



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

17th JULY 2019

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

COUNCIL BUSINESS UNIT AND RESEARCH SUPPORT FOR MEMBERS

REPORT OF THE INTERIM HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of the report is to:

- 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”).
- Detail the Independent research opportunities available to Members through the Council Business Units – Graduate Scrutiny Research Officer

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that the Democratic Services Committee:

- (i) Considers the arrangements in place in respect of the Council Business Unit, to further support and assist all Elected Members. Agree to receive a further report in respect of how the Council Business Unit will support the enhanced approach to scrutiny recently agreed.
- (ii) Note the provision of independent research for Members, subject to the criteria outlined within the report.
- (iii) To receive an update in respect of the take up of research by Members and review the criteria for such research as and when appropriate.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 At the Democratic Services Committee meeting on the 12th November, the Interim Head of Democratic Services provided Members with his report which

advised on the support provision available to Members and sufficiency of resources. A copy of which can be access through the following [link](#).

- 3.2 At the meeting the Interim Head of Democratic Services advised that following the recent changes that have taken place with the designation of Interim Head of Democratic Services and the amalgamation of what were separate functions, such changes would afford the opportunities to enhance the support for all Elected Members. He added that the changes would improve 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 also allowed the Council Business Unit to expand on the resources available.
- 3.3 The referenced amalgamation of Democratic Services and the Executive & Regulatory Business Unit has now created the 'Council Business Unit'.
- 3.4 Although Officers specialise in each of their areas of expertise i.e. Scrutiny / Executive / Regulatory / Democratic the merging of the teams has supported the 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. Further amendments to provide further capacity to support the enhanced approach to scrutiny recently agreed by members will be presented to a future meeting.
- 3.5 As reported at the November meeting, the Council Business Unit has secured a graduate research officer. The Graduate Officer provides scrutiny and secretarial support to the Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee and also provides research support to a number of working groups that are currently being undertaken. For the first time this role will also provide a scrutiny research resource for Non-Executive Members to support their scrutiny responsibilities and wider elected member roles. It was recognised that to provide this research resource it was important for the Graduate Officer to gain a sound understanding of the Scrutiny process within the Council.

4 ACCESSING THE RESEARCH OPPORTUNITY - GOING FORWARD.

- 4.1 As the interim Head of Democratic Services, I now believe that our Graduate Research Officer is sufficiently skilled to take forward independent scrutiny requests, upon instruction by Members.
- 4.2 To ensure accuracy with the research conducted any submission for research will need to follow the criteria outlined below:
 - Submission to be provided in writing / email providing as much detail about the research to be undertaken as possible to assist.
 - Email to be submitted to the email address: Memberservices@rctcbc.gov.uk
- 4.3 Any submission for research will be reviewed by the Interim Head of Democratic Services to ensure the request is appropriate.

- 4.4 To ensure a timely and manageable workload for the Graduate Research Officer it is proposed that a two week turn around at the minimum is afforded to the Research Officer to undertake the research. If the officer is unable to provide the Member with the research within this timeframe then timely notification will be provided to the Member.
- 4.5 It is proposed that once the Members Portal is fully developed any submissions for research will be made available through this avenue, although written / email submissions will be taken forward until this is available.

5 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 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.

6. CONSULTATION

- 6.1 The Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Scrutiny Committees continue to be engaged on any resource related matters. Recently introduced engagement meetings with Group Leaders also provide the opportunity to keep respective groups informed of current and future resources matters.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 7.1 It is important to consider the financial challenges and rising demands for services which the Council faces when consider democratic resources. Members will need to balance this alongside the need to support the democratic functions of the council when considering the recommendations of the Head of Democratic Services.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 None

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

- 9.1 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.
- 9.2 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

Democratic Services – 12th November, 2018.