



RHONDDA CYNON TAF

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

13TH FEBRUARY 2023

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

INFORMATION / UPDATE REPORT

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of the report is to provide Members with an update in respect of:

- Member Devices
- Members Attendance
- Members 3rd Party transactions
- Diversity in Democracy
- Members Wellbeing
- Member Notifications
- Democracy Engagement Grant

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that the Democratic Services Committee:

- (i) Note the updates provided within the report;
- (ii) Receive further updates in respect of each of the items outlined within the report as and when appropriate.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 A number of items are under consideration by the Democratic Services Committee and this report looks to provide Members with details of the current status of these items to ensure Members are kept up to date.

3.2 In addition to the above, work is also being taken forward by the Head of Democratic Services and it is considered appropriate that these items are shared with Members.

4. MEMBERS DEVICES

- 4.1 Following the Local elections, all Members were provided with electronic devices to support them in undertaking their role as an Elected Member, which included a laptop and mobile phone.
- 4.2 Members were provided with training in respect of using their devices, with particular reference to accessing Council Committee papers through the Modern.gov app and the zoom function, to allow remote attendance at meetings. Other features of the training included utilising Microsoft outlook and teams training.
- 4.3 In addition to the above, drop in sessions prior to Council meetings have also been taken forward for Members to utilise if they require any further assistance or support on maximising usage of their device. Members are also reminded that they can always request further training through the Council business unit as and when needed.
- 4.4 It is the intention that a survey be undertaken with Members to establish their use of devices, their confidence in using their devices and any further support requirements that Members would find beneficial. The results of the survey will assist in populating the Council training framework for Members, which will be presented to Committee at a future meeting.

5. MEMBERS ATTENDANCE.

- 5.1 Members attendance at Committee meetings is recorded via officers within the Council Business Unit and displayed with Decision Notice/Minutes of the meeting. The attendance will also display within the individual Members' profile on the Council webpages. Committee Members are to inform the relevant Democratic Services Officer if they are unable to attend a meeting and their apologies will be recorded at the meeting and published in the minutes of the meeting.
- 5.2 At a meeting of [Council](#), Council endorsed a decision of the Democratic Services Committee in respect of the noting of Member apologies, to ensure a clear, consistent and transparent picture was created of Members attendance.
- 5.3 It was agreed that that the following six categories are utilised by Members when providing apologies for non attendance, if appropriate:
 - **Council Duties** – i.e. attendance at another Council meeting /representing the Council at a specific event – i.e Mayoral duties / Cabinet Member duties.
 - **Business Duties** – ie LEA School Governor Duties / Community Council duties / Outside Bodies / Community Health Council
 - **Carer Responsibilities** – Including caring for both younger and older generations / Family Members.

- **Sickness**
- **Work Commitment** – Unavoidable work commitments
- **Bereavement**

5.4 It was also agreed if Members did not wish to provide a reason then an ‘Apology’ would be recorded. If no apology or any of the above was not provided prior to a Committee meeting, the attendance record would indicate ‘Non Attendance / Absent’.

5.5 It is suggested that Members review the categories of apologies listed in 5.3 and subject to Members comments the apology categories are re-circulated to Members for future use at Committee meetings.

6 **RELATED PARTY TRANSACTIONS**

6.1 Within the Annual Statement of Accounts the Council are required to disclose the value of transactions and year-end balances of “Related Party Transactions”.

6.2 A “Related Party” for this purpose would be any organisation in which a Member or Chief Officer of the Council has an interest, financial or otherwise. (Mere membership of an outside body or a minor interest in an entity does not itself create a related party transaction. Disclosure will depend upon an analysis of whether “control” or “influence” has been or can be exercised.).

6.3 Members are requested to update their declaration of Interest forms when any changes are made, within a 28 day period of the change to the Council Business Unit.

6.4 in addition to this and in accordance with The Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting 2018/19 Members are asked on an annual basis to ensure that their declarations of Interest forms are updated and accurate by the end of the financial year, ensuring that any related party interest (as described in 6.2 of the report) is accounted for, in order for the Council to assess whether any transactions have occurred between the Council and the organisations in which a Member may have declared an interest.

6.5 The Council Business Unit will be assisting the Council’s accounts department in collating this information by the statutory required date of the 31st March, 2021. Members will shortly receive timely notification and reminders of the responsibility on them to provide the information and for this to be reported appropriately.

6.6 This information will be reported within the Statements of Accounts.

6.7 At the Audit Committee on the 1st February, Members received the Audit of Accounts 2019-20 and were advised of recommendation 1 relating to Member

and Officers interest. “We require positive assurance that Members and Senior Officers’ interests are accurate and up to date” this includes assurances when Members and Officers leave their roles.

