



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

SCRUTINY CHAIRS & VICE CHAIRS MEETING

UPDATE REPORT

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES & COMMUNICATIONS

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs with a general update in respect of the provisions and support available to scrutiny Members to assist them in undertaking their role.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Scrutiny Chairs & Vice Chairs:

- 2.1 Consider and comment on the information contained within the report;
- 2.2 Agree to take forward the commencement of the Chair's Blogs on the Council website, starting with the Blog of the Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee in the first instance;
- 2.3 Agree to the diarising of Scrutiny / Cabinet engagement sessions to assist Members with diary commitments.

3. SCRUTINY WEBPAGES

- 3.1 The Council Business Unit are currently reviewing the Council scrutiny webpages to ensure they are still 'fit for purpose' and engage with residents. Updates to the pages will need to be taken forward in light of the virtual meetings currently undertaken and the future move to hybrid meetings, as regulated within the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021 i.e. Changes to the public participation guide.

- 3.2 Ahead of this, it is the intention to re-commence the Scrutiny blogs, with a blog provided from each of the Scrutiny Chairs. The blogs provide a valuable opportunity to promote the work of each of the scrutiny committees and although these had previously been on hold due to the Covid 19 restrictions, it is timely that they are once again driven forward.
- 3.3 Officers within the Council Business Unit are also actively working with the Council web team to develop scrutiny pages for both the Cwm Taf Public Service Board Joint Scrutiny Committee and the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal Joint Scrutiny Committee, which are both supported by RCT. It is important that such pages are made available to demonstrate the work undertaken by the scrutiny committees in holding the Boards / Cabinet to account.

4. MEMBERS PORTAL

- 4.1 The Council Business Unit have taken forward work on the development of a Members portal, an area on the website for Elected Members to access, which would allow them an area to:
- Report problems
 - View Ward based maps – see planning applications and other data related to a Members ward
 - Submit questions / Notices of Motion to Council
 - Submit scrutiny Call In's
 - Complete declarations of Interest forms
 - Submit Research requests
 - Provision of useful contact details for officers / external organisations.
 - E-learning.
 - Access relevant forms / consultation links
 - Members Surveys
- 4.2 It is anticipated that the provision of e-learning modules would assist Members in their busy working lives as a tool to support them in undertaking necessary training needed to help carry out their important roles and functions.
- 4.3 It is proposed that a demonstration of the portal is provided to a future meeting of the Chairs and Vice Chairs and Members are asked to consider whether any further provisions could be made to the portal to assist and strengthen the scrutiny process and support available.

5. RESEARCH PROVISION

- 5.1 Members will be aware that during the review of the Councils scrutiny functions in 2018 a weakness was identified within the Council Business Unit in respect of the research provision available to support non-executive members. As a result, the Service Director of Democratic Services and Communications secured corporate support to fund a graduate position to provide this function to non-executive members. The Graduate placement and the supporting funding concluded in August 2020. In recognition of this important addition to the service provided to non-executive members, permanent funding support was secured for this additional role. This position

will continue to provide a scrutiny research resource for Non-Executive Members to support their scrutiny responsibilities and wider elected member roles.

5.2 Members are reminded to utilise this support provision whenever needed, as independent research can assist in populating Committee work programmes going forward.

5.3 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: Membersservices@rctcbc.gov.uk
- Any submission for research will be reviewed by the Head of Democratic Services to ensure the request is appropriate.

5.4 To ensure a timely and manageable workload for the 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.

5.5 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.

6 SCRUTINY / CABINET MEMBER ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS.

6.1 Members will have undertaken / or will soon be undertaking their quarterly meetings with the respective Cabinet Member and Senior Officers to populate forward work programmes and discuss other items that may be necessary to assist both Cabinet and Scrutiny moving forward.

6.2 These meetings have been welcomed by the Cabinet and they welcome the invitations received to attend the scrutiny committees.

6.3 Going forward, it is proposed that such meetings are diarised for the 2021-22 municipal year to assist Members and Officers with their diary commitments.

7 DIVERSITY IN DEMOCRACY HANDBOOK

7.1 The Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021 received royal assent in January 2021.

- 7.2 The 'Coming into Force' provisions of the Act are complex, with some provisions coming into force within days of Royal Assent, others within two months and the majority via Ministerial statutory instruments.
- 7.3 The Welsh Government is currently consulting on draft statutory guidance on the 'performance and governance of principal councils'. RCT have already been approached by Welsh Government to assist in the development of the guidance that will accompany Chapter 4 of the Act in respect of 'Public Participation and Transparency'.

8 WEBCASTING

- 8.1 In response to the ability provided within the Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Meetings) (Wales) Regulations 2020 the Council swiftly moved to a virtual committee model, which has afforded the opportunity for the Council to record and publish proceedings for the first time.
- 8.2 Following this positive engagement Members and Officers of the Council will proactively develop plans to enable the web-casting of chamber meetings and the ability to adopt a hybrid approach in preparation for the requirements of the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act.
- 8.3 Due to the lockdown restrictions both in England and Wales, Public Officers who are installing the webcasting system within the Council Chamber have not been able to attend the Chamber to finalise the project, however sign off of the facilities is scheduled for the end of March with training dates for officers scheduled for the beginning of April.
- 8.4 It is fundamental that Officers are given time to adapt to the new way of working through webcasting before training is offered to Members, although this will only be done when it is safe to do so and / or through a social distancing setting.
- 8.5 Once a good knowledge base of the webcasting system is in place, Officers will also look to the hybrid approach of meetings to allow Members the flexibility to attend meetings in person or on a virtual basis. Again it is important that such new way of working is given time to embed to ensure the continuation of successful Committee meetings within RCT, although there are many good practices of hybrid meetings taking place (such as in the Senedd), which Officers will be able to utilise to assist in its development.
- 8.6 Members have positively taken forward the new way of working with virtual meetings and recognition of the role of the Chair in positively managing these meetings cannot go unnoticed. With further new practices coming forward it is suggested that the Council Business Unit looks to arrange training for Members on undertaking scrutiny and working group meetings through a hybrid approach, to consider varying questioning techniques and strengthen the knowledge base already held by Members, whilst also considering promotion of public participation.

9 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no Equality and Diversity implications arising from this report and no Equality Impact Assessment is deemed necessary for the purposes of this report.

10 CONSULTATION

- 10.1 Not applicable.

11 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 There are no financial implications as a result of the recommendations set out in the report.

12 LINKS TO THE COUNCILS CORPORATE PLAN AND FUTURE GENERATIONS – SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

- 12.1 The updates contained within the report will strengthen the Council's consideration and scrutiny of its work, through 'the lens of the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations Act'. These arrangements will be embedded into the business of the Council as set out in the Policy Statement agreed by Cabinet on [2 November 2016](#).
- 12.2 The proposals outlined within the report will work to ensure a sustainable and robust scrutiny structure is in place which will effectively challenge policy decisions taken forward.
