

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

19 JUNE 2013

Present: County Councillor Cowan (Chairperson);
County Councillors Dilwar Ali, Goddard, Hyde, Keith
Jones, Margaret Jones, McKerlich and Benjamin
Thomas

Apologies: County Councillors Chaundy, Furlong and Holland

32 : APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRPERSON

The Committee noted that Council at its meeting of 23 May 2013 appointed County Councillor Cowan as Chairperson of the Committee.

33 : APPOINTMENT OF COMMITTEE AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Committee noted that Council at its meeting of 23 May 2013 appointed the following Members to this Committee:

County Councillors Ali, Bridges, Chaundy, Cowan, Furlong, Goddard, Hinchey, Holland, Hyde, McKerlich, Murphy and Benjamin Thomas

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.

34 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 April 2013 were approved as a correct record and were signed by the Chairperson, subject to

the deletion of Councillor Chaundy's name from the list of members present.

35 : PAPERLESS COUNCIL PROPOSAL

The Committee received a further report on future ICT provision for Members to ensure that they are able to fulfil their duties and contribute to the Corporate Plan objective of delivering services through the development of a 'paperless' Council. The Committee was asked to consider making recommendations to the Council.

The Committee had formerly established a Task and Finish Group to consider the current provision of ICT facilities to Members and proposals for reducing the cost of paper and printing through the use of new technology. The Committee's recommendations were subsequently considered by the Council on 28 March 2013, when it was resolved to refer the matter back to the Democratic Services Committee to allow for further consideration of the proposals.

The Task and Finish Group was reconvened in April 2013 in order to agree a way forward. It was proposed that all Members be asked to complete a questionnaire, providing an indication of their preferred ICT solution. The questionnaire set out the following five options for Members to consider:

- A tablet device, basic mobile phone, low volume printer but otherwise paperless
- As above, but replacing the basic mobile phone with a smartphone
- Bring Your Own Device (BYOD), Council supplies connectivity software. Also paperless
- Keep existing ICT provision (laptop, home broadband, printing of all documents, home phone line)
- Any other option

The survey was conducted in May and 75 responses have since been received. Members expressed a wide variety of requirements reflecting their individual needs and these had resulted in some additional challenges for the project, including an increase in expenditure. The new cost of provision was estimated at £423,278 over 5 years, providing a saving of £68,782. Members noted that a sensitivity analysis suggested that costs/savings could vary. Each Member will receive an individual

assessment before any new equipment is installed, when reasonable adjustments will be identified. Members will also receive full training on the use of the new equipment if required.

The Committee discussed the report. Officers advised that the responses to the questionnaire had helped to identify the individual needs of members and satisfied equality impact assessment requirements. However, if each Member was to be provided with their preferred solution, then the level of savings identified would be compromised. Officers agreed to circulate an anonymised summary of the responses received to the Committee.

The Committee was advised that if there was a slight variation to the project then the level of savings identified of the 5-year lifetime of the project may not be achieved. Any additional costs would need to be drawn from the general fund or from reserves. The Committee was also asked to note that further additional savings would be achieved as the proposal now included that all routine correspondence with Members from Service Areas be via electronic means only.

The Committee reiterated its support for the proposals and considered that all Members needed to make a firm commitment to move towards the new ICT options. It was accepted that the proposal could be seen as controversial; however, the provision of a tablet device which would enable Councillors to embrace modern working methods and better fulfil their elected roles was not a luxury.

The Committee requested that the final report provide a better understanding of the total costs for each of the Options set out in the questionnaire. Members also requested that an anonymised summary of the questionnaire responses be included in the report. The report should also include a narrative setting out how the Council intends to ensure the best price possible for procurement of any new equipment.

Officers advised the 'Good Dynamics' software, whilst not a replacement for Microsoft Office, was able offer equivalent functionality.

The Committee discussed future provision of broadband in Members' homes. Concern was expressed that those Members

who did not have their own personal broadband connection would be unable to access Council systems. Steve Durbin advised that all the tablet devices would have 4G connectivity, meaning that Members are able to access Council systems from anywhere in the City at anytime. An indication was given that, depending on the amount of data to be downloaded, it would be cheaper for some Members to connect via 4G than provide them with a home broadband service. The Committee requested that this information be relayed to all Members and contained within the report to Council.

