DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE – 20TH SEPTEMBER 2023

SUBJECT: **MEMBER SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT/MEETING TIMES SURVEY – OUTCOME AND CONSIDERATION**

REPORT BY: **CORPORATE DIRECTOR FOR EDUCATION AND CORPORATE SERVICES**

1.   PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1   To report the outcome of the Members survey relating to Member Support and Development and the timing of meetings.

1.2   To present a draft Member Support and Development Programme for consideration and approval and to make recommendations to Council regarding the timings of council meetings.

2.   SUMMARY

2.1   At its meeting on the 14th of March 2023, the Democratic Services Committee endorsed a Training Needs Questionnaire which was circulated to all 69 County Councillors, Co-opted and Lay Members. The views of Voluntary Sector representatives and Town and Community Councillors on meeting times, venues and platforms were also sought as part of this process.

2.2   As part of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 (the Measure), the Authority is required to periodically undertake a training needs analysis and develop a forward work programme of training and development. The Council's commitment to Diversity in Democracy along with the requirements of the Local Government and Elections Wales Act 2021 seek to identify barriers to participation and the survey will assist in this regard.

2.3   In addition, Section 6 of the Measure requires the Council to survey the views of its Members in relation to the calendar of meetings.

3.   RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1   Members note the responses to the Training Needs Analysis Questionnaire and approve the draft Members Support and Development Programme as attached in

Appendix 1.

3.2   Members note and consider the responses to the meeting times survey and make a recommendation to Council as to the continuation or otherwise of the meeting times for council meetings.

4.   **REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

4.1   To provide the Democratic Services Committee with the responses to the survey analysis and agree a draft Member Training and Development Programme for 2023-2025, which is key in discharging the Council's responsibility and commitment to support Members to carry out their roles effectively.

4.2   Approval of the draft Member Training and Development Programme for 2023-2025 will allow Officers to procure appropriate Facilitators, secure the most appropriate venue/platform and set dates and times in line with the preferences expressed within the survey.

4.3   To provide the Democratic Services Committee with the outcome of the Meeting times survey and to make appropriate recommendations to Council.
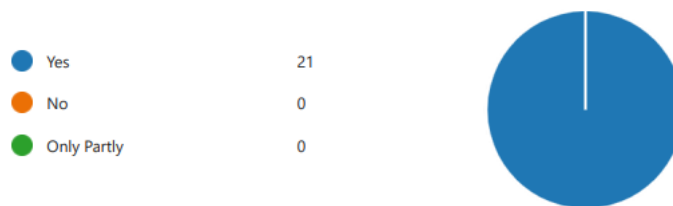

5.   **THE REPORT**

5.1   The Council has always recognised the importance of supporting Members' many and varied roles through a programme of targeted training and development. As Members training provision has evolved over time with a variety of platforms, e-learning and webinar options now readily available, training and development subjects can be delivered in a way that maximises attendance whilst minimising the demand on Members time, provide value for money and offer an enhanced learning experience.

5.2   The report seeks to provide an analysis of the responses received. The training and development programme arising from it sits alongside and builds on from the Members Induction process undertaken last summer and the continuing Members Seminar Programme which focuses on corporate and strategic matters. Together, both programmes provided Members with a good understanding of how the Council operates and the wider context in which local government is operating in the current challenging fiscal environment e.g. Treasury Management, Revenue Budget Management and Medium Term Financial Plan, Corporate Plan, Gwent Public Services Board, Cardiff Capital Region City Deal, Team Caerphilly Progress, Housing Act and the New Build Programme etc. This well established and comprehensive seminar platform in conjunction with the Induction and the Members Requested Programme will equip Members with the necessary tools needed in their ever changing and demanding roles**.**

5.3   Part of the Council's commitment to Diversity in Democracy is to understand barriers to participation and the survey specifically sought to identify why particular times or platforms might be difficult.

5.4   There were 21 responses received from Councillors giving a response rate of 31%. The Partner Questionnaire, which was circulated to Co-opted, Lay, Voluntary Sector Representatives and Town and Community Councillors generated a 27% response rate, this questionnaire specifically related to meetings times, venues and platforms

(hybrid, in person, remote).

