

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

29 NOVEMBER 2021

Present: Councillor Jones-Pritchard(Chairperson)
Councillors Goodway, Kelloway, Lay, Naughton, Keith Parry,
Sandrey and Wong

12 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made in accordance with the Members Code of Conduct.

13 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 July 2021 were approved by the Committee as a correct record of that meeting.

14 : DEMOCRATIC SERVICES - ACTIVITIES & SERVICE SUPPORT

The Chair invited Gary Jones, Head of Democratic Services, to present the report on the performance of the Council's Democratic Services since the last meeting held on 19 July 2021.

The report included the following matters:

Multi-location meetings

The Council has received funding from the Welsh Government to develop a hybrid meeting system which was being used for the first time in the meeting, with the Chair and Officers present in Committee Room 4 while other members attended remotely. A testing process had been used to develop the requirements for the new conferencing system which will have a range of facilities that will benefit meetings in multiple locations. The procurement was being finalised and it was hoped to conclude the award on 3 December 2021.

Webcasting

The webcasting totals were presented in the report. The total reached by the end of Q2 was 86% of the target for the year. The last meeting of Democratic Services Committee on 19 July 2021 was viewed 87 times, with 17 live and 70 archive views.

Member Development

The report presented information on the Member Learning sessions that had been held and details of attendance. Not all sessions were mandatory. The Monitoring Officer who was in attendance at the meeting is providing a Code of Conduct refresher which is mandatory, with 64 Members having completed the training and dates scheduled for others to do so. The figure for Safeguarding Training had been reached after comparing and compiling figures for training delivered by School Governors and other sources. An outline of Planned Learning was provided. Group

Whips have requested that Member Development activity be focused on mandatory topics until after the Local Government Elections in 2022.

Members were asked to comment or raise questions on the information received. Those discussions are summarised as follows:

- Members wondered whether it might be appropriate to ask UNICEF to postpone the Rights of the Child Part B training until after the elections as some Members would be standing down and others not be re-elected. Officers advised that most Members had completed the training but there were some who were outstanding, mostly because they were newly elected. UNICEF was not able to provide training due to the pandemic but now can. A minimum number of Members is required to attend each training session. It was considered it would be good for the training to be completed as it would demonstrate the Council's intention to progress the Child Friendly City. The follow-on session could be deferred until after the election.
- Members sought information on whether attendance at training sessions was higher with remote access than it had been when Members attended in person. Members were advised that early online sessions were well attended.
- Members enquired as to whether there was a way individual Members could ascertain which training sessions they had attended. Officers advised that the information could be made available to Members.
- Members questioned the purpose of requiring Members who would be standing down to attend learning sessions before the elections, and expressed the view that Members seeking re-election would want to spend time canvassing rather than in training. Officers advised that Members would benefit from completing the training.
- Members discussed whether the training available for newly elected members was suitable for their needs. The view was expressed that more pre-election training for candidates would be useful. Following election more practical instruction in the role of a Councillor and navigating the Council would be helpful, as well as mentoring and a buddy system. Some Members expressed criticism of the training for the 2017 intake. Officers advised that the Induction Programme was on the Forward Work Programme for the Committee. Information about the Councillor's role and forthcoming meetings would be made available to candidates prior to the election on the Council website. Any gaps identified in the Induction Programme would be addressed.
- Members were advised that prior to the 2017 election the Group Whips had indicated that they wanted mentoring to be done within the Groups and did not want a formal structure to be put in place by Officers. Members were encouraged to discuss mentoring within their Groups. The view was expressed that Groups would probably want to continue to conduct their own mentoring, but instruction of mentors to promote consistency would be useful.

Members were advised that prospective mentors would be identified with the help of Groups and an excess over requirements would be trained. Some variation between Groups' approaches to mentoring was permissible. It was suggested that not all Members would want to be mentored within their own Groups, especially where female Members wished to be mentored by other female Members. Members were advised that cross-party mentoring was possible where desired.