AGREED – That:

- (1) the Committee note the contents of the reports, including the financial analysis;
- (2) the Committee recommends Council to delegate authority to the Interim Head of Democratic Services, in consultation with the Chair of Democratic Services Committee and the Section 151 Officer, to implement the provision of each Member's preferred option for ICT equipment and facilities;
- (3) further to the implementation of recommendation (2) above, all Committee and Council papers and routine correspondence will be circulated electronically unless a Member makes a specific request to Committee and Member Services or the Cabinet Support Office to receive hard copies of documentation.

36 : CARDIFF COUNCIL WEB REFRESH PROJECT

The Chairperson welcomed Cath Smith, Head of Communications, to the meeting and invited her to deliver a presentation providing Members of the Committee with an overview of the redesign of the Council's website which is currently being undertaken. The presentation is summarised as follows:

The Website Refresh Project aimed to overhaul the way the Council engages with the public and stakeholders. The Council's current website was built using a Content Management System procured in 2005, which was unsustainable and no longer fit for purpose. There was now an increased expectation from the public that Council services and information be delivered online.

Members were advised that by 'channel shifting' or reengineering services it was possible to work more efficiently. The Committee was informed that each face to face contact with a member of the public was estimated to cost the authority between £8 and £9; each telephone contact costs around £4; and each contact online costs around 39p. Therefore, there existed huge potential for making savings and for making Council process more efficient. The concept of the online self service account for citizens was also highlighted. However, research undertaken by officers had indicated that such accounts were not popular with the public.

The content of the current website was currently 'locked down' whilst an audit of all 6000 pages (articles) was undertaken, with a view to the relevance of each article and its accuracy. Work was also being undertaken redesigning the structure of the website, prior to the content being re-written and applied to the new design.

The Committee was advised that the current website already provided over 100 services online, in a format that was once regarded as best practice. Members were recommended to refer to the award-winning Liverpool.gov website. This website was very simple in design and had gone 'back to basics' in order to ensure that it is citizen focused. Cardiff's new website will be basic and efficient and will allow easy access to the services citizens use most regularly.

The Chairperson thanked Cath Smith for her informative presentation. The Committee discussed the information received. Those discussions are summarised as follows:

- Members requested that a copyrighted photograph gallery be included on the website as a resource accessible to all Councillors and members of the public. Cath Smith advised that all Members will be consulted upon the content of the new website and the representations received will be factored in to the new design.
- Members questioned whether ad-burners could be included in the new design which would bring in new revenue.
- Members requested an improved search facility be incorporated into the new design and that documents, such as the

Constitution, be cross-referenced with other relevant documents or pages on the website. Referring to the Council webcasts, Members questioned whether it was technically possible to search webcasts by Councillor or by issue. Officers were conscious that there was potential to increase engagement with citizens. The Council's Constitution does fall within the remit of the refresh project. Providing a search facility for links on the Council's webcast is likely to be difficult, but officers agreed that an improved search facility on the new website, whilst challenging, was also essential.

- The Committee agreed that improved online payment methods for those Members of the public wishing to access Council services were essential.
- All parties were conscious that further refinement of the webcasting facility needed to be examined, as there was clearly potential for increasing public engagement.
- The Committee was advised that consideration had been given to the development of a smartphone 'app' which would allow citizens easy access to Council services. However, the developing website was being designed to work on mobile devices and was considered a better option for accessing a complex model of service delivery.
- Members requested that a report be brought to a future meeting of the Democratic Services Committee regarding the consultation exercise with Councillors, which is to be conducted in the near future, on the refreshed website.

37 : ANNUAL REPORTS BY MEMBERS OF A LOCAL AUTHORITY

On 8 December 2012 the Committee considered the Welsh Government's draft guidance on the production of Annual Reports by Elected Members. The Committee also considered a draft template for the preparation of annual reports. Furthermore, on 14 February 2013 the Committee considered a revised template. The Committee resolved that the Chairperson write to Group Whips requesting that these matters be discussed at Group Meetings and that a future report be considered by the Democratic Services

Committee upon receipt of the finalised guidance from the Welsh Government.