5.5   Members Induction Programme Analysis

5.6   Questions 1-8 of the survey related specifically to the Members Induction Programme. 100% of responders felt that the Induction Programme provided them with a good introduction to the Council and the Councillor role. 90% of responders agreed that it was set at the right level, 20 of the 21 responders confirmed that they had felt well supported during the induction with 1 responded advising that they had not felt supported.
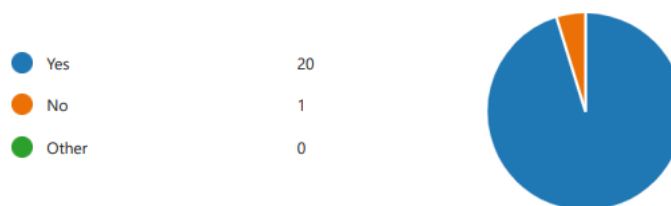
1. Did you feel that the Member Induction Programme provided you with a good introduction to the Council and Councillor role?

● Yes	21
● No	0
● Only Partly	0

3. Was the Induction Programme set at the right level?

● Yes - I found the sessions easy t...	19
● No Not All- I found the session ...	0
● Partly - I found only some of the...	2

5. Did you feel well supported during your Induction?

● Yes	20
● No	1
● Other	0

Members who commented felt that more support was needed around the structure of full Council meetings; terms and references made during proceedings were not always clear in terms of meaning and impact on the meeting for newly elected Councillors. Members also commented that more ongoing support post induction was needed.

100% of responders confirmed that they found the Members Induction Handbook useful.

7. Did you find the Members Induction Handbook Useful

- Yes   21
- No   0

Additional comments on the overall Induction Programme also suggested more '*face-to-face sessions with Councillors* 'should be included and felt that '*Councillors should be encouraged to come into the office environment more often as remote attendance might disadvantage them when it comes to career progression'.* Members also felt that overall, '*the Induction Programme was well put, easy to follow and extremely useful'.*

5.7 **Training and Development Opportunities Analysis**

Questions 9-21 provided suggested subject areas for Member Training and Development sessions and asked for Members to state their preference on the delivery of the session, through e-learning or in person with a facilitator, time and venue. The majority of responders expressed a preference for training to be delivered in person by a facilitator.

9. Ward Work and Surgeries (A blend of effective management skills for casework and a guide to resolving constituency correspondence and problems)

- Yes - E-Learning   9
- Yes - in Person with a Facilitator ...   8
- No   3

10. Community Leadership and Engagement (To provide members with an overview of the modern role of the Councillor being a Community Leader, working with Local Organisations, influencing Council decisions and policies and understanding the council's complex policy framework)

- Yes - E-Learnng   10
- Yes - in Person with a Facilitator ...   10
- No   1
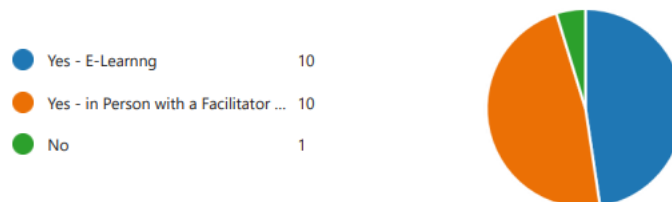
11. Information Technology - Outlook (Email), Word (Producing Letters and Documents), Teams (Provided by IT Training)

● Yes - E-Learning	6
● Yes - in Person with a Facilitator ...	11
● No	3
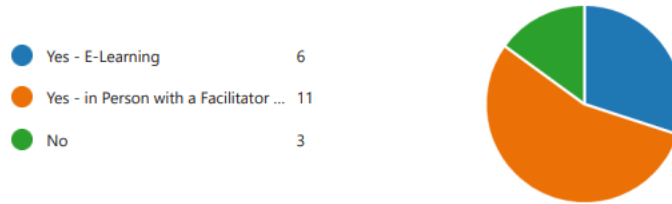
12. Chairing Skills (Practical Training on Chair Meetings)