- Members were also encouraged to put forward suggestions to make Code of Conduct training more engaging and informative.

Elected Member Personal Safety and Security

The Committee was provided with an update on the take up of the People Safe app. Registering for the app is not mandatory but all members are encouraged to do so. The app represents a significant step up in the protection of Elected Members. There are some challenges in relation to GDPR but these are being addressed. The app will be installed on Members' mobile phones but it would be up to individual Members whether they registered for the app.

Members were asked to comment or raise questions on the information received. Those discussions are summarised as follows:

- Members sought clarification on whether Elected Members should register with the Council or the app provider. Officers advised that the Council would give People Safe details of the device that Members most commonly took out and about with them, whether Council provided or personal. People Safe would set up registration with Elected Members. Officers would manage part of the portal and have access to usage data.
- Members discussed the number of permissions that were necessary on the Android version of the app. Officers advised that the matter would be followed up.
- Members were advised that a number of people had inadvertently triggered the app. People Safe had advised users on how to turn down the sensitivity of the app. A training video on use of the app will be circulated.

Demographic Profile Survey

The Survey was intended to provide data on the make-up of the Council for the purposes of comparison with the composition of the city's population. So far 63 Elected Members, 84%, had responded. Officers are working with Group Whips to gather remaining data. The information will be provided to the Race Equality Taskforce.

Members sought information on the party make-up of the respondents. Officers advised that the survey was anonymous. Group Whips had issued numbers and

Officers had advised Group Whips which numbers they had not received information from. It was pointed out that only a Council breakdown could be made available, as providing a Party breakdown risked undermining anonymity where there were small Party Groups. Members indicated their concern that the privacy of Members should be protected.

Democratic Services Team – Additional Activities

The Committee was provided with an update on recent activities additional to those planned. Supporting hybrid meeting arrangements had taken longer than expected due to unforeseen complexity. Additional Member briefings on a range of topics had been necessary. There was an internal audit of Members' remuneration which required changes to initial recommendations. Independent Members have been recruited for the Governance and Audit Committee and the Standards and Ethics Committee. The Team has led on the procurement and implementation of the People Safe app. Supporting information has been provided for complaints from the Welsh Language Commissioner. The procurement of a new conferencing system has taken considerable time and the implementation is progressing. The procurement of Zoom has been delayed due to the non-receipt of a single payment, but is now going ahead. Members' mobile phones are being replaced due to obsolescent operating systems. Democratic Services have been involved in developing the requirement for the Complaints, Compliments and Enquiries System. The new Corporate Performance Processes have been developed with a significant Scrutiny input. The Scrutiny webpages have been revamped to increase public engagement.

Staffing Arrangements and Support for All Party Council Groups

The Council continues to experience significant increase in demand for its services. Some activities had not progressed as far as hoped due to other priorities and various other difficulties. Officers were particularly disappointed that it had not been possible to progress with Potential Candidate Sessions. Acquiring additional committee support staff would ease pressure on the team and allow it to support All Party Council Groups.

Outcome of Local Government Boundary Review

The Review had raised the number of Elected Numbers to 79 and would lead to additional costs for the team. This would be reflected in the Base Budget for Democratic Services, but would not include any staffing increase.

Members were asked to comment or raise questions on the information received. Those discussions are summarised as follows:

- Members expressed concern about the delay in Potential Candidate sessions and wondered whether it might be possible to substitute alternative provision of information for Potential Candidates.
- Members expressed the view that Officers should determine their staffing requirements and that Members should argue the case for the costs of democracy to be ringfenced. The case for additional staff was not being made during the Budget process. Officers advised that there was no process for

growth bids in the Budget. The Committee has been asked whether it considers it beneficial to support Cross-Political Party Working Groups. PRAP had indicated it was not looking for savings from Democratic Services. If Democratic Services were fully staffed and the additional staff recruited it would be possible to support Cross-Party Groups. The difficulty might come in recruiting staff. There is a lack of Welsh speakers in the team which it would be desirable to address.

