



RHONDDA CYNON TAF

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

18th NOVEMBER 2019

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES – SUPPORT FOR MEMBERS

REPORT OF THE 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 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 Head of Democratic Services on the sufficiency of resources for Members’ support following the Council’s Annual General Meeting in May 2020.

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 Head of Democratic Services by the Committee at its meeting on the 17th July 2019 following a 12 month interim arrangement of the position (Minute 4 refers).

- 3.4 The Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales state in their 2019-2020 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.
- 3.5 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.
- 3.6 At the Council's twenty third annual general meeting, Members considered the review undertaken in respect of Overview and Scrutiny 'Fit for the Future' and 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'.
- 3.7 Positive changes continue to be progressed in respect of the Council's scrutiny arrangements. Work has already taken place to strengthen scrutiny's ownership of their work programmes. New ways of considering how to best focus committees time has been utilised from the start of the Municipal Year, looking at a more outcome based approach, taking forward the 5 ways of working of the Well being of Future Generations Act and rationalising agenda's so that Members can undertake detailed scrutiny within a committee setting, whilst officers still ensure Members are provided with important information through 'information reporting links' including the addition of 'consultation' information.
- 3.8 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).
- 3.9 A Survey of Members views on the support provided by the Unit was undertaken in April 2019, with the results reported to the July Democratic Services Committee. Feedback indicated that Members were happy with the level of support provided by the unit.

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 Head of Democratic Services secured a Graduate Officer placement within the Council Business Unit, and the appointed officer commenced their role in September 2018. As reported at the July Committee meeting, this position will provide a scrutiny research resource for Non-Executive Members to support their scrutiny responsibilities and wider elected member roles. The Head of Democratic Services is keen to promote this research opportunity to Members and it is hoped that this will be a useful research tool for Member to utilise going forward.
- 4.3 Due to the increasing demands placed upon the unit through the recent scrutiny review and approaches identified, a position of a 'Senior Democratic and Scrutiny Officer' has been approved and advertised upon. It is anticipated that the role will provide strengthened support to the Unit taking forward the Council's joint scrutiny approach, outcome focused approaches to scrutiny and also to further support the Community Charter agreed at the Community Liaison Committee. Interviews have been undertaken and the successful candidate should be in post by December 2019.
- 4.4 In addition to the creation of a new post within the Unit, the Head of Democratic Services has approved for the Unit to utilise a further resource going forward through a second Graduate Officer. The post has been moved from Consultation team, which also sits under the Head of Democratic Services under the 'Communication' service function. This additional resource will take forward both a democratic and scrutiny role and will also support the unit through the development of the Members Portal (previously reported to Committee) and any support provision needed if Members wish to take forward the webcasting provision. This will be a valuable support to the Unit and will provide further beneficial learning opportunities to the Graduate Officer.
- 4.5 Arrangements have been made to cover the responsibilities of the Committee Services Business Manager while the post holder undertakes maternity leave.
- 4.6 To assist the Council Business Unit in delivering support to all Members through both the medium of Welsh and English 2 dedicated translation officer posts have been secured in order to provide dedicated support to the unit on behalf of Members. This working has now been in place for a 12month period and provides the Unit with prompt and timely translations which importantly frees up capacity for the Council Business Unit to focus upon supporting members and scrutiny functions.
- 4.7 Going forward the Council Unit will consist of 6 Officers, 2 Graduate Officer and the utilisation of 2 dedicated Welsh Translation Officers from within the Translation team and will be led by the 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. In addition to this one other Member of the team is on maternity leave).

- 4.8 As the 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.
- 4.9 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.
- 4.10 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 and policy advice for Members
- Provide strategic advice and guidance to Members in respect of their decision making functions of the Council
- Providing strategic 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
- 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

- Supporting developments for the benefit of Members – Website developments / Webcasting
- The 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
 - Provide policy advice and guidance to elected members
 - Act as the ‘proper officer’ for democratic rules and procedures and functions.
 - Support and champion 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 Overview and Scrutiny Committee when sitting in its role as the Councils 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 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 political groups represented on the Council, within the Council Headquarter base, 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.
- 5.2 There is currently an outstanding need to review facilities, as since the creation of a further political group to the Council a further private office is required.
- 5.3 The Head of Democratic Services is currently developing proposal to rectify this position with colleagues in Corporate Estates.

- 5.4 The Member's library situated at the Council Headquarters within Pavilion F, continues to be utilised, although its contents and the materials provided will need to be reviewed in the coming year alongside its longer term future being considered in light of a move to a paperless approach and the development of the Member's Portal. The Portal will provide the ability for members to access key information, documentation and publications on-line, in a digital format.
- 5.5 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 increased with an additional committee room which is now fully operational. 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. HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES – OPINION

- 6.1 Whilst, being mindful of the requirements of the Measure and the recent WAO recommendations I believe as Head of Democratic Services, the recent changes that have taken place have enhanced the provision of support available to members.
- 6.2 The changes have improved the sufficiency of resources for the Council Business Unit functions, by providing greater staff resilience and expertise with which to support Members. Utilising the Council's successful Graduate scheme has provided the opportunity to expand on the resources available. The addition of the research function, a first in the history of the Council, now needs to be developed to fully support members in their non-executive role. This capacity has been further enhanced, through my decision to divert resources from elsewhere in the service directorate to support the enhancements we are making to scrutiny processes.
- 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. The development of a Members Portal, providing a one point access point for Members to utilise will also assist Members in their role.
- 6.4 The dedicated translation support provided to the Council Business Unit has proven to be very successful and invaluable to the service provided to Members.
- 6.5 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.

- 6.6 As we develop our scrutiny functions and role, in-line with the recommendations of the recent scrutiny review, it will be necessary to continually review the level of support available to facilitate the greater influence of scrutiny and the more outcome based approach which is desired.
- 6.7 As 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.
- 6.8 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, which we will link with the development of webcasting, if such a decision is taken forward by Members.
- 6.9 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.
- 6.10 **On the basis of this detail, I am of the opinion, as the Council's statutory Head of Democratic Services, that the resources made available for members are sufficient, and support continued improvement.**

7. CONCLUSION

- 7.1 The Council Business Unit comprising of eight members of staff, led by the 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 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'.
- 7.3 With the number of changes taken forward with the scrutiny approaches and the development being taken further outside of Committee settings (i.e. Member portal development / potential webcasting) time will be needed for these developments to embed. A further report will 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 2020.
- 7.4 It is proposed that a Member survey is undertaken later in the Municipal Year to ascertain Members views and opinions on the support provided by the Council Business Unit and gain further understanding of what further support could be provided.

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

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

NOVEMBER 2019.

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

BACKGROUND PAPERS - Democratic Services – Support for Members

Freestanding Matter