

City & County of Cardiff Democratic Services Committee Annual Report 2014/15



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Chairman's Foreword

I would like to take this opportunity of thanking my outstanding clerk Graham Porter and officers in Democratic Services for their unstinting work over the past twelve months. With diminishing resources and additional pressures, the support has continued and much has been achieved.

I have been proud to be the Chairman of this committee and feel that much valuable progress has been achieved. I would also like to thank my fellow Committee members who worked tirelessly on the Committee, in Task and Finish Groups and attending training and development sessions.

Much has been achieved, and I would like to thank everyone involved in helping us to achieve progress.

Members of the Democratic Services Committee 2014/15



Councillor Dilwar Ali



Councillor Bridges



Councillor Chaundy



Councillor Cowan



Councillor Goddard



Councillor Hinchey



Councillor Hyde



Councillor Lomax



Councillor McKerlich



Councillor Murphy



Councillor Ben Thomas



Councillor Weaver

Terms of Reference

- To carry out the local authority's function of designating the Head of Democratic Services.
 - To keep under review the provision of staff, accommodation and other resources made available to the Head of Democratic Services in order to ensure that it is adequate for the responsibilities of the post.
 - To make reports, at least annually, to the full Council in relation to these matters.
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Committee Membership and Formal Attendance Figures

The Committee have worked together to progress the work of the Democratic Services Committee. The membership of the Committee has changed during the past year, although many existing members have remained from the inception in 2012.

Councillor	Possible	Actual
Councillor Dilwar Ali	4	4
Councillor Ed Bridges	4	1
Councillor Paul Chaundy	4	2
Councillor Jayne Cowan	4	4
Councillor Susan Goddard	4	4
Councillor Graham Hinchey	4	3
Councillor Keith Hyde	4	3
Councillor Chris Lomax	4	4
Councillor Rod McKerlich	4	4
Councillor Jim Murphy	4	4
Councillor Ben Thomas	4	0
Councillor Chris Weaver	4	3

Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 - Chapter 2

Local Authority Democratic Services

The Local Government Wales Measure (2011) states that:-

- (1) *A local authority must appoint a committee (“a democratic services committee”) to— .*
 - (a) *exercise the function of the local authority under section 8(1)(a) (designation of head of democratic services),*
 - (b) *review the adequacy of provision by the authority of staff, accommodation and other resources to discharge democratic services functions, and*
 - (c) *make reports and recommendations to the authority in relation to such provision.*
- (2) *It is for a democratic services committee to determine how to exercise those functions.*

Welsh Government guidance regarding the formation of a Democratic Services Committee was provided to Local Authorities in Wales in June 2012. A membership of 12 was deemed appropriate for Cardiff Council, with each member needing to be a member of the Local Authority. The seats are allocated on a proportional basis, by each group on the Council. The Measure states that *“no more than one of the members of its democratic services committee is a member of the authority’s executive.”*

The Chairman of the Committee was selected from the opposition groups as the Measure states that the Chairman cannot be from the ruling group, unless there are no opposition Councillors on a particular authority. This is not the case for Cardiff Council.

Reforming Local Government White Paper

The Committee considered Chapter 3 of the Welsh Government's 'Reforming Local Government' White Paper. The White Paper followed the findings of the Williams Commission report published in January 2014 and included proposals for local government reorganisation in Wales through the merger of local authorities.

Chapter 3 of the White Paper – 'Renewing Democracy' – was of particular interest to the Democratic Services Committee. Chapter 3 set out proposals for the following:

- 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

Chapter 8 of the White Paper report 'Strengthening the Role of Review' indicated that the Welsh Government intended to remove the requirement that an authority's Monitoring Officer may not also be its Head of Democratic Services.

The Committee discussed the White Paper proposals. Members indicated whether they were broadly supportive or not. The Chairman wrote to the Cabinet on behalf of the Committee recommending that the views of the Democratic Services Committee be considered at part of the Council's formal response to Chapter 3 and Chapter 8 of the 'Reforming Local Government' White Paper. The Committee also responded to the Welsh Government consultation in its own right.

Annual Reports by Members of a Local Authority

In accordance with the requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, the Committee reviewed the Authority's position in relation to enabling and supporting Members wishing to produce and publish annual reports. Members received an overview of the Statutory Guidance issued by the Welsh Government in May 2013, which had previously been considered by the Committee on 19 June 2013. The Committee noted that it was not mandatory for Elected Members to produce an annual report of their activities. Comments were received from the Party Group Whips. The approved method and template for producing annual reports was agreed.

On 6 November 2015 the Minister for Public Services, Leighton Andrews AM, wrote to the Leaders of all Welsh Local Authorities highlighting the wide variation in the numbers of annual reports produced by Elected Members across all Welsh Local Authorities in 2013/14. In the letter the Minister expressed his belief that Members should be encouraged to provide annual reports in order to assist good public engagement. In Cardiff 5 Members (7%) produced annual reports during the year.

The Committee provided their views on the Minister's letter and the arrangements in place to support any Member who wish to produce an annual report. The Committee considered that the public were generally aware of the role of Councillors and questioned whether the information provided in an annual report was of any value. Members also considered that it was difficult to balance the contents of the annual report and remain apolitical.

Modern.gov

A new Committee management and decisions system 'Modern.gov' was launched in May 2015. The system is used by over 280 Local Authorities in the UK and dovetailed into the Cardiff Council internet and intranet webpages. Staff in the Democratic Service Team undertook the launch of the new system in addition to their existing duties. Members are provided with enhanced profile pages which include contact details; Register of Interests; Attendance Records; Election results; Twitter feeds, etc.