- The view was expressed that it was difficult to justify a Welsh-essential post if the staff member was not often required to use Welsh. It was more important to get the capacity the Council needed to fulfil its obligations.
- Members discussed support for Cross-Party Groups. The view was expressed that it might be difficult to decide in detail on support for Cross-Party Groups ahead of the Local Government Election, but that a decision in principle could be taken on whether Democratic Services should have the capacity to provide such support if required, and to help with other activities.

Draft Independent Remuneration Panel

The Committee was provided with an update on the work of the Panel.

Substitution of Senior Salary Roles

The Committee had been asked to consider arrangements for Substitutions in the event of illness or family absence, and information on known arrangements was provided.

Members were asked to comment or raise questions on the information received. Those discussions are summarised as follows:

- Members were advised that at issue was the minimum period before a Substitution should take effect, and whether the Council could pay an additional Senior Salary above its permitted 19. Members expressed the view that it would be damaging for diversity if people were hindered from taking the leave they need by not being able to afford to do so. It would be inappropriate to reduce a person's entitlement to remuneration during maternity absence.
- Members were advised that the Council was permitted to exceed the number of Senior Salary Roles but had to inform the IRPW within 14 days. Members were advised that the Substitution of someone previously unremunerated into a Senior Salary role would require approval by the Council.
- Members expressed the view that it was important not to give Elected Members superior benefits compared to Council or other employees.
- Members were advised that the maximum period of family absence or sickness that the Council could remunerate for was 26 weeks.

- Members discussed what should be the minimum period before a Substitution began. Members agreed to set up a Working Group composed of Councillors Jones-Pritchard, Sandrey and Wong, to discuss the issue further.

RESOLVED:

To note the report and accept the recommendations contained therein.

15 : ICT AND AGILE WORKING FACILITIES FOR ELECTED MEMBERS

The Chair invited Gary Jones, Head of Democratic Services, to present the report which outlined what equipment and facilities it was proposed to provide for Elected Members following the Local Government Elections 2022.

Members were asked to comment or raise questions on the information received. Those discussions are summarised as follows:

- Members discussed whether it would be possible to allow Elected Members to access Office 365 through their own IT devices rather than Council ones. The view was expressed that there was an advantage in having separate devices. The provision of additional monitors was welcomed.
- Members sought clarification on the provision of printing facilities. Members were reminded that the use of personal printers to print Council material was not permitted. Officers advised that old Council printers were being recycled for use. It has been suggested that Members with a recognised need could purchase printers compatible with their Council device, and that the Council could compensate for the purchase of paper and ink cartridges. Member Services would continue to print letters to constituents. There are no plans to provide printers for all Elected Members. Members could access printing facilities in Council offices.

RESOLVED:

To note the report and accept the recommendations contained therein.

16 : MEMBERS ENQUIRY SERVICE UPDATE

The Chair invited Gary Jones, Head of Democratic Services, to present the update on the Members Enquiry Service. The Committee was provided with as presentation of how the new Service would work.

Members were asked to comment or raise questions on the information received. Those discussions are summarised as follows:

- Members suggested it would be useful to receive notifications if the response to an enquiry was overdue.

- It was suggested that it would be useful if Members were able to generate their own reports to track and analyse enquiries they had received.

Councillors Goodway, Kelloway and Sandrey volunteered to test the new system.

RESOLVED:

To note the report and accept the recommendations contained therein.

17 : FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair invited Gary Jones, Head of Democratic Services, to present the Forward Work Programme.

RESOLVED:

To approve the committee's Forward Work Programme (FWP) as at Appendix A

18 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

No urgent items were received.

19 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Democratic Services Committee is on 24 January 2022 at 5.00 pm via MS Teams.