



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Democratic Services Committee held on Thursday, 1 October 2020 at 5.00 pm.

Democratic Services Committee Members in attendance:-

Councillor M Diamond (Chair)

Councillor M Webber Councillor J Bonetto
Councillor J Brencher Councillor G Caple
Councillor L Walker Councillor J Edwards

Officers in attendance

Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication

25 APOLOGIES

An apology of absence was received from County Borough Councillors L M Adams, H Fychan, G Jones, K Morgan, S Rees, S Powderhill and E Stephens.

26 Change to the Order of the Agenda

The Chair advised there would be a change to the order of the agenda in that agenda items 6 and 9 would be considered together.

27 Declaration of Interest

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

28 Minutes

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 8th January 2020 as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

29 Members Portal Demonstration

The Service Director Democratic Services and Communications advised that subject to Members' approval and agreement, the Democratic Services Committee would monitor the progress of the Portal and subsequent roll out to all Members. The Portal has been developed in conjunction with the Customer Services team and Council Business Unit to ensure its compatibility and relevance.

The Customer Service Programme Manager provided an overview of the portal's functionality and advised that, for the purposes of the demonstration, the following three programmes have been developed in conjunction with the

Council Business Unit; how to submit a question to Council, declaration of interest at a meeting and submitting a Call-in.

Members were informed that other features would include ward based maps for planning applications, the latest updates from the council website and it would be fully integrated with the Modern.Gov system. Eventually it is anticipated that Members will be able to submit requests and map issues that have been flagged within their individual wards and the portal will provide statistical information, compiled from the Council's customer reporting system ('The CRM').

Following the demonstration to Committee which highlighted the functionality of the three programmes the Service Director explained that additional developments to the portal would be incremental and the system would be operational alongside the current, more traditional processes and from 2022 the portal would become the default approach to Member engagement.

The Customer Service Programme Manager confirmed that the system has the additional functionality of being able to upload images which would complement any local members' submissions to the portal via the reporting pages

Members discussed other aspects of the portal functionality and **RESOLVED** to note the progress made to date and continued development of the system and to receive future demonstrations to the Democratic Services Committee on an incremental basis.

30 Webcasting Provision

The Head of Democratic Services provided Members with an update in respect of the introduction arrangements to enable the broadcasting of committee meetings and access and accessibility improvements to the Chamber.

Members were reminded that the Council's response to the roll out of the virtual platform to enable formal committee meetings has been positive and well received and the Head of Democratic Services alluded to a hybrid meeting approach via the new technology, which would be installed early in the autumn, and the ability to use the infrastructure to enhance the current virtual approach such as live streaming. It was advised that the technology would be rolled out on an incremental basis and a comprehensive training programme developed to allow Members sufficient opportunity to gain experience with the webcasting provision.

In the short to medium term the Head of Democratic Services reflected on the need to consider and adapt the Council's Standing Orders and Rules of Procedure to the new infrastructure in place, through the Constitution & Governance Committee and subsequently Full Council.

The Head of Democratic Services advised that discussions would continue with Group Leaders in respect of these developments and future roll-out plans.

Members were able to view photographs of the improvements to the Council Chamber before discussions and questions were asked about the implementation of the webcasting provision.

The Vice Chair requested that a visit to the Chamber is arranged for herself and the Chair to see the improvements to the Chamber first hand.

The Head of Democratic Services explained how arrangements for a hybrid meeting would be undertaken, with up to 29 Elected Members physically present in the Council Chamber (under current Covid-19 restrictions) but with the potential, under normal circumstances, for the full 75 individual Members to attend in person or virtually.

The Chair acknowledged the benefits of the webcasting provision for both Elected Members and local residents by creating more opportunities for the public to access council business

In conclusion, the Head of Democratic Services referred to other benefits such as interlinking with the Modern.Gov system, recording Members' attendance and the electronic voting system which would represent a positive demonstration of accountability and transparency.

Following discussion Members **RESOLVED** to :-

- Note the development of the provision of webcasting within Rhondda Cynon Taf Council, in line with the potential proposals within the Local Government Elections Bill, which deliver upon 'in principal' support provided by members previously to broadcast Council meetings;
- Support the development of webcasting to further assist with the promotion of public engagement and transparency of decision making by the Council;
- Note the improvements technology and accessibility which can support diversity and engagement in local government moving forward; and
- Support a future site visit to the Council Chamber by the Chair and Vice Chair of the Democratic Services Committee.

31 **Members' Survey**

The Head of Democratic Services presented his report in respect of feedback obtained from the recent Member survey undertaken during August 2020 which captured information about the support provided to Members to assist them in undertaking their role and identify areas where the Council Business Unit can improve or change current arrangements. He advised that there is a statutory requirement for the Council to survey the views of its Members in relation to the calendar of meetings and the provision of support and resources to non-executive members. Views had also been sought in relation to other services which are equally important to inform future provision for Members. He advised that the findings in relation to the timings of meetings are not binding but provide a basis for individual Committee Chairs to determine the start times of their respective committees.