Modern.gov is also used to create Committee agenda and report document packs and provides secure electronic access to confidential documents via Intranet. The system supports the management of Forward Plans and publication of decisions, which assists with the authority's stated aim to increase transparency. Elected Members, citizens and service users are able to subscribe to email notification of significant events occurring and issues being discussed.

Member Development Sessions and Training on Modern.gov was offered to all Members during May 2015. The training demonstrated the Modern.gov platform and the improved webpage content. Members are encouraged to download the Modern.gov app to their mobile devices. The app improves accessibility to agenda and reports for Members of Committees.

Further enhancements to the Modern.gov platform are anticipated in the future. For example, Modern.gov provides a facility to enable bilingual Welsh translation of its webpage content. It is anticipated that all content will be offered bilingually in the future.

Chief Executive Q & A

The Chief Executive accepted the Chairperson's invitation to address the Democratic Services Committee. The Chief Executive attended and participated in an informative question and answer session. He also indicated that he would welcome similar invites periodically in the future.

The Chief Executive and the Committee considered that Members were receiving insufficient Member Briefings on key issues for the Council, such as school performance and transportation. Members considered that an improved reference library and electronic access to briefing materials would lead to improvements, as it was not always possible for Members to attend the Member Briefing sessions.

The Committee considered that it was essential that Members gain an understanding of the key issues in order for service improvements to be enacted. The Chief Executive agreed and suggested that Members should enter into dialogue with Directors in terms of an improvement agenda in order to target scrutiny to issues where problems exist.

Member Development Strategy

The Committee on 11 June 2014 approved the Member Development Strategy and proposed schedule of Member Development sessions for 2014/15. The key aim of the Member Development Strategy is to ensure that there is support in place for every Elected Members to enable them to acquire and develop knowledge and a full range of skills to support their many roles as Community Leaders and representatives of the Council.

The Member Development Strategy identified the following key themes:

- Frontline Councillor including Community Leadership and engagement
- Corporate Governance and legislation including business essentials sessions on Safeguarding; Data Protection
- The Networked Councillor making effective use of ICT and Social Media
- Scrutiny and Challenge
- Personal Skill Development e.g. Chairing Skills
- Induction Programme and Mentoring.

The WLGA Continuing Professional Development for Councillors Competency Framework set out the range of skills and knowledge required by Members and provided a 'curriculum' of areas that authorities can consider when developing local strategies on Member Development including generic and specific competencies. Many of these competencies formed part of the key themes identified in the Member Development Strategy.

On 25 March 2015 the Committee agreed to establish a Member Development Steering Group consisting of 3 Members of the Democratic Services Committee (including the Chair) and 1 Independent Member of the Standards and Ethics Committee. The Steering Group will review and evaluate feedback from sessions held in 2014/15; review the delivery and learning approaches to ensure that these meet Members expectations and requirements; consider the scheduling and frequency of training. The Member Development Programme would be complimented by Member briefings on emerging issues.

A total of 20 Member Development events were held during the year, supplemented by additional Cabinet Member briefings.

Members ICT

The Members ICT Project was closed on 30 November 2014. The Project aimed to deliver a new agile way of working for Members by utilising mobile technology and generate savings on paper and printing costs. A total of 46 Members were participating in the project resulting in 30 Council provided broadband accounts being terminated. The project outperformed the original target to equip up to 35 Councillors. A total of 55 tablets were purchased. 46 Councillors have taken up the option and are now users; 28 Councillors retained their existing equipment.

It was projected that the project would save £60k over 3 years. At year end 2014/15 the project had generated over £30k savings in printing and postage costs alone. The budget line relating to printing is being monitored on a monthly basis to quantify savings in printing costs. It is anticipated that a continued reduction in printing costs will contribute to further savings during the remaining two years.

The Committee continued to be broadly supportive of the principals of the project. Some technical issues with the tablet devices were acknowledged and these were being monitored. It was accepted that some Members will require additional individualised support.

Member Enquiry System Task and Finish Inquiry

In December 2014 the Democratic Services Committee convened a Task and Finish Group Inquiry on the Member Enquiry System (MES). The aim of the enquiry was to review the use of the Member Enquiry System (MES) by Councillors and Service Area Co-ordinators. The Task and Finish Group was asked to evaluate:

- The use of the MES by Members
- Understanding of enquiries and requests for service and the most effective channels for the reporting of each
- Responses to MES enquiries from service areas
- Service improvement for the MES

The Committee received the report of the Task and Finish Inquiry in March 2015. The report contained 9 recommendations, supported by 10 Key Findings. The Committee discussed the recommendations. The Committee noted that a number of the recommendations had already been implemented.

Members Online Library Service (MOLIS)

In March 2015 officers from the Scrutiny Services Team were invited to deliver a presentation providing an update to the Committee on the development of a Members Online Library and Information Service (MOLIS). MOLIS is being developed to replace the existing Members Library in County Hall. Officers provided feedback from a survey of members, from interviews and from focus groups which was used to shape the content of the library and set priorities. The results of the survey were detailed in a presentation received by the Committee.

MOLIS would employ the Modern.gov platform to provide a document search facility and index file system which would allow Members to access both internal documents and external sources of information. A list of priority documents and external sources was to be provided along with an overview of the search facility and index file system. 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.

The Committee was asked to note that Welsh Language and Disabled Access issues were also likely to need addressing in the future. The Committee requested that further progress of the MOLIS project be reported to future meetings.

Public Attendance at Democratic Services Committee Meetings

We are keen to see members of the public attend Democratic Services Committee Meetings. With the exception of confidential items, all business is held in public. All of the public papers are published online on www.cardiff.gov.uk. People who cannot access the internet can request a copy at their local library.

Paperwork will also be available 3 days in advance, and further information can be provided by Democratic Services – democraticservices@cardiff.gov.uk on 029 2087 2020.