

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

23 MARCH 2016

Present: County Councillor Clark (Chairperson);
County Councillors Dilwar Ali, Chaundy, Goddard, Hinchey,
Hyde, Lomax, Murphy and Robson

27 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillor Dilwar Ali had indicated that he would be late attending the meeting.

28 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairperson reminded Members of their responsibility under Part III of the Members' Code of Conduct to declare any interest in general terms and to complete personal interest forms at the start of the meeting and then, prior to the commencement of the discussion of the item in question, specify whether it is a personal or prejudicial interest. If the interest is prejudicial, Members would be asked to leave the meeting and if the interest is personal, Members would be invited to stay, speak and vote.

No declarations of interest were received.

29 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 January 2016 were approved by the Committee as a correct record and were signed by the Chairperson, subject to the inclusion of Councillor Goddard's apologies.

30 : DIRECTORATE SENIOR MANAGEMENT UPDATE

Members were updated on Governance Directorate Senior Management arrangements following the resignation of Marie Rosenthal, the Director of Governance and Legal Services, who had left the authority on 29 February 2016.

The 25 February 2016 Council, in accordance with the Employment Procedure Rules approved that the post should be filled. It had been agreed that the recruitment and selection exercise process to fill the Director of Governance and Legal Services post be initiated with no changes to the statement of duties, terms and conditions, including remuneration for the post. The successful applicant would also be the monitoring officer.

In addition, the Council, on 25 February 2016, designated David Marr as Interim Monitoring Officer from 1 March 2016 until the date the new appointee commences employment. Geoff Shimell holds the post of Interim Head of Democratic Services which is a statutory requirement for all Welsh Local Authorities.

The Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members:

- Members indicated that they would want to see a permanent Head of Democratic Services in post to support Elected Members.

- It was noted that the Monitoring Officer or Deputy Monitoring Officer could not under current legislation act as the Head of Democratic Services.
- The appointment of the Head of Democratic Services was within the remit of the Democratic Services Committee.

RESOLVED - That a permanent role of Head of Democratic Services be considered as soon as practicable.

31 : MEMBERS SUPPORT SERVICES UPDATE

Members were advised that the purpose of the report was to update the Democratic Services Committee with information relating to the support provided to Elected Members, one of the key duties of the committee under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011.

The report was considered in separate update headings:

Support to Members

Members were advised that on 20 January 2016 they endorsed the report and recommendations of the Task Group on the Review of Support Services to Members. The Director of Governance and Legal Services had shared the report with the Cabinet Member for Skills, Safety & Engagement ahead of the Budget setting process for 2016/17.

In accordance with Recommendation 1 of the report, the Director Governance and Legal Services submitted a growth bid for 2016/17 to secure funding within the Committee & Members Services budget for a permanent Member Support post currently funded on a temporary basis from savings in Scrutiny Services.

At its budget meeting on 25 February 2016 the Council had approved a growth bid of £100,000 linked to the funding of a permanent Member Support Officer and the statutory duties to meet the Welsh Language Standards requirements for bilingual services for the Council from 1 April 2016.

Actions in relation to the other 7 recommendations were ongoing and would feature as part of the future work plan for the Democratic Services and Constitution Committees.

In addition, the Governance and Legal Services Directorate was participating in a benchmarking exercise on the support provided to Members being undertaken with core cities network and led by Leeds City Council; and a Peer Review with a former officer of Nottingham City Council. The outcomes of this exercise would be reported to Committee.

The Committee was appraised of the requirements of the Welsh Language Standards in relation to Governance. These standards were applicable from 1 April, 2016 and Welsh Language Commissioner was the Welsh Government Regulator.

Officers advised that they have statutory deadlines to meet with regard to publishing agenda and papers for formal meetings. These may need to be brought forward in

order to provide time for translation. Modern.Gov has a Welsh publishing option to meet the statutory requirement.

The Chairperson summarised the discussion points as follows:

- There were concerns over the implications of additional pressures on the Members Services team in meeting statutory deadlines and these concerns to be fed back to the Chair of Constitution Committee;
- It was recommended that there should be a proper review after the first year to assess the resource implications.

Members Survey

Members were advised that in accordance with the Governance and Legal Services Directorate Plan 2015/16, a Members Survey would be undertaken during May 2016 which would seek Members views on service delivery matters; the principles of effective scrutiny; and the Member Development Strategy and programme. The aim was to receive feedback and comparator data to influence future service delivery to meet the requirements of Elected Members. This would be an online survey, with Members being offered the opportunity to complete in a different format or with the support of the Democratic Services team if required. The last Member Survey was undertaken in 2014.

Officers advised that the survey held a dual focus of effective scrutiny and assessment of services provided by Democratic Services. The survey would be used to inform the Governance Programme Plan and the 2017 Induction Programme.

Member Enquiry System (MES)

Members had previously received updates on the Member Enquiry System (MES) to allow for feedback and discussion.

Members were provided with a summary of the number and types of member's enquiries made on a selection of months.

Members discussed issues that they have encountered whilst using the system including the routing of enquiries; closing down of enquiries when re-routed; or enquiries being closed too soon; Members ability to cut and paste from other programmes such as email or word; and the length of time in getting full and complete responses.

It was noted that since the previous meeting, additional buttons were now available to mark an enquiry as urgent and for responses. There was also an Unknown Icon for officers to route the enquiry on a Members' behalf.

Officers advised that currently 68 out of 75 Members regularly use the system. The system is designed to capture all data and establish trends.