The Head of Democratic Services thanked Members for their positive comments for the services provided to them by the Council Business Unit which would inform future developments and support provision.

The Vice Chair acknowledged the flexibility required particularly in respect of the timings of virtual meetings

It was **RESOLVED** to:

- Note the feedback obtained from the Member Survey 2019/2020 as outlined within the report; and
- Acknowledge that the timings of meetings set out in the report are subject to change and for the individual Chairs of Committees to use as a basis when determining their respective start times.

32 Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (IRP) -Reimbursement of Costs of Care

As previously indicated by the Chair of the Democratic Services Committee, it was the intention to consider Agenda Item 6, the Reimbursement of Costs of Care in conjunction with Agenda item 9, Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales: draft annual report 2021 to 2022.

The Head of Democratic Services advised that following publication of the papers for this meeting, the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales has subsequently published its draft Annual Report for the 2021-2022 Municipal Year. Members were informed that the Chair of the Committee and the Head of Democratic Services had been invited to a meeting with the Panel at the end of October to provide feedback in respect of the IRP draft annual report.

The Head of Democratic Services highlighted the key issues for Members to note within the IRP report such as the modest raise of £150 in the basic salary and the importance of the Council actively promoting information relating to the costs of care for Members. He advised that in line with the IRP proposals, formal care costs are to be reimbursed in full and informal (unregistered) care costs are to be reimbursed up to a maximum rate equivalent to the Real Living Wage at the time the costs are incurred. It was proposed that the costs are promoted through the Members Portal and through publicity material which could also be used to champion diversity amongst Local Government candidates in advance of the 2022 Local Government Elections.

The Vice Chair supported the actions proposed to actively promote the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales' (IRPW) determination in relation to the Reimbursement of Costs of Care and encourage the take up of the reimbursement by all Elected Members which may also encourage others to stand as candidates in the forthcoming Local Elections in May 2022.

Following discussion it was **RESOLVED** that:-

- The Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales' (IRPW) determination in relation to the Reimbursement of Costs of Care is actively promoted amongst all Elected Members through a variety of means such as the Members Portal; and
- The reimbursement of Costs of Care is also included in pre-election materials to ensure future, potential candidates are aware of the financial support is available to them.

33 Democratic Services Committee Annual Report 2019-2020

The Head of Democratic Services sought Members' approval of the Democratic Services Annual Report for the 2019/2020 Municipal Year which provides a summary of the Committee's work throughout the year. The Head of Democratic Services advised that the Annual Report would be reported to a future Council meeting following approval by Committee.

Following consideration of the Annual Report, the Chair thanked all committee members for their work over the past twelve months and the Vice Chair for her continued support.

The Vice Chair thanked the Chair and acknowledged their good working relationship over the last 12 months. The Vice Chair advised that other Committee Chairs would also have the opportunity to present their annual reports to a future Council meeting.

It was **RESOLVED** to:-

- Note the contents of the Democratic Services Committee Annual Report 2019/2020; and
- Endorse the report to a future meeting of the Council.

34 Written statement from the Minister for Housing and Local Government

The Head of Democratic Services reported that the Statement by the Minister for Housing and Local Government, which had been recently published, was looking to take forward a number of issues contained within the Local Government Bill and some other broader proposals to increase diversity across local government at both a community and county borough level and it was appropriate to bring the statement to members' attention and for the Democratic Services Committee to consider the proposals within the statement.

The Head of Democratic Services referred to the actions within the annexe of the report, as set out on page 58, regarding the publication of members' addresses, promotion of high conduct standards, the electronic broadcasting of meetings and job sharing opportunities. As many of the matters sit within the remit of the Democratic Services Committee its approval to establish a Working Group was sought to facilitate Members discussions and consider the detail behind the proposals with a view to formulating recommendations for agreement by the wider committee.

In conclusion, the Head of Democratic Services advised that the working group would be well placed to comply with some of the future Local Government Bill arrangements. Any recommendations to be implemented would be referred back to the committee for its approval.

The Chair suggested that, as a number of Members were not present at the meeting, the opportunity to sit on the working group should also be afforded to them via notification following the meeting. The Vice Chair welcomed the proposal to establish a Working Group to support and enhance diversity within the local authority.

A member of the Committee also welcomed some of the key points raised within the Ministerial Statement such as maximising the work/life balance by increasing

remote access to meetings and the promotion of the care packages and support for those with disabled responsibilities. The Member stated that it offered a further opportunity for the local authority to improve on its current arrangements.

Following discussion it was **RESOLVED** to:

- Acknowledge the contents of the written statement by the Minister for Housing & Local Government in respect of phase 2 of the Diversity in Democracy Programme; and
- Establish a working group to consider the detail within the proposals and refer any recommendations back to the wider Committee (for an invitation to participate in the working group to be extended to those members not in attendance at the meeting).

This meeting closed at 6.00 pm

**Cllr M Diamond
Chairman.**