



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on
Wednesday, 17 March 2021 at 5.00 pm.

County Borough Councillors - Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members in attendance:-

Councillor M Adams (Chair)

Councillor W Lewis	Councillor J Bonetto
Councillor P Jarman	Councillor H Boggis
Councillor J Brencher	Councillor E Stephens
Councillor L Walker	Councillor G Caple
Councillor M Griffiths	Councillor A Cox
Councillor G Hughes	Councillor M Forey

Officers in attendance

Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication

Mr R Evans, Director of Human Resources

Ms M Warburton, HR Advisor, Equality & Diversity Team

30 Apology

An apology was received from County Borough Councillor W Jones and Mr Fish – Voting Parent / Governor Representative

31 Welcome & Introductions

The Chair welcomed Members to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and introductions were made.

32 Scrutiny Research Facility

The Chair advised Members of the Committee that the scrutiny research facility is available within the Council Business Unit to support Members' scrutiny responsibilities and their roles as Elected Members. Any requests should be directed to the scrutiny inbox as indicated on the agenda.

33 Declaration of Interest

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, there were no declarations made pertaining to the agenda at this point in the meeting.

34 Minutes

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 23rd February 2021 as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

35 Consultation Links

Members acknowledged the information provided through the consultation links in respect of open consultations, Welsh Government consultations and those matters being consulted upon by the local authority.

In response to a query relating to the consultation links, whether the funding of the Community Cohesion Programme will continue, the Diversity and Inclusion Manager confirmed that the Community Cohesion Co-Ordinator post is hosted by Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council but confirmed that the response to the consultation would be shared with the Committee in due course.

36 Annual Equality Report 2019-20

The Service Director Democratic Services & Communications outlined the pre-scrutiny opportunity provided to Members on the annual equality monitoring report 2019/20, thus providing Scrutiny with an opportunity to feedback its comments to Cabinet at its meeting held on the 25th March 2021.

The Diversity and Inclusion Manager presented the Council's annual equality monitoring report 2019/20 advising that the report contains progress made in year 2019/20 in meeting the equality objectives contained in Council's Strategic Equality Plan.

A Member highlighted the importance of responding to recent events in the media, and the need to address the safety of women in public spaces. A motion was put forward that a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, sitting in its role as the Council's Crime and Disorder Committee be convened to consider safety and equality for women in the community and to invite relevant partners to the meeting. The motion was unanimously agreed with a view to convening a meeting of the Crime & Disorder Committee at the earliest convenience.

Members discussed the Annual Equality Report and felt that the key reporting requirements in respect of employment monitoring reporting, compliance with the General duty and the Council's commitment to the principles of equality and diversity had been fulfilled. In response to a query regarding the impact of Covid-19 on issues such as hate crimes, the Diversity and Inclusion Manager advised that the next annual report would reflect any impact on this area as a result of the pandemic and acknowledged that providing local figures post Covid-19 would be useful for the committee to review.

Members sought assurance that work was being undertaken in respect of a number of areas to improve equality and diversity. The Service Director, Democratic Services & Communications advised that the Democratic Services Working Group: Diversity in Democracy, had recently been established to support the Council in achieving diversity in democracy ahead of the 2022 local government elections to encourage participation in principal authorities and Community and Town Councils. It was noted that an action plan had been developed to further improve the diversity of the Council. The Service Director advised that this is a fast-moving agenda and a high priority for Welsh Government and referred to a paper which was due to be reported to the WLGA Council seeking cross party endorsement for changes to be realised post 2022.

The Diversity and Inclusion Manager outlined the issues of closing the gender pay gap and the council's new performance review process for staff which is being incrementally rolled-out to ensure effective implementation and understanding and also the ongoing work to develop an action plan which will support women in leadership programme, a particular strand of work which would be shared with the committee in due course.

The Committee raised concern regarding the long-term impact of emotional abuse and noted the actions contained within the report, which stated that as part of Education's Well-being Strategy a programme for schools would be developed which would raise awareness of emotional abuse in relationships.

Committee also raised issues in relation to the collection and analysis of data for bullying incidents in schools; it was reported that additional relevant guidance has now been circulated to all schools for monitoring to be undertaken in this area. Issues were also raised in relation to the Welsh Language and the barriers of awareness raising events given the large geographical area of the Borough.

