

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

5 FEBRUARY 2024

Present: Councillor Lancaster(Chairperson)
Councillors Davies, Derbyshire, Palmer and Simmons

65 : 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 in accordance with the Members Code of Conduct

66 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2023 were approved by the Committee as a correct record and were signed by the Chairperson, with the inclusion of Cllrs Palmer, Simmons, Derbyshire and Carter as being in attendance.

67 : MEMBER SURVEYS 2024

The Committee was provided with an update on members surveys planned for 2024 which included the plans and intentions of the Behaviours Survey as approved by the Standards and Ethics Committee to be undertaken before the end of March 2024 and the draft Neurodiversity Survey planned to be undertaken in September 2024.

Gary Jones, Head of Democratic Services, outlined that on 14 February 2023, the Standards and Ethics Committee had approved a series of questions for a behaviours survey to be launched Feb/March 2024 with the outcomes reported back to the committee. The questions would form part of a SNAP survey which would be launched and online for a couple of weeks. The survey would provide the opportunity to identify if Members had experienced or observed any unacceptable behaviours and to confirm if the reporting mechanisms were understood and used appropriately.

In order to maintain confidentiality/anonymity of responses, Group Whips would be provided with a block of numbers to allocate to members and to be used as a reference when members completed the survey. The level of responses would be monitored by Democratic Services Officers and if necessary, the whips would be requested to follow up with their respective groups to ensure that a suitable level of responses were provided.

Members were informed the survey would ask questions on the details of the experience of bullying, harassment or discrimination and then move on to the unacceptable behaviours witnessed by members to other people, investigate

reporting mechanisms to check for understanding and seek to determine whether they were being reported effectively.

Members noted that on the 21 September 2023 Council had approved a motion which included: investigating providing training to all Councillors on neurodiversity to aid in their casework in recognising the growing impact of neurodivergent conditions on the issues they dealt with on behalf of constituents; to review and implement reasonable adjustments for elected members, to ensure the role of Councillors was accessible to people with neurodivergent traits and conditions and that the skills and talents of all people could be harnessed for the benefit of the citizens of Cardiff.

To determine the training and support arrangements for councillors regarding neurodivergence, a survey had been developed in conjunction with a service area expert, Professor Amanda Kirby, to provide the basis for determining any necessary requirements.

Members were informed that the Political Group Whips had been consulted to assist in determining if it would be preferable to merge the two surveys rather than undertaking them independently. Due to the significant number of possible questions of a combined survey their preference was to deliver the surveys separately as follows:

Behaviours w/c 5 Feb 24 (Survey Launch) 01 Mar-24 (Survey End) Mar- April (Analysis) Jun-Jul (Reporting)

Neurodiversity w/c 2 Sep 24 (Survey Launch) 29 Sep-24 (Survey end) Oct – Nov (Analysis) Jan-Feb (Reporting)

The Head of Democratic Services provided an update to Members that since the report had been produced an all-party Council group had been formed as of 30 January 2024 to look at neurodiversity. Conversations had taken place with the Cabinet Member and lead officer for the Neurodiversity Strategy for Cardiff to align all work. Initial indications were that there would need to be fluidity around when the Neuro diversity survey was run for members resulting in the fact that it might take place later than September in order that an holistic survey could be undertaken. Members noted that the results would be fed back to the Standards & Ethics Committee, Democratic Services Committee and the Cabinet to progress outcomes.

Members were invited to ask questions and make observations which are summarised below:

- Members discussed the surveys and noted that the same questions would be contained in both and asked for clarification on the surveys in relation to the definition of Welsh as a first language.

RESOLVED:

- a. To note the questions identified by the Standards and Ethics Committee set out in Appendix A.
- b. To consider the proposed questions for the Neurodiversity survey as set out in Appendix B.

c. To approve the plans for the delivery of the surveys as outlined in paragraph 16 above.

d. To delegate the authority to make any subsequent amendments to the planned questions for the Neurodiversity survey to the Head of Democratic Services in consultation with the Chair of the Democratic Services Committee and the Cabinet Member responsible for the Neurodiversity Survey.

68 : DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT 2023

Members were advised that this report was to enable the Democratic Services Committee to consider the content of its Annual Report for 2023 and approve the arrangements for the report to be finalised and presented to full Council.

The Head of Democratic Services outlined the report to Members and highlighted the headings from the Annual Report as follows:

Membership of the Democratic Services Committee

The Democratic Services Team – Support, Services and Structure

Resources

Key Activities and Achievements,

Collaborative Working and Networks

Performance Information,

Forward Plan for 2024

Members noted an amendment on page 58 to Cllr Palmer's attendance at Committee from 1 to 2 meetings and that the Chair's Forward would be added after the receipt of any further queries or comments from members.

Members were informed that following consideration of the Draft Annual Report any changes would be made as a result of members comments/queries and the report would be presented to the next committee meeting for agreement prior to its submission to Council in June.

RESOLVED:

a) To provide comments on the content of the Committee's Annual Report 2023 which would be used to update the report in readiness for consideration of the next meeting of the Committee and prior to its submission to Council in June 2024.

69 : DEMOCRATIC SERVICES - ACTIVITIES AND SERVICE SUPPORT

Members were informed that this report was to inform the Democratic Services Committee on the performance of the Council's Democratic Services Committee since the last meeting on 13 November 2023.

