



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL

29th JULY 2020

VIRTUAL MEETINGS

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, DEMOCRATIC SERVICES & COMMUNICATIONS

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide members with a further update in respect of the Council's virtual committee meetings, following the introduction of the [Local Authorities \(Coronavirus\) \(Meetings\) \(Wales\) Regulations 2020](#), and the previous update report, presented to Council on the 1st July.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Council:

- 2.1 Acknowledge the progress made to date;
- 2.2 Note the sequence of meetings in the enclosed timeline of committees up to and including the 16th September 2020 (Council AGM); and
- 2.3 Request that the Service Director Democratic Services and Communication provides further updates on progress of the Council's virtual meetings.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The need to make Members aware of the progress made, through the member-wide roll out of the Zoom Video Conferencing application and the proposed continued roll out of Committee and Council meetings up-to the proposed Annual General Meeting of the Council.
- 3.2 To provide advance notification to Members, of the timeline of meetings to be held following the August recess.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 At the Council meeting held on the 1st July 2020, Members were provided with an update on the roll out of committee functions operating virtually.
- 4.2 The report advised members on the incremental approach being taken, which had provided all Members with the opportunity to gain experience operating virtually and for the Zoom applications to be made accessible to all Councillors.
- 4.3 During the first phase, and with the support of Group Leaders, Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs, meetings of the Cabinet, Planning & Development and Overview & Scrutiny Committees, were prioritised and held virtually.
- 4.4 Members were also advised that through this approach, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, as the overarching scrutiny Committee, would undertake a council side strategic role, with all Chairs and Vice Chairs of the four themed scrutiny committees being invited to participate in the work of this committee in the immediate future.
- 4.5 At that time, Members were informed that all Elected Members and Co-opted Members had been provided with the Zoom application and that comprehensive training arrangements had been made available. A number of functions, include Cabinet, Planning and Council are discharging their responsibilities on a regular virtual basis.

5. VIRTUAL MEETINGS TO DATE

Virtual Meeting Activity

- 5.1 The initial roll out and first phase of virtual meetings, was based on the Council's business needs at the time and the requirement to establish its decision-making committees, such as Cabinet, and the Planning & Development Committee, as well as the Overview & Scrutiny committee, to maintain robust scrutiny of service delivery and decisions. Since that time there have been a large number of other committees and joint committees held in a virtual setting, which have supported the re-introduction of the Council's democratic arrangements.
- 5.2 Since the last update, the meetings set out below in the table have been undertaken based on the need to resume business, and has included the Llwydcoed Crematorium Joint Committee to review its Budget Monitoring Update, the Audit Committee, to considering key reporting matters and the LEA Governor Appointment Committee to consider applications for the appointment of Local Education Authority Governors in a timely way.

DATE	Committee/ Function
Thursday, 9th July 12.30pm-1.30pm	Appointments Committee
Thursday, 9th July 3pm	Planning & Development
Monday, 13th July, 2pm	Llwydcoed Crematorium Joint Committee
Tuesday, 14th July, 2pm	Pension Fund Committee
Thursday, 16th July, 3pm	Planning & Development
Monday, 20th July, 10.30am	LEA Governor's Appointments Committee
Monday, 20th July 3pm	Audit Committee
Monday, 20th July 9am	Appointments Committee
Wednesday, 22nd July, 3pm	Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee
Friday, 24th July, 3pm	Extra-Ordinary Council
Tuesday, 28th July, 2.30pm	Cabinet
Wednesday 29th July, 3pm	Council

- 5.3 Each committee has received a consistent model of approach, including training for the individual members, business matters in advance of the meeting, one-to-one preparation meetings with Chairs, and planning meetings with the Democratic Services Team in advance of the formal committee.
- 5.4 In the case of the Llwydcoed Crematorium Joint Committee, the same support was offered to members of Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council

Public Participation

- 5.5 Public participation remains a priority with the progression of the Council's virtual meetings and recent Planning & Development Committees have welcomed a number public speakers to their meetings. Following their original application to speak, residents or applicants follow a simple process to enable them to access the meeting safely and securely at the appropriate time. They were afforded the opportunity to address Committee on their planning applications for up to five minutes within the virtual meeting setting.
- 5.6 Clear guidance has been developed to assist residents who have requested to formally speak at planning. Positive feedback has been received from this virtual opportunity. The Council continues to offer more traditional means of engagement, such as written submissions, which may be considered by committee members as part of their deliberations.
- 5.7 The decision as to whether a meeting is recorded remains with the Chair of that committee and is determined by the Head of Democratic Services, based upon the public interest in the business being considered, balanced against the Officer resource required to facilitate this. Since the initial roll out a number of formal meetings have been recorded and published on the council website including most recently the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on the 26th June 2020 and Full Council held on the 1st July 2020. All Cabinet and Planning Committees undertaken to-date have been recorded and published.
- 5.8 Consideration will need to be given over the coming weeks, into how the Council would facilitate the provisions which are provided for the public to engage, within the Council's constitution, in other committee settings, in this new virtual way.

Welsh Translation Function

- 5.9 Progress has been made with Welsh translation arrangements within a virtual setting. Following thorough testing with internal council services, our Welsh speaking Members and with the support of Group Leaders,

the facility was successfully piloted at the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on the 26th June and continues to be used where appropriate.

