

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE: 2 April 2014

A STRATEGY FOR DEMOCRATIC SERVICES 2014/15

**REPORT OF THE COUNTY CLERK AND MONITORING OFFICER
AGENDA ITEM:**

Reason for this Report

1. To present a new Strategy for Democratic Services to inform the Committee priorities for 2014/15

Background

2. The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 requires the Council to appoint a Democratic Services Committee. The Committee's duties include keeping under review the provision of staff, accommodation and other resources made available to the Head of Democratic Services (HDS) in order to ensure that it is adequate for the responsibilities of the post.
3. At its last meeting on the 5 February 2013 the Committee appointed Geoff Shimell as Interim Head of Democratic Services pending the determination of the council budget for 2014/15 and a consequential restructure designed to deliver improved services to members. .
4. The functions of the HDS are set out in the Local Government Measure and relate to the provision of advice and support to non-executive members as part of the democratic process and all Councillors when carrying out their representational role. Under the current Cardiff arrangements this includes Committee services; Overview & Scrutiny Services and Member support services.

Resources

5. Budget savings of £454,000 for 2014/15 for Democratic Services were agreed by the Council representing 29.9% of the net controllable budget. This included £246,000 in Scrutiny Services reflecting the deletion of four vacant posts together with increased income. Savings of £183,000 were also agreed in Committee and member Services including deletion of vacant posts, acceptance of voluntary severance applications and a

restructure of management responsibilities, clerking fewer meetings and more efficient use of ICT.

6. Further savings of £16,000 will also be found through the removal of committee general expenditure budgets within Democratic Services and Scrutiny and £9,000 from the removal member refreshment budgets and the budget for Council Year Books.
7. However additional resources of £100,000 were provided to the Democratic Services Committee in order to resource their budget priorities.

Democratic Services

8. Democratic and Scrutiny Services provide a politically impartial service to all Members of Cardiff Council. The staff support, inform and record the work of the council and its committees. They make the Council's meetings and information about those meetings accessible to the general public, and they maintain a public record of all member level decisions and documents in trust for the public. The service also provides member development, ICT and a limited degree of personal support for members in dealing with case work correspondence.
9. Cardiff Council Scrutiny services play an important role in facilitating robust challenge to the organisation through the work of the five formal Scrutiny committees and a variety of informal scrutiny panels and activities. Scrutiny is an integral part of the Wales programme for improvement, and its challenge is designed to support the cabinet in providing accessible, efficient and effective services for citizens.

A Vision for Democratic Services

10. To guide the design and organisation of Democratic Services for the future, members are asked to consider the Strategy set out at Annex A and below. It sets out a vision and series of strategic objectives with detailed actions for the Committee to consider. It has been developed in consultation with staff, scrutiny chairs and members of the executive. It is recommended that this Strategy be used by the Committee to agree its priorities for 2014/15 and how best to use the £100, 00 investment.
 - The Council and its committees will be valued as the key democratic institutions for Cardiff making accountable, robust and inclusive decisions about public services for the city and city region and representing the diverse views of the electorate, it will be seen both in Wales and the UK as a model of good practice and innovation, and it will cost less money
 - Cardiff Councillors will have the information, advice, support and technology they need to be effective in their work and to engage closely with their constituents.

- Democratic Services will have earned the respect of all Councillors and of the public for our independence, integrity and professionalism and for our commitment to make the council work even more effectively. We will be seen as modern, efficient and responsive

Strategic Goals to deliver the Strategy

11. We have identified four strategic goals to deliver the Vision and to provide a framework for the various improvement activities identified by the members and this Committee in its recent work. These are:

- To make council decision making more effective and efficient
- To ensure that members, council staff and partners and the public are well-informed
- To encourage greater public participation in local democracy
- To have clear and accepted standards of conduct for members and staff and to take action against breaches of these standards.

The Strategy sets out a series of specific measurable actions against each strategic goal which will form the Service delivery plan for the Service.

Additional Resources

12. It is proposed that the additional resources be used to ensure that the actions identified in the Strategy can be successfully delivered alongside existing resources. This would require reinstating two of the vacant posts deleted from the Scrutiny Team namely the Principal Scrutiny Officer for the Economy and Culture Scrutiny Committee and the Public Engagement officer. The Principal Scrutiny officer will play an important role in strengthening the scrutiny function working with colleagues across the team and allow for renewed focus on partnership scrutiny. The new post of Public Engagement officer will work across Democratic services to deliver on the various actions to encourage greater public participation in local democracy

13. In addition it is recommended that two new Graduate Trainee posts are established for a two year fixed term to provide career opportunities for graduates to join Democratic Services to work on these actions and to qualify as Committee Administrators. This will also provide additional resilience in clerking committee meetings.

14. Investment is also urgently needed to the Council's system and processes for supporting members and committee meetings and to ensure that the Council is well placed to deal with the e-modernisation era within local government and the electronic delivery of democratic information to members and the public. An up to date committee decisions management system is urgently required to deliver the strategy and to complement the Members ICT project.