The Head of Democratic Services provided the Committee with an update on Member Development Activities – School Admissions and Appeals, Special Procedures (Cosmetic Procedures) (dates of sessions to be confirmed); WLGA

Essentials: Risk Management for all Governance and Audit Members (13 and 19 March 2024 4.00 pm – 7.30 pm); Cyber Security Training – MS Teams Compliance; Member Induction – Mandatory Training; Member Enquiry System (MES) Refresher Training.

Members were informed that the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) was providing some anti-racism training which had been identified as part of their Improvement Programme. It supported the Wales Anti-Racist Action Plan and would boost the Equalities Training provided in the Member's Induction Programme. The training covered what racism was, what anti-racism was and the impacts. Members were asked for their guidance on whether it was something they would support or whether they felt they had enough knowledge provided by the induction.

Members were invited to ask questions and make observations which are summarised below:

- In discussing the provision of anti-racism training from the WLGA Members agreed the number of compulsory courses already attended had been sufficient and covered the necessary areas.
- Members suggested monitoring the surveys for any demand in training needs of councillors.

RESOLVED:

To note the report.

70 : DEVELOPING THE RESEARCH PROTOCOL

Members were advised that this report was to update the Committee on the existing research support available to Councillors and to seek directions for the development of a Research Protocol for Elected Members.

Gary Jones, Head of Democratic Services reminded Members that the Welsh Government Statutory and Non-Statutory Guidance for Principal Councils in Wales relating to Research Support and Services for Councillors (**Appendix A**) had been considered by the Committee at its meeting on 13 November 2023.

The guidance indicated that it was for the Committee to advise on the nature and level of support for research by elected members that would be suitable for their council and the level of resources that the Head of Democratic Services might require to provide a sufficient set of services in this regard.

To determine a baseline for the existing research support, the Head of Democratic Services informed the Committee that he had carried out an assessment and directed their attention to Appendix B which contained the details of the initial assessment. Members were being asked to consider the assessment and to provide further direction prior to wider consultation with elected members.

The need to provide data analysis training was also highlighted to Members. Members were informed that Data Cymru offered a wide range of 'data focused' training courses, two of which were aimed at Councillors – Data 101 – An Introduction to Understanding and using Data and Understanding and using

Performance Data. During 2023-24, Data Cymru were offering each local authority the option of taking one cohort of members (up to 20) through the training for free and Members were asked to consider if this was something they would like to take up.

Members were directed to page 116, paragraph 19 of the report. To assist in structuring the Research Protocol it was proposed that the following categorisation be used: a Self-Service Research; b Level 1 – Simple Research Support; c Level 2 – Assisted Research Support; d Level 3 – Scoped Research Support. Members noted that Levels 2 and 3 would be directed through the Head of Democratic Services

It was proposed that Level 2 and 3 Research Support requests be submitted to the Head of Democratic Services to prioritise the request to ensure the available resources were not exceeded. The Head of Democratic Services would also ensure that these research requests were not overtly political and that they would not compromise the neutrality of officers.

Members were then directed to the questions in paragraph 14 (page 114/115) of the report as follows:

- Are there any other areas of research support which you consider should be included in this list?
- What research support has been useful in your role as Councillor?
- What could be improved?
- What information / data do you require that is not currently available on the Council's website or reports provided to committees?
- How should other members be informed about the draft Research Protocol and their views on its content be sought.
- What information / data do you require that is not currently available via external partners such as Data Cymru, Open data sources etc.
- Please list any areas of research that you may find useful to your role as Councillor, where this information is not already available in the public domain.

Members were invited to ask questions and make observations which are summarised below:

- Members welcomed the development of the Research Protocol and felt that councillors should be given more information on what they could be given in terms of resources. However, it was felt that perhaps there should be consideration of what could be achieved in terms of resources and that there should be a quota – first come first served. The Head of Democratic Services suggested that if it was an individual request for data it could be allocated by a political group and fed through and prioritised by the political group and if it was in relation to a ward issue and all 3 or 4 ward members were keen to undertake and agree a schedule could be drawn up in terms of prioritisation.

- Members agreed that Appendix B was a useful document. Information from outside bodies was useful for signposting as the research might already have been carried out.
- Members discussed the benefits of taking up the offer of free training from Data Cymru. The Head of Democratic Services to circulate the details of the training to Members to gauge interest.

RESOLVED:

a To note the content of the report and the initial assessment of current research facilities for elected Members at **Appendix B** undertaken by the HDS.

b To consider the questions in Paragraph 13 and the proposed categorisation of research as set out in paragraph 18 and provide direction for the development of the Research Protocol.

c To agree that a draft version of the Research Protocol be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee on 15 April 2024.

71 : FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

Gary Jones, Head of Democratic Services provided Members with an update on topics for inclusion in the Committee's Forward Work Programme. These included Democratic Services – Activities & Services Support; Democratic Services Committee Annual Report 2023, Developing the Research Protocol, Review of the Elected Member Learning and Development Strategy.

Members noted the date of the next meeting was 15 April 2024 with another meeting planned for June/July 2024. Members were informed that the dates would be confirmed once the calendar of meetings was established.

RESOLVED:

To approve the Committee's Forward Work Programme

72 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

There were no urgent items received.

73 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting of the Committee is 15 April 2024 at 4.30 pm.

The meeting terminated at 5.34 pm