Following discussion of the Annual Equality Report 2019/20 it was **RESOLVED**:

- 1.To acknowledge the contents of the Annual Equality Report 2019/21;
- 2.That Members' comments form part of the reported feedback the Cabinet will receive, at its meeting to be held on the 25th March 2021; and
- 3.That an Overview & Scrutiny Committee, sitting in its role as the Council's designated Crime & Disorder Committee, is convened at the earliest convenience to consider the safety and inequalities experienced by women in community spaces.

37 Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021

The Service Director Democratic Services & Communications presented his joint report with the Director of Legal Services which summarised the various elements of the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021 which received Royal Assent on the 20th January 2021.

The report requested that Committee consider the Council's position statement in respect of the requirements of the Act with particular regard to the actions that will need to be addressed to ensure RCT comply with the legislative requirements. The Service Director advised that several elements will be considered in many of the council's formal committees such as the Standards Committee, which will consider Members Codes of Conduct and the role that Group Leaders will play in the conduct of their members and Cabinet will also consider this report at its next meeting in March 2021.

The Service Director acknowledged that a large part of the discussions have, to date, focussed on the Corporate Joint Committees (CJC's) and extending the voting franchise to 16 and 17 years old in next year's Senedd elections and preparing for the extension of the franchise to this age group for the 2022 local government elections.

The Service Director was pleased to report that the Council has already laid many of the foundations for the promotion of democratic processes and public engagement which are considerations of the Act and will be taken forward by the Council. He drew Members' attention to the numerous other areas for which the Act provides provision, such as the general power of competence for principal councils and eligible community councils, powers for Welsh Ministers to instigate more consistent and

coherent regional working across Wales, more formalised performance and governance arrangements based around self-assessment and peer reviews. The Service Director advised that the proposals to make the role of scrutiny within a principal council more effective by strengthening the scrutiny arrangements is of particular relevance to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee by bringing forward the opportunity for scrutiny to engage and consider key decisions in advance of Cabinet determining those matters. It was noted that is an area that the Scrutiny Committee currently undertakes as a matter of good practice.

The Service Director acknowledged other key areas of interest for future discussion by this committee, such as the reforming of public participation and the determination which will enable Members to attend and participate virtually. He explained that the council will soon be able to formerly broadcast its meeting via the introduction of a webcasting solution provided by Public 1 which will fully integrate with the current virtual arrangements and will allow the provision of a hybrid approach for meetings whilst still being able to live stream online.

With regards to the diversity agenda, the Service Director advised that there are changes to the family absence arrangements and formalising the provisions for job sharing opportunities for Cabinet Members and Chairs of Committee. Enhancements to the role of the Head of Democratic Services to strengthen and support the role of non-executive members and the influence of scrutiny across the council. The Service Director continued to outline the many changes to executive arrangements, information sharing between the regulators, changes to the Fire & Rescue Authority arrangements, changes to the Boundary Commission and how the Public Service Boards will operate. He advised that further information in relation to how the Act will come into force and what elements will need to be taken forward from the Council's AGM this year and onwards from the 2022 Local Government Elections.

In conclusion, the Service Director reported that the Council has been requested to participate in a working group on the participation agenda to be able to inform the regulations.

Following the presentation, the Service Director Democratic Services & Communication responded to a number of queries such as STV voting system post 2022, the role of Corporate Joint Committees, the definition of politically restricted posts in relation to campaigning and standing for office and the status of the Head of Democratic Services and strengthening of the statutory role.

In line with an earlier query, the Director of Human Resources responded to a concern regarding the protection afforded to junior members of staff should they stand and be unsuccessful in an election. The Director advised that there are a number of policies in place such as the whistleblowing policy which serve to protect individuals as well as seeking support through their trade unions.

Following discussion, it was **RESOLVED** to note the Council's position statement outlined within the report in respect of the requirements of the Act.

The Chair thanked Members for attending and for their contributions during the meeting. He summarised the key points to have arisen from the two reports considered and the recommendations to include the additional recommendation that a Crime & Disorder Committee is convened at the earliest opportunity.

This meeting closed at 6.20 pm

**Cllr M Adams
Chairman**