

## REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

### DEMOCRATIC SERVICES – RESOURCES AND CHALLENGES

#### Reason for this Report

1. The purpose of this report is to inform the Democratic Services Committee of the current status of Democratic Services and the challenges facing the service.

#### Background

##### Role of the Democratic Services Committee

2. The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, Part 1, Chapter 2, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/mwa/2011/4/part/1/chapter/2> requires local authorities to appoint a Democratic Services Committee to oversee the Democratic Services functions of the Council, ensure that the work is adequately resourced and report to the full Council accordingly. The Democratic Services functions include Members' Services, Committee Services and Scrutiny Services, but not Cabinet Support Services. Electoral Services are part of the Democratic Services Team but only for management and administration purposes.

##### Democratic Services

3. Democratic Services comprises the following service areas:
  - Electoral Services
  - Committee Services
  - Member Services
  - Scrutiny Services
4. The roles and responsibilities of each of these services is shown at **Appendix A**. The Democratic Services Team is currently established with 21 employees as shown at **Appendix B**.
5. The budget allocation in 2019-20 for the Democratic Services Team was as follows:

	Committees	Electoral	Members	Scrutiny
Total Budget	396,820	587,070	1,765,250	450,460
Projected Outturn	410,452	587,070	1,776,047	446,171

For the 2019-20 budget a number of savings were proposed and initially agreed. However, prior to the Council Budget meeting in February 2019 some of the individual budget savings targets were removed from budget determination as these were not considered feasible to Elected Members, however the quantum of saving still required delivery. These included the following savings which are still allocated to the relevant team budgets:

Narrative	Amount
Cease Democratic printing	13,000
Removal of County Hall Webcasting	6,000

6. The Democratic Services Team has the following reserves which are planned to be utilised for the Local Government Elections in 2022 and to facilitate the induction and equipment costs of the candidates successfully elected. These reserves will also be used to part fund a new conference and webcasting facility as outlined in paragraph 19 below.

Reserve	Balance
Committee, Members and Scrutiny Services	184,428
Electoral	326,974

### Current Challenges

7. In addition to its existing roles and responsibilities the Democratic Services team is currently facing a number of ongoing challenges.
8. Education Appeals
- a. Support to provide a note-taker for education appeals was initially agreed to part-funded by the Education Directorate which provided a salary for a Grade 2 note-taker on annualised hours. Due to difficulties in recruiting to this role the Committee and Member Services teams have been allocated this budget to assist in undertaking the note-taking of education appeal hearings which have been currently scheduled until December.
  - b. A total of 398 admission appeals have been received, of which, 255 are expected to be held. Up to five admissions appeals are usually held on a single day with each appeal taking approximately one hour to complete although some appeals take considerably longer. This equates to approximately 51 days where a member of the team is supporting an appeal hearing. The note taker is required to complete the notes of the hearing to the necessary standard within 3 working days. Some agreements have been made which enables the note-taker to complete their notes more quickly than previously achieved but this may require an additional time commitment from team members.

- c. There have been four Exclusion Appeals held to date, with a team member committed to support each day-long appeal. The minutes of these meetings are more detailed and often require a significant amount of time to complete within the require timescales.
- d. The support to education appeals has been prioritised and is one of the factors that has led to the team being unable to achieve its 80% target for publishing draft minutes of committee meetings within 10 working days of the meeting. This performance indicator is currently being reviewed as the initial target set was not wholly within the control of the team.

## 9. Office 365

- a. Office 365 is the latest version of Microsoft Office which includes Word, Excel, PowerPoint and Outlook. It utilises the benefits of “the cloud” to make savings in infrastructure costs which includes a reduction in server space, the removal of license costs for “Blackberry Works” which is no longer required and provides more collaborative features which should enable users to work more effectively.
- b. The Authority is currently migrating to Office 365 and it is planned that all Elected Members will be converted by December 2019. The migration of Democratic Services to Office 365 was completed by 31 August 2019.
- c. However, the initial plans for a pilot for Elected Members was delayed following early meetings which identified technical challenges for those Elected Members who already had a managed Office 365 account on their devices which prevented the Council’s Office 365 software from being installed. These technical issues are being addressed but this has resulted in the timescales for the roll out being compressed to meet the migration deadlines.
- d. It is expected that at least one team member will be required to support the Office 365 team and the ICT Department with the migration for Elected Members. This will include liaison with the relevant teams should there be any initial issues experience by Elected Members once their migration has occurred.

