

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

16 OCTOBER 2014

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

Apologies: Councillors Bridges, Hyde, Marshall and B. Thomas.

10 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 June 2014 were approved by the Committee as a correct record and were signed by the Chairperson.

11 : MEMBER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME 2014/15

The Committee received a report updating Members on the delivery of a Member Development Strategy and Member Development Programme 2014/15. The Committee had initially considered and agreed the draft Member Development Strategy and Programme for 2014/15 at its meeting on 2 April 2014. Following a meeting of the Task and Finish Group on 3 September 2014, the Development Programme for 2014/15 was updated for the remainder of the year. The updated programme was appended to the report.

The Monitoring Officer provided an overview of the Member Development events to be arranged during the autumn, including:

- a Public Speaking Skills seminar – aiming to helping Members feel at ease when speaking in a public forum
- Budget Setting – an introduction and refresher to outline the budget and Council Tax setting process
- Community Development Workshops – covering asset transfers, co-production funding, volunteering and setting up community organisations
- Understanding and Challenging Performance – exploring the role of Councillors in supporting the improvement agenda
- Media Training a practical session to equip Members for handling the media

The Monitoring Officer indicated that future development training events will include Chairing Skills, Personal Resilience and Code of Conduct refresher training.

RESOLVED – That the Committee agreed the proposed schedule of Member Development Training for the remainder of the year.

12 : NETWORKED COUNCILLOR ICT PROJECT 2014/15

The Council on 27 June 2013 resolved to provide Members with mobile devices in order to increase efficiency savings and modernise support for Members, enabling them to be less reliant on paper and work in a more mobile way. The Monitoring Officer presented a report providing an update on the progress made on the project.

The Committee was advised that, following a brief delay in the project, to allow for security concerns to be addressed, 51 Councillors had been provided with tablet devices. The business case had been made on the assumption that 35 Members would be participating in the project, providing a projected saving of £56k. The Monitoring Officer was hopeful, therefore, that as 51 Councillors joined the project, further efficiency savings would be realised.

Councillors participating in the project had also been encouraged to have their Council provided telephone lines and broadband removed from their homes and allow the tablet devices to use 'piggyback' on their personal broadband, and thus allow for further savings to be made.

The Monitoring Officer advised that the 'roll out' phase of the project will soon be brought to an end. It was anticipated that a protocol, setting out Members responsibilities in terms of damage or loss to their tablet devices, would be presented to the next meeting of the Committee in December.

The Chairperson stated that she would write to officers in Democratic Services and ICT thanking them for their efforts and for helping make the project a success.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

13 : MEMBER ENQUIRY LINE UPDATE

The Committee on 30 April 2012 resolved to receive regular updates on the performance of the Member Enquiry Line system. The Committee received the latest report for information.

The Chairperson welcomed John Agnew and Emlyn Nash of Corporate Customer Services, to the meeting. John Agnew presented the report. The report provided statistical information regarding the number of enquiries received and the issues/service areas they related to.

The Committee was advised that the Member Enquiry Line team monitors the use of the system and the types of enquiries recorded by Members. It was apparent that Members are using the system to record 'requests for service' such as the reporting of street lights not working, the non-collection of waste and fly tipping. Issues such as these require shorter timescales to be responded to than the 10 calendar days response timescale for Member Enquiries.

John Agnew recommended that service requests such as these should be reported via C2C by using the dedicated Councillors contact number 029 2087 2082. The Member Enquiry Service system should be used for more standard enquiries which do not require an immediate response. It was noted that the Councillor contact number is only available during office hours. Contacts are immediately flagged as priority. Members of the Committee suggested that the dedicated contact number for Councillors should be published on the Member Enquiry system page of the intranet, as the Committee considered that not all Councillors were aware of this facility.

In response to a recent enquiry from a Councillor, Emlyn Nash explained that the 'Fix My Street' app for mobile devices was becoming increasingly popular with members of the public. However, problems reported via 'Fix My Street' will be done so via an email to C2C generated by the 'app'. Such emails are subject to queues. This can often result in a delay in the matter being reported to the relevant service area. Emlyn Nash stated that the optimal method for members of the public to report issues in their ward was via the C2C phoneline. Issues are then reported directly to the service area and given a target date for completion.

Members of the Committee noted that service areas were still closing enquiries without providing feedback to the Councillors who raise them. John Agnew welcomed feedback from Members regarding individual cases. It has been made clear to service areas that it was unacceptable to close enquiries in this manner.

John Agnew acknowledged that the response times in particular service areas were of concern. However, it was also acknowledged that staffing and resources issues had been identified in particular service areas which were affecting those response times, such as inadequate cover during times of annual leave. Discussions were on-going with managers in those services areas in order to address these issues.