The Committee received a report outlining the final guidance which was issued by the Welsh Government on 16 May 2013 and which was attached to the report as Appendix A. Members were advised that the Chairperson of the Committee had written on behalf of the Committee to Group Whips enclosing a copy of the statutory guidance, requesting that they discuss the issue within their groups and report any comments back to the Committee.

The final guidance issued by the Welsh Government included some amendments to the draft guidance previously considered by Committee. The guidance states:

- The Local Authority must tell its members how and when to produce annual reports.
- The Head of Democratic Services may support Cabinet Members in preparing an annual report on their executive activities as this is not an executive function in itself.
- The method of publishing the report is up to the authority to decide, with a minimum requirement to link the report to the individual member's page on the Council's website.
- The report should avoid promoting political achievements, be written in the past tense and be limited to two sides of A4.
- The Local Authority should have regard to the resource implications of supporting all members to prepare for publication of their report and may produce a standard report template which balances resources and output while taking into account the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998.
- The template might be expected to include:
 - role and responsibilities including membership of outside bodies;
 - constituency activity;
 - initiatives and special activities;
 - learning and development; and
 - other activities.

- Reports should contain only factual information relating to the work of the Councillor, but not relating to their party role.
- The previous requirement for reports to be published by June 2013 is omitted from the final guidance.

A draft template for annual reports by Members was appended to the report. The template had been developed in accordance with the statutory guidance. The Committee was asked to consider approving the draft template and agree the method of publishing annual reports.

The Committee were broadly content to approve the draft template. It was further agreed that annual reports should only be provided electronically and be published on the each individual Councillors webpage. Members expressed concerned regarding the potential impact the production of annual reports by members could have on resources. The Committee also requested that a guide be produced to assist Members .

Responding to a question from a Member regarding joint reports from Councillors in the same ward, Officers advised that there was an expectation that reports would be published on an individual basis.

Concern was expressed that some Councillors could be perceived to more diligent than others in the discharge of their duties and this information could be used for political gain. Members were also requested that a facilities be provided to members of the public who were unable to access annual reports electronically.

The Committee agreed that annual reports should be published at the end of each municipal year.

RESOLVED – That the Committee:

- (1) notes the comments received from Group Whips;
- (2) approves the annual report template, set out in Appendix B to the report;

- (3) agreed that annual reports by individual Members be published on their respective pages on the Council's website.

38 : TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR ELECTED MEMBERS

Chapter 2 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 relates specifically to the training and development of Members and recommends that the Democratic Services Committee has overall responsibility for deciding what are reasonable training and development opportunities as part of its function of providing support to Members to carry out their duties.

The Committee received a report and was asked to consider the provision of training and development opportunities for Members and proposals for the introduction of a process for reviewing their training and development needs on an annual basis in accordance with the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011.

The Committee was asked to consider both the relevant extract from the Welsh Government's Statutory Guidance, and proposals to establish a Task and Finish Group to undertake a review of the Council's Member Development Strategy, to bring forward proposals for the implementation of a Personal Development Review Scheme for Members.

RESOLVED – That:

- (1) the Committee note the provision of training and development opportunities to Members as part of the Council's Member Induction and Development Programme 2012/13 as summarised in Appendix B to the report;
- (2) the Committee establish a Task and Finish Group in order to consider the future provision of training and development opportunities for Elected Members in accordance with the requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011.

39 : FEEDBACK FROM MEETING WITH MEMBERS OF THE STANDARDS AND ETHICS COMMITTEE

The Chairperson advised the Committee that, following discussions with Members of the Standards and Ethics Committee, and with the agreement of the Committee, she would contact the Chairperson of the Standards and Ethics Committee in order to arrange a joint meeting.

40 : MEMBER CARE, TRAVEL AND SUBSISTENCE – PROPOSED TASK AND FINISH GROUP

RESOLVED – That the Committee establish a Task and Finish Group to consider the Independent Remuneration Panel guidelines for the claiming of expenses.