



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL

1st JULY 2020

VIRTUAL MEETINGS

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, DEMOCRATIC SERVICES & COMMUNICATIONS

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on the progress the Council has made to date, to enable Members to participate in virtual committee meetings since the introduction of the [Local Authorities \(Coronavirus\) \(Meetings\) \(Wales\) Regulations 2020](#).

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Council:

- 2.1 Acknowledge progress made to date in the initial phase of virtual meeting;
- 2.2 Agrees the timeline of virtual meetings as set out at 6.1 of the report; and
- 2.3 Request that the Service Director Democratic Services and Communication provides regular updates on progress of the Council's virtual meetings.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The need to advise Members of the progress made to date with the council -wide roll out of the zoom application; and
- 3.2 To provide an update in respect of the remote meetings held to date and to advise Members of the timeline of meetings to be held over the coming months.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Following the introduction of social distancing measures at the end of March and the suspension of formal committees, the decision making and governance of the Council has continued to operate in accordance with the Council's Constitution to discharge key decisions. This has

included undertaking urgent decisions necessary to the Council's service response during this period.

- 4.2 [The Local Authorities \(Coronavirus\) \(Meetings\) \(Wales\) Regulations 2020](#), published at the end of April, provided the opportunity for committee functions to operate virtually. The Council has subsequently taken an incremental approach to the roll out of committee meetings on a virtual basis. This approach has provided the opportunity for Members and officers to gain experience operating virtually and for the zoom applications to be made accessible for all members.
- 4.3 To date the Council's Cabinet and Planning Committees have met virtually.
- 4.4 At a briefing of Group Leaders and Committee Chairs and Vice-Chairs, held on 18th May 2020, Members supported the proposal presented by the Head of Democratic Services, to prioritise the Cabinet, Planning & Development Committee and Overview & Scrutiny Committee in the first phase of committee functions to be rolled-out virtually. Members also supported the proposal for the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, as the Council's overarching Scrutiny Committee, to consider the forward work programme of the Cabinet and to initially take a council-wide approach.
- 4.5 To date, the Zoom software has been rolled out to **all** Elected Members and Co-opted Members and a number of follow-up training sessions have been undertaken in small groups and where requested tailored to individuals. On the 15th and 16th June 2020 the Council Business Unit held a further two training sessions to which all Members/Co-opted Members were invited.
- 4.6 The Cabinet utilised video conferencing in the early weeks to engage with senior officers around the Council's response to the Coronavirus. The 'Weekly Cabinet Member & Senior Leadership Team Briefing' was shared with Members and the first formal meeting of the Cabinet took place on Thursday 21st May. A further Cabinet meeting was held on the 25th June and subsequently the recordings of both have been posted on the Council website.
- 4.7 In recent weeks there have been virtual meetings of the Planning & Development Committee and more recently on the 26th June 2020 the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

5. VIRTUAL MEETINGS-KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Protocol

- 5.1 In order to support the initial roll out of Zoom, the Council's ICT Services has developed general guidance for Elected Members for both iPad and

laptop devices to be used in conjunction with the deployment of Zoom. This has provided Members with a quick reference guide to the basic functionality of the online platform.

- 5.2 In addition to the 'User Manuals' Members have also been furnished with detailed guidance on etiquette when attending virtual meetings such as testing software in advance of the meeting and identity presentation.

Public Participation

- 5.3 Public participation remains at the forefront of the Council's approach to consistent and robust governance across the Authority. Full consideration has been given to providing opportunities for the public to participate in the virtual meetings through discussions between the Head of Democratic Services and the respective Chairs.
- 5.4 In advance of the recent Planning and Development Committee a public participation guide outlining a number of options available to the public was developed and published on the council website. The options for participation included joining the Zoom meeting to address committee members, submitting a written response or providing a pre-recorded submission. Procedures to manage public participation in a remote meeting continue to be considered.
- 5.5 Zoom does have the facility to record a meeting and subsequently make any recording accessible on-line. To date a number of formal meetings have been recorded and published on the [virtual meetings pages](#) of the Council website. Formal notice of the intention to record a meeting is given in advance, advising participants that the meeting recording will capture their images and sound and therefore the permission of all those participating must be sought.
- 5.6 The decision as to whether a meeting is recorded rests 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.

Welsh Language

- 5.7 Arrangements to provide Welsh translation in our virtual meeting environment continues to be tested. Officers from the Councils ICT department, Democratic Services and Welsh Language Services have under-taken live testing and a taster session with elected members is scheduled for the Thursday 25th June. Based on the feedback from members, consideration will be given to the most appropriate meeting to provide this functionality.

Scrutiny

- 5.8 The Overview & Scrutiny Committee, the Council's overarching Scrutiny Committee, has been prioritised in the first phase of virtual meetings and for the immediate few weeks will take a Council-wide approach to scrutiny and in-doing so, the opportunity will be provided for the Chairs of the four thematic scrutiny committees to participate in these meeting.
- 5.9 At its first meeting, members will consider the opportunity to develop an amended work programme for the extended municipal year 2019/20 (including key matters that would have otherwise been reviewed by the other four thematic scrutiny committees).
- 5.10 The oversight of the system response to COVID-19 will play an important part of this forward work-programme. Repurposing this single scrutiny committee in the first instance, will enable a tighter focus on a smaller range of issues and produce more effective outcomes.
- 5.11 It is proposed that the next phase of virtual meetings will include the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee and the Health & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee which will identify specific matters within the council's response to the crisis.

6. TIMELINE FOR COUNCIL MEETINGS

- 6.1 Members will note the timeline for forthcoming council meetings over the next few months as set out below. The schedule will be adjusted to incorporate further meetings as they are rolled out and Members will be informed accordingly:-

Date	Committee	Business
Friday 26th June, 3pm	Overview & Scrutiny Committee	Agenda & Reports
Thursday 25 th June, 11am	Cabinet	Agenda & Reports
Wednesday 1 st July, 3pm	Extra Ordinary Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council's Response to COVID-19 • Amended Work Programme • LDP Update • Virtual Meetings
Thursday 2 nd July, 3pm	Planning & Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applications for committee consideration
Wednesday 29 th July, 3pm	Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council's Response to COVID-19 UPDATED • Council Business Matters(tbc)
Wednesday 16 th September, 3pm	Council (AGM)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AGM Business

7. THE NEXT STEPS

- 7.1 The Council's ICT Service together with the Council's Business Unit will continue to address the most pressing challenges for the remote council meetings. This will include providing ongoing support and guidance for councillors and officers, to enable all participants to become comfortable and confident when using this new technology for all types of committee meetings.
- 7.2 A review of progress and experiences to date will be ongoing and the Head of Democratic Services, in discussions with Group Leaders, will consider how best to approach resuming other committee functions, such as Audit Committee and Democratic Services Committee. Member training will be evaluated to identify the requirements needed to support future roll-out and learn from experiences of each respective committee before arriving at a definitive mechanism for operating virtually.

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

12.2 The Council is still in the early stages of developing its virtual meetings and the incremental approach we have adopted provides the opportunity for Members and Officers to become familiar with this new way of working and to also explore the opportunities provided by virtual technology.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXTRA ORDINARY COUNCIL

1st JULY 2020

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BACKGROUND PAPERS