The Committee agreed that, whilst the Member Enquiry System was not without flaws, it was a vast improvement and was much valued by Councillors. Officers advised that the Customer Services team had learn a lot about the processes required and what improvements can be made within the parameters of the technology being used. Customer Services' ultimate aim was to enable citizens to report requests for service and to see the status of those requests for service until the matter is dealt with.

RESOLVED – That:

- (1) the report be noted;
- (2) the Monitoring Officer arrange for all Members to receive advice regarding the best methods to report service requests requiring an immediate response and more general enquiries; and further, that this advice include details of the dedicated C2C contact number for Councillors 029 2087 2082;
- (3) that the Chairperson write to Members of the Committee seeking expressions of interest in contributing to a Task and Finish Group into the Member Inquiry System.

14 : MEMBER LIBRARY SERVICE

The Committee received a report setting out the results of a survey undertaken by the Scrutiny Research Team. The survey aimed to identify the information sources available to Members both internally and externally; determine Members information support requirements; identify changes or improvements required to the current Members Library in County Hall; and identify any other forms of support required by Members that will enable them to fulfil their roles and responsibilities.

The Chairperson welcomed Gladys Hincho and Tom Foreman of the Scrutiny Research Team to the meeting. The officers were invited to deliver a brief presentation on the findings of the survey.

The Committee was advised that 43 Councillors had responded to the survey including Cabinet Members, Party Whips and backbench Members. Officers advised that survey had indicated that Members did not support the continuation of a paper-based reference library. Almost all respondents (97%) agreed that it would be useful for Members to have a dedicated webpage containing reference materials and links to external online sources of information. Such a website would be accompanied by regular updates on information sources relevant to local government via email, twitter and bulletin meetings. Respondents also considered that it would be useful to receive short briefings on topics of interest and have a dedicated point of contact to assist with information resource enquiries. Furthermore, the Monitoring Officer suggested that the Scrutiny Research Team could, in future, be adapted to become a resource which is available to all Members and was able to assist Members on a wide range of information requests.

Concerns were expressed regarding lighting, ventilation and workstations. Members felt that there were opportunities to possibly relocate the library, removing redundant publications to make space for topical documents and to upgrade the technology provided. However, there was support for the dictation services provided to Members to remain.

The Monitoring Officer made the following recommendations:

1. A dedicated webpage be developed as a reference tool for Members and which would allow access to Council documents, other than Cabinet and Committee papers, provide links to external documents and publications, and signpost links to other information providers;
2. Improvements to the workstations provided to Members in the Library Room be undertaken, to include more work spaces and improvements to the layout, lighting, ventilation and equipment. Redundant publications should be removed from the Library and a space to display large planning applications should be provided.
3. A flat-screen television should be provided in the Members Lounge area giving access to 24 hours rolling news.
4. The dictation service currently provided to all Members should be retained.

The Chairperson thanks the officers for their presentation and for their work undertaken in conducting the survey. The Chairperson invited the views of the Committee on the information received.

The Committee supported the recommendations (1), (2) and (3). Members of the Committee did not support the provision of a flat-screen TV in the Members Lounge. The Committee also recommended that subscriptions to the daily newspapers provided in the Members Lounge should cease.

RESOLVED – That:

- (1) the report be noted;
- (2) that a dedicated webpage be developed as a reference tool for Members and which would allow access to Council documents, other than Cabinet and Committee papers, provide links to external documents and publications, and signpost links to other information providers;
- (3) Improvements to the workstations provided to Members in the Library Room will be undertaken, including the provision of additional work spaces and improvements to the layout, lighting, ventilation and other equipment. Redundant publications should be removed from the Library and a space to display large planning applications should be provided.
- (4) a dictation service for Members will be retained, and the Monitoring Officer arrange for alternative methods of delivering a dictation service be investigated;
- (5) the Glamorgan Archives Service be invited to attend a future meeting of the Council in order to showcase the service as a resource;
- (6) that subscriptions to the daily newspapers provided in the Members Lounge cease.

15 : MEMBER NEWSLETTER/MEMBER DIARY UPDATE

The Monitoring Officer requested feedback from the Members of the Committee on the format and content of the Members Newsletter and Members Diary circulars. The Committee were asked to consider how each circular may be improved. Members of the Committee indicated that they valued both circulars and requested that the service be continued.

16 : MODERN.GOV PRESENTATION

The Chairperson welcomed Gill Nurton to the Committee and invited her to deliver a brief presentation on the Modern.Gov committee management and decisions software which was currently under development in Democratic Services.

Gill Nurton provided an overview of the software package and the associated 'app' for smartphone devices and tablets.