recent relocations, the space available to members and the Council's Democratic Functions has been maintained. With the roll out of the paperless approach to Committee meetings as supported by both the Democratic Services Committee and Council, work will need to be undertaken to ensure that the appropriate provisions are available to Members to operate in this way within the Council Chamber and other specific Committee meeting room locations – i.e Wi-Fi / Charging points.

6. INTERIM HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES – OPINION

- 6.1 Whilst, being mindful of the requirements of the Measure and the recent WAO recommendations I believe as Interim Head of Democratic Services, the recent changes that have taken place with the designation of Interim Head of Democratic Services and the amalgamation of what were separate functions, will afford us the opportunities to enhance the support for all Elected Members.
- 6.2 The changes have improved the sufficiency of resources for the Democratic Services functions, by providing greater staff resilience and expertise with

which to support Members. Utilising the Council's successful Graduate scheme will also allow us as a Unit to expand on the resources available.

- 6.3 The role of a dedicated scrutiny research officer will for the first time provide even greater support to the scrutiny function although it is appreciated that time will be needed to support and develop this role for the benefit of Members.
- 6.4 I believe that the changes taken forward provide greater resilience within the new Council Business Unit to accommodate both staff and Members without compromising the support provided. It also provides the opportunity for more focused staff resource to support individual functions.
- 6.5 As Interim Head of Democratic Services, it will be important to ensure that the accommodation resources continue to be recognised as part of the Council Accommodation Strategy moving forward.
- 6.6 To support the decision of the Committee with the forward thinking approach to a paperless Committee system I will work with both ICT and Corporate Estates to ensure that Members are provided with adequate resources to take forward this new approach to working.
- 6.7 As I am also a member of the Senior Leadership Team, the role of scrutiny and the needs of members, to support the democratic functions of the councils, has been significantly enhanced as a result of the recent changes.

7. CONCLUSION

- 7.1 The Council Business Unit comprising of seven members of staff led by the Interim Head of Democratic Services will provide a multitude of diverse support services to elected Members going forward. The pooling of resources will allow for continued support for each of the services falling under the Council Business Unit and as Interim Head of Democratic Services I am confident that the Unit is adequately resourced going forward.
- 7.2 With these changes I am confident that we can positively respond to the Wales Audit Office recommendation that 'the Council should review the level and type of scrutiny support required to enable the scrutiny function to respond to current and future challenges'. This will also be strengthened with the review tasked to me by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on the 22nd October, in respect of reviewing the current scrutiny arrangements.
- 7.3 We will need time for the recent changes to embed and 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 Annual General Meeting in May 2019.

8 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 This report supports 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.

9. CONSULTATION

- 9.1 No consultation is required on this matter.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 10.1 None.

11. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 The legal implications are set out in the report.

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

- 12.1 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.
- 12.2 Ensuring all Members are supported and have equal access to support and development links to the future generations well being goals of a more equal Wales and a Wales of cohesive communities.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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BACKGROUND PAPERS - Democratic Services – Support for Members

Freestanding Matter