



**RHONDDA CYNON TAF**

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**1<sup>st</sup> OCTOBER 2020**

**DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**MEMBER SUVERY – CONSIDERATION OF FEEDBACK**

**REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES**

**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

The purpose of the report is to provide Members with the feedback obtained from the recent Member survey undertaken during August 2020 which has 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.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1 It is recommended that the Democratic Services Committee:

- (i) Consider the feedback obtained from the Member Survey 2019/2020 as outlined within the report; and
- (ii) Progress any actions deemed appropriate as a result of the feedback and comments received as outlined within the report.

**3. BACKGROUND**

3.1 As part of the statutory responsibilities of the Head of Democratic Services, the Council is required 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.

3.2 In view of this requirement the Democratic Service Committee drafted a bilingual survey which was developed and agreed for circulation by the Committee at its meeting on the [19<sup>th</sup> March, 2019](#).

3.3 In 2019, the survey was undertaken for a two week period from the beginning of April, through a dedicated website link. Hard copies of the survey were also made available to those Members that required them. Following close of the survey, 40 responses were received and an outline of the comments received were considered at the Democratic Services Committee on the [17<sup>th</sup> July 2019](#).

3.4 For 2020, the survey previously developed by the committee was utilised as a basis for the annual questionnaire, with the addition of questions relating to virtual meeting following discussions of the arrangements for such committee meetings, at recent Council and scrutiny meetings.

#### **4. MEMBERS SURVEY 2020**

4.1 In advance of the 2020/2021 Municipal Year the Council sought the views of Members in areas not statutorily required to ensure that the Council continues to provide the appropriate support to all Elected Members.

4.2 The outcome of the survey has formed the basis of the calendar of meetings that was agreed at the Council AGM held on the 16<sup>th</sup> September 2020 and has enabled the Council Business Unit to establish the most convenient time for Members to conduct their formal business.

4.3 The survey was initially conducted in August 2020 but due to an initial low response the deadline was extended for another week to ensure all Elected Members had the opportunity to submit their views.

#### **5. SURVEY RESPONSES**

5.1 Overall the responses to the survey were positive with

- 64% of respondents are happy to proceed with the paper light approach to committee meetings going forward;
- 97% are happy with the level of support provided to Members through the Council Business Unit;
- Feedback in respect of the timings of meetings are outlined in **section 6** of the report,
- 97% of respondents were happy with the training provision provided to Members although further feedback was provided which is highlighted in **section 8** of the report.
- 86% of respondents were happy with the facilities provided at the Council Chamber, although further feedback was provided which is highlighted in **section 9** of the report.

#### **6. TIMINGS OF MEETINGS**

6.1 Members were asked to provide their preferences of start times for each of the virtual Council Committees as well as indicate their preference for Committee start times when they are back up and running. In general the consensus is for the start times to remain at 5pm.

6.2 This view was considered at the Council AGM on the 16<sup>th</sup> September 2020 at Agenda item 10 - Calendar of Meetings when Members agreed that in the majority Committees would commence at 5pm

6.2 Some additional comments in respect of start times of Committees were noted by Members in respect of:

- Concern with the 3pm start time due to the impact on childcare and/or work commitments;
- Councillors who work, and members of the public who are interested in attending meetings, would be adversely affected by any move earlier than 5pm;
- Holding meetings within work time hours (9-5pm) so as not to disrupt family life;
- Could meetings commence at 10am in the winter months?
- Can Members have more notice in advance of ad-hoc meetings such as VER and Appeals Committee?

## **7. COUNCIL BUSINESS UNIT**

7.1 Members were complimentary of the support provided to Members by the Council Business Unit both in general terms and with regards to the support required to undertake meetings on a virtual platform. They felt that they had been well equipped to deal with the new way of working through a support package of training as the virtual meetings were rolled out on an incremental basis.

7.2 Members were also asked if they are satisfied with the level of information that is circulated on a daily basis via the Members Daily Updates which has been fundamental in engaging Members with headline information from the local authority and that of Welsh Government and the Welsh Local Government Association during the Coronavirus pandemic.