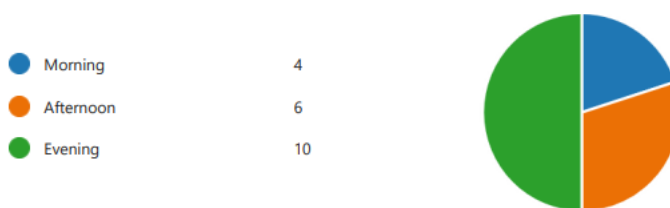|		
● Yes - E-Learning	6
● Yes - In Person with a Facilitator ...	12
● No	3

14. Question and Listening Skills for Scrutiny Committee Members (Practical advice on questioning and listening skills)

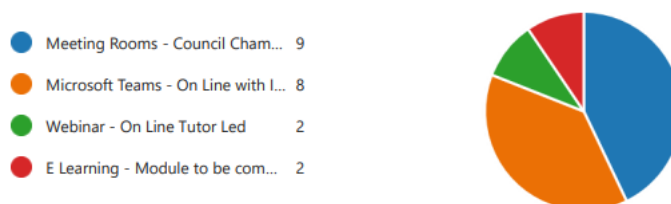|		
● Yes - in Person with a Facilitator ...	17
● No	3

5.8   Suggested sessions on Information Technology, Chairing Skills (Practical Training on Chairing Meetings), Questioning and Listening Skills for Scrutiny received the highest number of responses and so these have been prioritised as the first sessions in the training programme. The Advanced Chairing Skills training session proposed in the survey has been brought forward and will take place on the 25th of September 2023. Invitations have been sent to Group Leaders and existing Chairs and Vice Chairs. A second session will also be scheduled to follow the Chairing Skills (Practical) for those Members aspiring to Chairing roles or wish to develop their skill set further having completed the initial training course. Public Speaking and Mentoring proved to be less popular options and considering the additional information provided by Members when asked what additional topics they would like to see on the programme, we will look to replace these sessions with 'Challenging Chambers' and additional Scrutiny training topics.

5.9   It is envisaged that training sessions will be 90 minutes in duration and in line with the preferences expressed by Members the sessions will be held at 5pm, through a mix of meeting room/in person provision and Microsoft Teams tutor led sessions. Officers will identify facilitators able to provide Teams/On-Line training for those subjects where the majority of responders expressed this as a preference.

20. Training Times - Please indicate which of the following times you would prefer?

🔵 Morning	4
🟠 Afternoon	6
🟢 Evening	10

21. Please indicate your preference for training provision.

🔵 Meeting Rooms - Council Cham...	9
🟠 Microsoft Teams - On Line with I...	8
🟢 Webinar - On Line Tutor Led	2
🔴 E Learning - Module to be com...	2

5.10 **Mentoring**

17 of the 21 (80%) responders felt that Mentoring would be useful for both new and existing Members with 10 responders confirming that they would be willing to take on a Mentoring role.

Mentoring is usually organised by the political group with more experienced Members acting as mentors for newly elected Members. We will share this information with Group Leaders and can arrange for additional support from the WLGA on mentoring or for individual Members on request.

5.11 **Meeting Times, Arrangements and Platforms.**

Questions 22 to 36 sought Members preferences in relation to meeting times, platforms and current meeting arrangements (hybrid/multi-locational). The Local Government and Elections Wales Act 2021 stipulates that all Council meetings must be offered on a multi-locational basis. The technology required to support this has been challenging and through the survey Democratic Services wish to establish if Members found these arrangements satisfactory.

5.12 19 of the 21 (90%) responders agreed that current meeting arrangements were satisfactory with only 2 responders (10%) disagreeing. When asked about the duration and frequency of meetings again 90% of responders agreed that current arrangements were satisfactory.

22. Do you find the current arrangements for meetings satisfactory (i.e. hybrid where you can choose to attend in person or remotely)?

🔵	Yes	19
🟠	No	2

23. Do you find the current frequency and length of meetings satisfactory?

🔵	Yes	19
🟠	No	2

5.13 When asked to provide any additional information on meeting arrangements comments included:

'hybrid meetings lead to longer meetings'…
'the failure to remember to switch microphones on'… '
the general delays and often technical problems'… '
'In person meeting are far preferable for career development.'
'Reports are provided to read prior to the meeting so there is no need to go through them at the meeting'…
'A lot of time is taken up with questions already answered being asked again'…
'Some topics overlap with the Directorates and the introduction of all member Scrutiny meeting will cut down on duplication'…
'I have great concerns with the technology issues as some meetings feel disjointed and distant from fellow Councillors… I still haven't met all our new intake of Members from last year's election.'