The Chairperson summarised the discussion as follows:

- Icon to be included on the MES screen for 'Tips' including instructions on how to cut and paste from other programmes;

- Members be advised of when a query is actually resolved, not after the case is closed on the MES;
- The Unknown category can be used for areas where a Member is unsure of which Directorate it falls within;
- Response timescales to be investigated;
- Officers to refresh Members on how they can fully use the system at a future meeting.

Member IT Project

Members were updated on the receipt and roll out of the upgraded tablets which had arrived and were currently being configured. At the configuring stage it was agreed that the upgraded model should provide Members with the latest operating programmes which included the new Direct Access feature and Windows version 10. Members who had been asked to test these upgraded features had confirmed that these features were useful updates to the current package. The transition to the new tablets would be completed by the end of May;

As part of the transition arrangements the Committee & Members Services team have tested the tablet and were now familiar with the features to allow them to be able, with IT officers, to support Members.

Members were advised that the roll out was starting in earnest and the pilot team had tested the devices rigorously, the consensus being that they provide a much improved experience.

The Chairperson enquired how many tablets would be rolled out and was advised that there were 41 Members on the tablet system and they would be encouraged to stick with them. If there were any significant issues then there were a small number of alternative devices available. 6 Members had received the new tablets so far.

The Chairperson noted previous discussion about provision of cases with keyboards for the tablets; officers updated that 30 would be ordered initially. Members were welcome to order their own cases if they wished and would be reimbursed up to the value of £10.

It was noted that Members should sign for all equipment and accessories that they are given.

Member Development

The Wales Audit Office (WAO) published its Corporate Assessment 'Follow On' report received on 26 February 2016 on its assessment undertaken in October 2015 identified improved arrangements in financial planning, HR management, performance management, asset management, IT, and governance with the latter helping to promote a better culture of accountability and risk management. Paragraph 50 of the WAO report referred specifically to Member training; attendance at training sessions; and what training should be considered essential for Members to discharge their role effectively.

The Corporate Assessment 'Follow On' Report contained one statutory recommendation and 14 proposals for improvement. The single statutory

recommendation was that the Council must ensure that it addresses these proposals for improvement to deliver improved outcomes within the next 12 months.

In response to the statutory recommendation the Council had prepared a statement of action and proposed timetable. Improvement action P5 (b) and (c) are relevant to the remit of this Committee and are set out below: -

“Enhance Member accountability by:

- strengthening member development and learning programmes based on competency assessments to improve skills and understanding to enable them to undertake their roles more effectively; and
- determining what training should be considered essential for Members to discharge their role effectively.”

The following was put forward to Cabinet on 21 March 2016 in relation to improvement proposal P5: - (see table)

Ref	Action	Timescale	Responsible Officer(s)
P5b	Democratic Services Committee to review Member Development & Training and agree new approach and programme to commence in May 2017	December 2016	Democratic Services
P5c	Democratic Services Committee to agree essential training and frequency of training prior to start of new council term in May 2017.	December 2016	Democratic Services

Members noted that the WAO had visited in November 2015 but had only sampled a number of Cabinet Members and Scrutiny Chairs. Things had progressed a lot since then; Members considered if they visited now the findings would not be the same.

Officers advised that they would work with the Member Development Steering Group to develop the 2016/17 programme and planning for the Member Induction 2017. The Chief Executive had asked for the Organisational Development Governance programme to be refocussed and one of the projects concentrate on Member Induction and Member Support 2017.

Members noted that there had been significant learning developments such as the establishment of the All Wales online Academy; £50k had been put back into the Scrutiny function. It was noted that it was now important to look at the structure on the Committee and Members Services Team, to stabilise this and to see where resources could be focussed to provide effective support to Members.

Members discussed training for Governors and were advised that in-house training for Governors was currently being reviewed. The Cardiff Managers programme was also being looked at to see if modules could be helpful for Members.

The Chairperson summarised the discussion of the all the above sections as follows:

- The Member Development programme for May to July 2016 was noted;
- Consideration be given to the delivery of mandatory School Governor training;
- Notice of any training programmes should be provided for the year ahead so that Members can diarise;
- Proposals for the programme of Induction of new Members in 2017 be developed with the Member Development Steering Group;
- The aims and objectives for all training should be clear, avoid jargon and be well publicised;
- Investigate why attendance at training sessions is currently very low, and include a question on this in the Members Survey;
- In Members survey also ask what training Members may like to see, and timings locations of training etc.;
- Collaborative training courses be established and possibly sold to other local authorities;
- Consider the possibility of providing accredited training courses, or qualifications for Members;
- Extend an invitation to Members of Standards and Ethics Committee to participate in the Member Development Steering Group.

RESOLVED - That

- (1) the use of funds from the Members hardware budget 2016/17 to purchase ancillary cover and keyboard unit to protect the new tablet device as a Council asset used by Members be approved;
- (2) the Member Development Steering Group meet to take forward the actions from the WAO Corporate Assessment Follow On Report Statement of Action;
- (3) the Member Survey be progressed in consultation with the Chair and be undertaken in May/June 2016

32 : WORK PLAN

Members requested that the following items be considered by the new Committee for its work plan:-

- Member Enquiry System briefing and feedback from Members;
- Member Learning opportunities 2016/17;
- Member Induction 2017;
- Member Support Services Peer Review;
- Scrutiny Services Review;
- Website content
- Members Annual Reports.

33 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Democratic Services Committee is scheduled to take place on 23 June 2016.