7.3 When asked to provide further comments in respect of the support provision and to identify any gaps, the following comments were made:-

- Further promotion of the Member research provision and a standing agenda item to highlight Welsh Government consultation documents;
- More online training opportunities;
- An updated Officer Directory;and
- Useful to have advance notice of ward related events

7.4 In respect of the above comments, the following actions are proposed:-

- Further elevate opportunities to publicise the research to Elected Members and Co-opted Members of the Council and the promote the availability of this service to support the activities of non-executive members;
- Publish an up to date Office information to reflect recent key officer changes, potentially as part of a future members portal;

- Online training opportunities are currently available via the RCT Source and will be further promoted amongst Members (further information regarding the developing Members Portal is set out at point 9 of the report);

## **8. MEMBERS' PORTAL**

- 8.1 It is anticipated that members of the Democratic Services Committee will be provided with a live demonstration of the Members' Portal at its meeting in October 2020. This will provide Members with the opportunity to gain an understanding of its functionality and purpose as well as see its potential to provide future E-Learning training modules and become a 'One Stop Shop' for logging enquiries and reporting issues in respect of Members' individual wards.
- 8.2 As Members become more familiar with conducting council business via their electronic devices and through the use of virtual meetings, the portal will complement this and the roll-out of the paper light initiative. In time, the portal can be further developed to incorporate interactive sections and offer a whole host of information, messages and links to other useful sites. The Democratic Services Committee will continue to be instrumental in progressing the Members' Portal and will receive regular demonstrations of the function as it develops.
- 8.3 The survey asked Members which E-Learning modules they would consider to be the most beneficial when the facility is availability. It is considered that the face to face meeting provision will reduce following the introduction of the E-Learning facility. The following areas were some examples cited by Members:-
- Safeguarding
  - Stress / Mental Health and Well-being
  - Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence
  - Lone working for Members
  - Equality & Diversity

## **9. MEMBERS FACILITES**

- 9.1 Members were asked to comment on the facilities made available to Members within the Council Headquarters in respect of meeting room provision, private rooms for each political party and the Council Chamber. The majority of Members responded that they are satisfied with the facilities at the Council Headquarters. Private meeting rooms for each of the political groups and independent Member are available in Block C of the Pavilions for Members to utilise.
- 9.2 As Members will be aware work has been undertaken over recent weeks in the Council Chamber for the provision of the webcasting facility. The webcasting provision has progressed to assist the digitalisation of the Chamber, to support the broadcasting of committees in the future, and to continue delivering the

Council's 'paper-light approach' to committee management and importantly to enhance access opportunities.

- 9.3 A specific report on the progress of the webcasting provision has been presented to the Democratic Services Committee on the 1<sup>st</sup> October 2020. This will assist in the future development of the Council's committees such as the option to consider a hybrid approach. Discussions will continue between the Head of Democratic Services, Group Leaders and the wider membership of the Council to ascertain the most effective way to hold formal committees in the future.

## 10 **Additional Comments**

- 10.1 Members were surveyed on what additional requirements they would like to receive from Democratic Services over the next 12 months to enable them to continue to carry out their roles effectively. Many Members commented that they are content with the level of support they currently receive. Below are a few additional comments which will be addressed by the Council Business Unit team:-

- Ensure that the current level of support is provided if we experience another lockdown;
- Jyst help efo'r ipad (Just help with the iPad);
- More research facilities;
- A 'virtual' guide as to what each department is responsible for and contact name/email address for who to contact

## 11. **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 The results of the survey allow for each Member to submit their comments and suggestions into the work of the Council Business Unit and provide valuable insight into the needs and support for each Member. The report encourages the authority to examine the way that business is conducted to ensure the equality of access and involvement of all Councillors.

## 12. **CONSULTATION**

- 12.1 Members Survey 2019/2020.

## 13. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)**

- 13.1 Any financial implications aligned to the suggestions put forward by Members will be considered as and when taken forward.

## 14 **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 14.1 None

**15. LINKS TO THE CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT.**

- 15.1 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.
- 15.2 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**

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**OCTOBER 2020**

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**BACKGROUND PAPERS - Democratic Services – Support for Members**