5.14 Questions 25-36 listed all the Council's formal committees and sought to establish preferences (for their personal committee membership only) on meeting times with a choice of morning, afternoon or evening. The majority of Cabinet supported the existing afternoon arrangements (*it should be noted that there was an additional response in relation to the timing of Cabinet Members - with 11 responses received in relation the 10 Cabinet places at the time of the questionnaire we have disregarded this anomaly for the purposes of the analysis). The outcome of the survey for the Appointments Committee and Licensing Committee on balance preferred alternative times to the existing arrangements with Appointments Committee members just favouring afternoon meetings, followed by evening meetings with morning meetings being the least favoured options. As meetings of the Appointments Committee are held on an ad hoc basis, officers will liaise with Committee members on meetings going forward to optimise the members requirements.

In terms of Licensing Committees the overarching full Licensing and Gambling and

Taxi and General Committees are held on a much less frequent basis than the associated sub committees which have traditionally been held in the morning. On balance the outcome of the survey suggests that members would marginally prefer evening meetings followed by morning meetings. In general Sub Committees are convened as and when the business to be transacted requires, therefore it is not always possible to populate a timetable in advance. This in itself presents challenges in addition to the availability for evening meetings may be limited as Council, Planning Committee and Scrutiny Committees are already held in the evening. In addition, we must consider any resource implications for hosting and supporting evening meetings, together with any detrimental implications for participating public attendees (such as the impact on candidates for interview by the Appointments Committee or Taxi Drivers providing evidence to the Taxi and General Sub Committee whose main income may be generated during the evening)
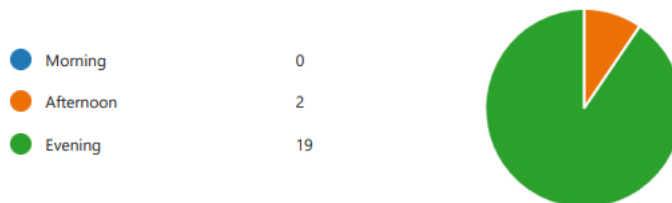
The responses are illustrated below.

25. Full Council

Morning	0
Afternoon	2
Evening	19

26. Cabinet

Morning	2
Afternoon	7
Evening	2

27. Scrutiny Committees (including Joint Scrutiny)

Morning	0
Afternoon	2
Evening	19

28. Planning Committee

●	Morning	0
●	Afternoon	2
●	Evening	11

29. Licensing Committee (Taxi and General and Licensing and Gambling)

●	Morning	5
●	Afternoon	1
●	Evening	7

35. Appointments Committee

|		
●	Morning	2
●	Afternoon	4
●	Evening	3

5.15   In order to aid Democratic Services Committee to identify barriers to participation, the final question of the survey asked Members to identify any time would be difficult.

33% of respondents noted caring responsibilities (older parent/children). 22% confirmed that due to full time employment daytime meetings would be difficult.

1 respondent felt that to '*attract working age people to the role of Councillor we must utilise late afternoons/evenings…*'

Another commented '*work during the day… Evening much better to fit meetings in… Teams is great, no need to extra travel and saves fuel (better for the environment).*'

Further comments included '*it's the time it takes for the meeting a 2-3 hours meeting is best in the morning not evening*' and alternatively another respondent commented '*I can attend most times, morning, afternoon or evening, I am happy to go with the majority.*'
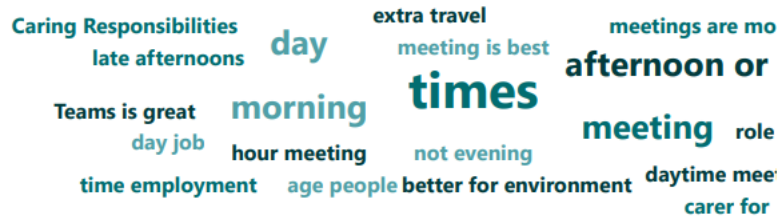
5.16 Meeting Times Partner Survey

The meeting arrangements/times element of the survey was circulated to Voluntary Sector/Co-opted and Lay Members and Town and Community Councillors, which achieved a 27% response rate.

