

## DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

14 FEBRUARY 2013

Present: County Councillor Cowan (Chairperson);  
County Councillors Ali, Chaundy, Goddard, Hyde,  
Margaret Jones, Marshall and Benjamin Thomas

Apologies: County Councillors Furlong, Holland, McKerlich and  
Keith Jones

### 23 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2013 were approved as a correct record and were signed by the Chairperson.

### 24 : DRAFT TEMPLATE ANNUAL REPORTS BY MEMBERS OF A LOCAL AUTHORITY

The Committee received a report setting out a draft template for elected Members Annual report.

At its meeting of 6 December 2012 the Committee was advised that the Welsh Government had issued draft guidance for consultation purposes on the production and publication of Annual Reports for Elected Members. Local Authorities will be required to put in place arrangements that enable Members to produce annual reports, and to publicise those arrangements to both Members and the public. At the meeting the Interim Head of Democratic Services was requested to seek clarification on a number of points. These points were appended to the report. It was also agreed that a standard report template be developed for use by elected Members who wish to produce an annual report, outlining their activities during the municipal year.

The Committee were requested to comment on the proposed template and provide comments to inform the Authority's future arrangements for the production and publication of annual reports by Members.

The Chairperson invited Councillor Bridges to address the Committee. Councillor Bridges felt that proposed template was too

inflexible and prescriptive. He stated that Members should be permitted to draft their own reports, so long as the requirements of the Welsh Local Government are met. The template would still be available to those Members who wish to use it. Councillor Bridges also felt that limiting annual reports to two pages was flawed. This had not suggested by the Welsh Government and was too limiting. He was concerned that the proposed template, whilst not mandatory, had been drafted to suit the needs of officers and failed to address the needs of Members. It was considered that Members should be permitted to produce their own reports, and, as long as the statutory requirements are met, the Monitoring Officer would have the final veto over the content.

The Councillor agreed that joint reports within wards were a good idea, as he represented a split ward but had a close working relationship with the other Councillor. A joint report could be used to reflect collaborative working.

The Committee was asked for their views. Members supported Councillor Bridges' view that having a page limit was too prescriptive. Members agreed that the proposed template and structure for annual reports was officer friendly and that the content and style of annual reports should be left to the discretion of individual Councillors, and that the Monitoring Officer have a final veto.

The Committee was advised that if Members wished to present information in different ways then officers would like to accommodate that. However, a balance needed to be struck between consistency and styles.

Members expressed the view that the finalised Welsh Government proposals for the production annual reports should be discussed within their party groups. The Chairperson requested that, once the final guidance is received, Group Whips gather feedback from their Groups and with a view to reporting back to the next meeting of the Committee. Officers were requested to advise the Conservative and Plaid Cymru Groups of this proposal.

**RESOLVED – That**

1. upon receipt of the finalised guidance from the Welsh Government the Chairperson write to the Group Whips

requesting that the proposals be discussed at Group meetings and reported back to the Monitoring Officer within 4 to 6 weeks;

2. a further report be brought to a future meeting of the Committee;
3. officers advise the Group Whips of the Conservative and Plaid Cymru groups of the proposals above

## 25 : THE WALES CHARTER FOR MEMBER SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT

The Committee received a report for information on the Wales Charter for Member Support and Development. Members were asked to consider the information set out in the report and make any comments or observations they consider appropriate.

Members were advised that the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) had developed a national programme of support for elected Members – the Wales Charter for Member Support and Development. The Charter had been developed in collaboration with Members representing each of the political groups and Member Support Officers from around Wales. The Charter had been in place since 2007 and many authorities had achieved the Charter or the revised Advanced Charter. Cardiff Council had not engaged in the process to date.

The Committee were invited to review the information presented in the report and make and comments it considered appropriate.

The Committee raised concerns regarding the impact introducing the Charter would have on resources. Members were advised that as Members of the WLGA there would be no cost for the assessment and evaluation of the criteria in Cardiff. There would be an impact on officer time and resources would need to be prioritised accordingly. The Committee was also concerned at the prospect of officers conducting performance reviews for Members, although the Charter states that reviews should be conducted by “a suitably qualified person”.

Some Members were expressed concerns that the Charter needed to be meaningful and of public benefit. Members felt it was

questionable whether a Charter was needed in Cardiff. Members requested that the party Groups discuss these issues further. The Committee also requested that officers contact local authorities where the Charter was in place, to ascertain how the Charter worked in practice and whether there was any measurable benefit.

RESOLVED – That

1. a further report be brought to a future meeting of the Committee setting out timescales for consultation with the party groups on the Wales Charter for Member Support and Development;
2. Officer be requested to contact local authorities operating the Charter to invite key individuals to address the Committee at a future meeting on the operation of their Charter.

26 : WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received for information a verbal update on the Committee's Work Programme.

27 : JOINT MEETING OF THE DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE AND STANDARDS AND ETHICS COMMITTEE

The Chairperson advised that a meeting between herself and the Vice Chairperson of the Standards and Ethics Committee would be arranged in order to discuss items to be included on the agenda for a the proposed joint meeting. The Chairperson agreed to circulate possible dates for that meeting and invited any Members of the Committee who were available to attend.

28 : COUNCIL REFRESHMENTS

A Member questioned whether subsistence allowances could be used to fund hot food buffets at Council meetings. The Monitoring Officer reminded the Committee that Members received subsistence allowances for duties performed 'out of county'.