- 6.8 This assurance is built into the Member checklist currently taken forward by the Council Business Unit when a Member leaves their term of office.
- 6.9 If any Member has a query in respect of their Declaration of Interest form they can contact the Council Business Unit for support.

7. DIVERSITY IN DEMOCRACY

- 7.1 Members will be aware that following extensive work by the former Democratic Services Committee, in respect of Diversity in Democracy the Council have adopted a [‘Diversity Declaration’](#) reflecting Rhondda Cynon Taf Council as a Diverse Council, a position encouraged by the WLGA across all Councils in Wales.
- 7.2 It is proposed that an update in respect of the requirements of the declaration is undertaken to ensure that the Council is taking forward the agreed approach.
- 7.3 In addition the recommendations agreed by Council following the work undertaken by the former Democratic Services Committee in respect of diversity in democracy be reviewed to ensure compliance.
- 7.4 With Members agreement this information will be brought forward to a future Committee meeting.

8 MEMBERS WELLBEING

- 8.1 The welfare and mental health of Members is crucially important and Members need to be aware of the support that is available to them if they wish to utilise through the Council’s Occupational Health service. Members should contact the Head of Democratic Services who can refer a Member to the service.
- 8.2 In addition to the above Members would have received recent notification through the Council Business Units weekly update of the Care First Lifestyle scheme.
- 8.3 The scheme is available free of charge, offering immediate information, answers and advice on a range of workplace and personal issues. Care First Lifestyle is an online solution provided by Care First. All access is confidential, providing:
- Phone Counselling
 - Online Counselling
 - Advice and Information Specialists
 - Free Advice

- 8.4 If Members require access to the system then it is recommended that Members contact the Council Business Unit who can direct Members as to how to access the system. Going forward it will be the intention to add this information to the Members Portal.
- 8.5 Since the covid pandemic and the provision made available through the Local Government and Elections Act, the hosting of Committee meetings through the hybrid / remote system has provided many benefits including greater flexibility with work / life balance, yet it has also produced a number of unintended consequences, such as Members feeling isolated. It was apparent that the informal, net working discussions by Members in advance of a physical meeting at the Council Chamber has sometimes been lacking.
- 8.6 To try to address this aspect the Council Business Unit have previously conducted virtual coffee mornings, allowing Members the opportunity to come together, chat and share experiences, which we hoped boosted Members wellbeing.
- 8.7 It is the intention to reintroduce these coffee mornings, although in a physical setting at the Council Headquarters. Details of a future session will be provided to all Members shortly.

9 MEMBER NOTIFICATIONS

- 9.1 The Council Business Unit strive to provide Members with timely and up to date information to assist them in undertaking their role. A daily update is provided to Members via email rounding up the latest news items, important social media correspondence, links to news items of Welsh Government and other items organisations. In addition to this a weekly update is also provided , providing a summary of the week ahead of calendar information and different themed items, which we feel would be beneficial to Members.
- 9.2 Although Members are able to access their emails through their council devices, including their Council mobile, it may be the case that emails are not checked on a regular or daily basis, depending on how a Member uses this provision. It is therefore important that when necessary a different form of notification is utilised in cases of urgency.
- 9.3 During January the Council Business Unit tested the 'Text Alert System', whereby a brief text was sent to Members mobile numbers.
- 9.4 It is anticipated that in cases of urgency, notifications will be sent to Members through this form of communication. In addition, the Council Business Unit are also looking at the creation of a Members Whatsapp group, for Members who utilise this form of correspondence.
- 9.5 It is intended that these different avenues of notifications will assist Elected Members in sharing important information.

10 DEMOCRACY ENGAGEMENT GRANT

- 10.1 Correspondence relating to the creation of a Democracy Engagement Grant has recently been received by the Head of Democratic Services. The Grant looks to encourage and support people to participate in democracy, helping funded organisations ensure as many people as possible are engaged, motivated, and empowered to take part in democracy, giving them the tools to make their voice heard and impact positively on the Wales around them.
- 10.2 Consideration is being given as to a submission bid for the grant and an update on this submission and the outcome will be provided at a future meeting of the Committee.

11 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 This report supports the need for all Members to have equal access to support to perform their role. The report encourages the authority to examine the way that business is conducted to ensure the equality of access and involvement of councillors.

12. CONSULTATION

- 12.1 As part of each item various consultation meetings have taken place with Members / Officers and are advised upon within the report.

13. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 13.1 None.

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

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

February 2023

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

BACKGROUND PAPERS – None.