Scrutiny

- 5.10 The Overarching Scrutiny Committee held its first virtual meeting on the 26th June 2020 to provide Members with the opportunity to develop an amended work programme for the extended municipal year 2019/20 and to identify any matters within the Cabinet forward work programme, to pre scrutinise or review in greater detail. For that reason the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the themed Scrutiny Committees were invited to attend and engage in the process. Consideration was also given to the Council's response to the Covid-19 emergency and a comprehensive update was provided by the Leader of the Council with contributions from the Chief Executive and the Senior Leadership Team.
- 5.11 All members of the committee contributed to this scrutiny process and a number of outcomes were recorded for further review. Members understood that the current approach to scrutiny needs to proportionate and fit within the current constraints the council is facing, as well as recognising the need to realign the immediate scrutiny work programme, to encompass the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the current recovery process.
- 5.12 At the same meeting, the Director of Education & Inclusion Services delivered a verbal update in respect of the opportunity to return to school on the 29th June for all statutory school aged pupils.
- 5.13 The Children & Young People's Scrutiny Committee, will be the first thematic scrutiny committee to convene virtually and will provide the opportunity for Members to scrutinise, review and challenge the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic from an education perspective. The committee has been convened for the 22nd July 2020. A second meeting of this committee will take place in September to consider the Children's Services aspects of its Terms of Reference.
- 5.14 In order to maintain the momentum and engagement in the Council's Scrutiny process it is proposed that the next Overview & Scrutiny Committee will be held on the 30th July 2020 with a view to reviewing and challenging recent information considered by the Cabinet, on the Council's response to Covid-19, together with its overarching and council wide approach to deal with other council matters.
- 5.15 The Health & Well-being Committee will meet for the first time virtually in September, with the Overview & Scrutiny Committee undertaking its third meeting prior to the conclusion of this extended municipal year.

5.16 In response to the democratic business needs, flexibility has been provided to convene meetings of the Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee or the Public Service Delivery Scrutiny Committee, when appropriate.

6 TIMELINE FOR UP AND COMING COUNCIL COMMITTEE MEETINGS

6.1 Members will note the timeline for forthcoming council meetings up until the Council’s Annual General Meeting (AGM) on the 16th September 2020 as set out below. Members will be familiar that the business of a number of other committee functions feed into the Council AGM, and therefore this date continues to be reviewed.

6.2 As set out in section 5, a number of Scrutiny Committees will be convened in early September to consider the ongoing response of the Council to Covid-19 and the recovery plans that will be implemented over the coming weeks.

6.3 The current schedule of meetings is set out below. This calendar is subject to change and additional meetings may be added, in response to business requirements:-

DATE	COMMITTEE/FUNCTION
Thursday 30th July 10am	Corporate Parenting Board
Thursday, 30th July, 3pm	Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Tuesday, 1st September, 5pm	Democratic Services Committee
Wednesday, 2nd September, 3pm	Health & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee
Thursday, 3rd September, 5pm	Planning & Development
Monday, 7th September, 5pm	Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Wednesday, 9th September, 5pm	Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee (Children’s Services)
Wednesday, 16th September, 3pm	Council (AGM)

7. THE NEXT STEPS

- 7.1 The incremental roll out of virtual meetings has provided Members with the opportunity to familiarise themselves with virtual technology and meeting etiquette and to receive sufficient support from ICT/Council Business Unit to secure the efficient running and broadcasting of a meeting.
- 7.2 It has been a swift learning process for Members and Officers alike but confidence has grown as meetings progress and by adopting a “lessons learned” approach following each committee, the Council is developing a positive approach towards its virtual meetings. The timelines demonstrate that a number of committees have and continue to take place over the coming weeks to enable maximum engagement and participation by all Members.
- 7.3 The Service Director Democratic Services and Communications in discussions with Group Leaders, will continue to review the progress of these meetings in a virtual setting, to identify any areas where further training and/or support is required and to manage any emerging challenges associated with carrying out the council’s governance role during the COVID-19 crisis. Progress will continue to be reported at appropriate intervals.
- 7.4 Members will be aware that a number of improvements are currently in progress to assist the digitalisation of the Chamber, to support the broadcasting of committees in the future, and to continue delivering our ‘paper-light approach’ to committee management and importantly to enhance access opportunities.
- 7.5 The coming weeks will require continued engagement with Group Leaders and the wider membership of the Council, in respect of how our future committee arrangements will look. One option for consideration may be how we might approach facilitating hybrid meeting arrangements in the future. Approaches in the future should certainly seek to ensure that the progress we have been made, in a very short space of time, which have enhanced the opportunities for members to engage in their role, can be further developed as part of how operate and work as a democratic organisation.

8. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not required as the contents of the report are for information purposes only.

9. CONSULTATION

- 9.1 Engagement and the approaches being considered continues to be undertaken with Group Leaders and Committee Chairs.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no financial implications aligned to this report.

11. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are no financial implications aligned to this report.

12. CONCLUSION

12.1 The Council continues to build confidence with its virtual meetings and has responded to the need to develop member and officer decision-making which is facilitated by remote working. Virtual meetings continue to offer equal access to all Members as the Council moves from crisis response to recovery.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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BACKGROUND PAPERS