The majority of respondents found the current arrangements satisfactory and agreed that the current frequency and length of meetings was satisfactory.

1. Do you find the current arrangements for meetings satisfactory (i.e. hybrid where you can choose to attend in person or remotely)?
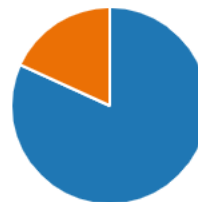
More Details   Insights

● Yes	7	
● No	4	

2. Do you find the current frequency and length of meetings satisfactory?

More Details

● Yes	9	
● No	2	

Respondents to this survey commented that: -

'*They should be more frequent and shorter… That suits me as I have no commitments on my time which may not be right for everyone.*'

'*Hybrid meetings are not effective; people need to be back in the room. The Chamber is not a good meeting place for partnership meetings where people need to mix, it makes it too confrontational to be sitting in rows facing the chair and screens…*'

'*No reason to continue with hybrid meetings now that Covid crisis is over…*'

'Please can we meet in the Sirhowy Room again…'

'I think we need a minimum for 5 meetings per year to cover what is a comprehensive agenda…'

'CCBC and TCCLC Meetings are much better in person..'

'4 TCCLC meetings a year instead of 2 or 3 please'

When asked to identify any barriers that might prevent you from attending meetings at a certain time, respondents referenced '*caring responsibilities'*, '*school runs'* and for one responder preference for '*daytime rather than evening, reluctant to travel after dark due to infirmity…'* another responder referenced '*public transport'* and another referenced '*summer breaks'*.

5.17 Conclusion

The Members' survey is a valuable tool that provides insight into members requirements which in turn allows the Democratic Services team to align its arrangements to better support Members.

Member Training and Development Programme

The Member Training and Development Programme outlined in Appendix 1 will hopefully address the comments and feedback raised in respect of training opportunities for members. It is important that the development programme remains an adaptable "living" document which can change with the requirements of members individually and the Council as a whole.   As such update reports will be brought to this committee to monitor the Programme and to ensure its delivery.

Timing of Meetings

The calendar of meetings is a decision for Council however Democratic Services will always strive to present a calendar that is accessible. Trying to achieve a Committee calendar which balances the numerous commitments taken forward by Members, plus a healthy work life balance, in addition to any work and or caring commitments is difficult. However, the opportunities and benefits which have arisen through multi location meetings has meant that some of the obstacles facing members can be overcome which in turn helps to promote diversity in democracy.

6.   ASSUMPTIONS

6.1   No assumptions have been made in the report which is based on work undertaken

by the WLGA Charter for Members Support and Development and the requirements of the Local Government Measure (Wales) Act 2011 and the Local Government and Election Wales Act 2021.

7. SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

7.1 As the survey provided all members with the opportunity to submit their comments and suggestions both on their training and development needs and a platform to identify their meeting time preferences and any barriers to participation in Council business a specific integrated impact assessment has not been undertaken.   The outcome of the survey will be used to employ a variety of topics, platforms and facilitators to mitigate these barriers and support Councillors roles as decision makers and scrutineers. A role that requires them to make decisions and recommendations that will impact the long and short term needs of Caerphilly County Borough Council residents; enable them to confidently scrutinise, challenge and hold to account, better assess appropriate interventions, and provide them with the skills required to work collaboratively and nurture their understanding of the importance of community involvement.

7.2 This report encourages the council to examine the way that business is conducted to ensure the equality of access and involvement of all Councillors.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The costs associated with the Member Development Programme will be met from the Council's existing Members' training budget provision.

8.2 There will be no financial implications associated with the calendar of meetings.

9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The administration of the Members Training and Support Programme means additional tasks for the Democratic Services staff, but these will be met through existing budgets.

10. CONSULTATIONS

10.1 The report reflects the views of consultees.

11. STATUTORY POWER

11.1   The Local Government Act 2000, Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, Local Government and Elections Wales Act 2021.

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Appendices:

Appendix 1   Draft Members Support and Development Programme 2023-25