

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

25 MARCH 2015

Present: County Councillor Cowan(Chairperson)
County Councillors Dilwar Ali, Goddard, Hinchey, Hyde,
McKerlich, Lomax, Murphy and Weaver

Apologies: Councillors Bridges, Chaundy and Ben Thomas

26 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairperson reminded Members of their responsibility under Part III of the Members' Code of Conduct to declare any interest in general terms and to complete personal interest forms at the start of the meeting and then, prior to the commencement of the discussion of the item in question, specify whether it is a personal or prejudicial interest. If the interest is prejudicial, Members would be asked to leave the meeting and if the interest is personal, Members would be invited to stay, speak and vote.

No declarations of interest were received.

27 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 December 2014 were approved by the Committee as a correct record and were signed by the Chairman.

28 : MEMBER ONLINE LIBRARY INFORMATION SERVICE - PRESENTATION

The Chairman welcomed Gladys Hingco, Principal Research Officer, Scrutiny Services to the meeting and invited her to deliver a presentation updating Members on progress made in the development of a Members Online Library and Information Service (MOLIS).

Members were reminded that MOLIS was being developed to replace the existing Members Library in County Hall. Feedback from a survey, interviews and focus groups was used to shape the content of the library and set priorities. The results of the survey were set out in the presentation documents circulated to the Committee.

Members were advised that Phase 1 of MOLIS would use the Modern.gov platform to provide a document search facility and index file system allowing Members to access internal documents and external sources of information. A list of priority documents and external sources was provided along with an overview of the search facility and index file system. The Committee was advised that, as a result of the large volume of documents within the scope of the MOLIS project, it was necessary to prioritise corporate, governance, scrutiny, performance management and decisions. It would also be necessary to allocate resources to the administration and maintenance of MOLIS on an ongoing basis.

Gladys Hingco requested one Member and one staff volunteer to participate in the testing of the system. Members were also asked to note the probability that Welsh Language issues and Disabled Access issues would need addressing in the future.

AGREED – that:

1. the Chairperson writes to the Members of the Committee requesting a volunteer to participate in the testing of MOLIS;
2. a further progress report be considered at the next meeting of the Committee.

29 : WHITE PAPER - REFORMING LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Committee received a report considering Chapter 3 of the Welsh Government's 'Reforming Local Government' White Paper. The report set out the background to the White Paper following the findings of the Williams Commission report which was published in January 2014 and which included proposals for local government reorganisation in Wales through the merger of local authorities.

Members were advised that the Cabinet would consider the Council's formal response to the consultation at its meeting on 2 April 2015. Members were asked to consider what comments, if any, to refer to the Cabinet for consideration when agreeing the City of Cardiff Council's submission.

The report provided details on the following proposals from Chapter 3 of the White Paper – 'Renewing Democracy' - which may be of particular interest to the Democratic Services Committee:

- Local Government Elections
- The roles and responsibilities of Leaders, Cabinet Members and Elected Members
- Diversity of Elected Members
- Remuneration of Elected Members
- Number of Elected Members
- Restrictions on Elected Members and Electoral qualification
- Recall of Elected Members

The report also noted that Chapter 8 of the White Paper report 'Strengthening the Role of Review' stated that the Welsh Government intends to remove the requirement that the Monitoring Officer may not also be the Head of Democratic Services.

The Committee debated each of the White Paper proposals set out above. Members indicated whether they were broadly supportive or not.

AGREED – That:

- (1) the Chairman write on behalf of the Committee to the Cabinet recommending the views of the Democratic Services Committee when formulating the Council's response to Chapter 3 and Chapter 8 of the 'Reforming Local Government' White Paper issued by the Welsh Government;

- (2) the Committee responds to the Welsh Government consultation in their own right; the Chairman to draft a letter and circulate to all Members for agreement prior to despatch.

30 : MEMBERS ICT UPDATE

The Committee received a verbal update from Phil Bear, ICT Service Manager on the performance of the tablet devices provided to Members as part of the Members ICT project. Members were advised that a number of unforeseen hardware and software faults resulted in poor performance. A brief explanation of those fault identified was provided.

Members discussed the information received and provided anecdotal examples of some of the issues they were experiencing. Members were supportive of the principles of the ICT project in terms of supporting members and reducing costs. However, the Committee felt that it was essential that any device provided needed to be reliable. Members expressed concerns regarding the reliability of the tablet devices as a long-term solution. Questions were raised regarding the impact the responding to the high number of faults reported was having on officer time and resources. Councillors also questioned what might be done to shorten the length of time taken to get devices handed to ICT for repair back to Members.

AGREED – That a Task and Finish Group be established to evaluate the implementation of the Members ICT Project.

31 : TASK AND FINISH GROUP REPORT - MEMBER ENQUIRY SYSTEM

The Committee received a report from the Task and Finish Group on the Members Inquiry System (MIS). The aim of the Task and Finish Group was to review the use of MIS by Councillors.

The report contained 9 recommendations, supported by 10 Key Findings. The Committee discussed the recommendations. It was noted that a number of the recommendations had already been implemented.

AGREED – that the Committee approves the recommendations contained in the report.

32 : MEMBER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

The Committee received a report and were asked to consider the WLGA Continuing Professional Development for Councillors Competency Framework as part of this objective setting for the Member Development Programme for 2015-18. The Committee was also requested to nominate Members to participate in the Member Development Steering Group which was established as part of the Member Development Strategy to review and evaluate the 2014/15 programme and design and proposed a Member Development Programme for 2015/16.

The Committee noted the report. The Chairman requested that an email be sent to all Members of the Committee seeking nominations for the Steering Group as a number of Councillors were not present. The Committee suggested that the email should be sent to all Members of the Council and Membership of the Steering Group

should not be restricted to the Democratic Services Committee. It was also considered that the Members Development Programme should provide all Members with an opportunity to raise their awareness of budget setting and performance management.

AGREED – That the Chairman write to all Members of the Council requesting nominations for members to participate in the Members Development Steering Group.

33 : MODERN.GOV UPDATE

The Committee received a verbal update on the progress made on the implementation of the Modern.gov committee management system.

34 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

AGREED – That the date of the next meeting be determined.