Legal Implications

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Financial Implications

This report proposes the creation of two posts, the reinstatement of two posts and investment in a decision management system. All expenditure carried out in alignment with the strategy needs to be found from within the existing budgetary resource allocated to the Service.

The report proposes the creation of two Graduate Trainee posts on a fixed two year contract. Consideration needs to be given as to the impact if any of the 2015/16 Budget on the sustainability of this decision.

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Recommendations :

That the Democratic Services Committee :

1. approves the Strategy for Democratic Services set out at Annexe A to inform its work on keeping under review the provision of staff, accommodation and other resources made available for Democratic Services
2. agrees the proposals set out in paragraphs 12 – 14 for the additional resources provided to the Committee in order to resource their budget priorities.

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**MARIE ROSENTHAL
COUNTY CLERK AND MONITORING OFFICER**

Appendix A Strategy For Democratic Services:

Appendix 1: Strategy

CARDIFF COUNCIL DEMOCRATIC SERVICES STRATEGY 2014/17

OUR VISION is that:

The Council and its committees will be valued as the key democratic institutions for Cardiff making accountable, robust and inclusive decisions about public services for the city and city region and representing the diverse views of the electorate, it will be seen both in Wales and the UK as a model of good practice and innovation, and it will cost less money

Cardiff Councillors will have the information, advice , support and technology they need to be effective in their work and to engage closely with their constituents.

Democratic Services will have earned the respect of all Councillors and of the public for our independence, integrity and professionalism and for our commitment to make the council work even more effectively. We will be seen as modern, efficient and responsive

OUR STRATEGY To achieve our vision we have **Four strategic goals**

1. To make council decision making more effective and efficient
2. To ensure that members, council staff and partners and the public are well-informed
3. To encourage greater public participation in local democracy
4. To have clear and accepted standards of conduct for members and staff and to take action against breaches of these standards

1. More Effective Decision Making

- encourage committees to have clear, agreed strategic plans for their work that prioritises their activities and focuses their use of time and resources
- achieve the WLGA Charter for member development
- establish a programme of training for staff to make sure they have the skills and capability to deliver
- introduce individual executive decision making and better coordination of the Forward Plan
- strengthen the scrutiny function.
- deliver the Networked Councillor Programme to at least 35 Councillors (Tablet and Smartphone and less paper)

- implement a new computerised system to simplify office processes and speed up production of agenda and minutes and improve quality of report writing
- ensure that the Council is well placed to deal with the e-modernisation era within local government and the electronic delivery of democratic information to members and the public
- have more web casting of meetings
- carry out an annual member survey and programme of interviews

2. Well-informed Members, Partners , Staff and Public

- produce a regular Member Newsletter with updates from all standing committees , member services and training and other events
- develop the Member Diary Service
- create an on line member library service with external and other links to the work of the scrutiny research team, other council information, research and consultation services and those of Partners
- develop an on line twitter feed alerting readers to new committee and cabinet reports and meetings
- develop a new democracy section in Capital Times
- implement improved easy access on line service to enable the public to have easy access to all council business
- ensure timely responses to requests under Freedom of Information and Environmental Information law
- Create a University Engagement Programme to share resources and better links with university students
- Support a Programme of school visits to City Hall and to meet the LM
- Support the Cardiff Youth Council programme of events
- Webcast committee meetings and events
- Promote live events and exhibitions around full council meetings
- Pilot public open days and specialist visits to see council meetings in action
- Publish on line and paper Guides To Your Council explaining how decisions are made
- Engage proactively with the media to support the work of the scrutiny committees and the full council
- Improve the Member Induction Programme
- Deliver more written Committee Reports in Welsh.

3. Greater Public Participation

- Promote an open and transparent way of doing business
- encouraging public participation in council business including the work of the scrutiny committees and making all council meetings more welcoming to the public
- deliver the Individual Electoral Registration Project
- administer the European Elections 2014
- increase voter registration across the city
- improve voter turn out in local elections

- develop an on line tool to enable members of the public and other external bodies to submit evidence to scrutiny inquiries
- develop public question time at cabinet and all major committees
- complete community boundary review
- carry out polling station review
- introduce Public petition Scheme

4. Improved standards of conduct and earned respect for the Council

- Appoint 3 new Independent Members to raise the profile of the Standards and Ethics Committee
- agree a new Whistle-blowing Policy and Communications Plan
- agree new Social Media Member Guidelines with related training
- review the Member/ Officer Protocol and Employee Interests
- engage proactively with the media to encourage full and accurate reporting of the work of the Committee in raising standards in public life
- Sponsor an annual lecture or other event to promote high standards in public life
- provide standards and ethics training to the 6 community councils
- Review vetting and qualification arrangements for LEA Governors.

Marie Rosenthal
County Clerk and Monitoring Officer
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