## 10. Implementation of Microsoft SharePoint

- a. Microsoft SharePoint is a browser-based software system which supports collaborative document management. It enables departments to set up a protected space for document sharing using cloud technology. The Authority is progressing the corporate implementation of SharePoint with Governance and Legal Services being the latest directorate undertake the transfer to this new system.
- b. The first stage of this process is to “cleanse” the data currently held on the team’s drives before the transfer to SharePoint takes place. This entails the review of thousands of files to ensure that only necessary and relevant information is retained. This is a time consuming process and the teams are making slow but steady progress to meet the deadline of the end of October to complete the cleansing process.
- c. During this period, new SharePoint websites have to be created to reflect the data storage and collaboration needs of each of the teams and to enable the cleansed

data to be transferred into SharePoint. New processes have to be developed to support the effective provision of existing services and the ongoing operation of SharePoint in the future.

- d. Following the October deadline, any outstanding work to transfer to SharePoint will have to be undertaken without the support of the SharePoint team from the ICT department increasing the burden on Democratic Services to achieve this task quickly
- e. Conversion to SharePoint will eventually lead to better collaboration and data sharing with only a single version of a particular file being stored but able to be shared more widely across the authority. This outcome will not be achieved without a significant volume of work, collaboration and innovation to streamline processes and procedures for use with the SharePoint facility.

## 11. Personal Safety for Elected Members

- a. Awareness of Elected Members receiving online, verbal and other forms of intimidation and abuse has increased. This has required the establishment of processes and procedures to ensure that any personal safety concerns which a Councillor may have can be reported and assessed, with appropriate actions taken to mitigate these concerns. This is an ongoing role requiring liaison and co-ordination with Democratic Services, Elected Members, the Corporate Security Manager and the Police.

## 12. Printing

- a. Printing is one of the costs which Democratic Services is able to influence. The team has access to a centralised printing service which is able to provide a fast and effective service for the larger and more complex printing needs of the team including committee reports and members letters. This service can provide significant cost savings compared to Printsmart facilities and the teams have been directed to maximise the use of this facility. Total Printsmart costs in 2018-19 for Democratic Services were £19,049.
- b. With the increased use of the print service a review of the printers funded by the Democratic Services teams has been undertaken. It was found that the printer in the Members Room in City Hall is being used regularly but the equivalent printer in County Hall has not been used since November 2018 although the contract charges are still being made. The larger printer used by Committee Services is underutilised in respect of the volume of printing expected for the cost of the contract in place. Options are being considered to potentially remove one of the Member's room printers and to change the larger printer to one which is more cost effective for the volume of printing. The potential savings are still being determined but the views of the Committee would be welcomed.
- c. Although, the overall volume of printing has significantly reduced over a number of years particularly for Committee papers it is considered that the further savings are achievable. All Elected Members are provided with ICT equipment and access to the Modern.gov app to enable committee papers to be viewed and annotated. Many Elected Members have struggled using this software to support paperless meetings either through lack of training, poor network facilities in the committee rooms or with the inconsistency of the app.

- d. Those Members identified as having a particular need and requiring access to a hard copy of committee papers are provided with them accordingly. However, a number of members request a hard copy of the papers prior to a meeting even though they may not have an identified need or have forgotten to bring their papers with them.
- e. Options to effectively identify those Elected Members with a need for printed copies of committee documents and to encourage those who are provided with hard copies to ensure that they bring them with them for meetings are being considered with the group Whips.
- f. In addition, the new Modern.gov app is currently available for IOS and it is hoped that the windows version of the app will be released imminently. The new app is being “beta tested” by members of the team and a significant improvement on the current version with greater stability, wider functionality and it’s easier to use. Once this new app is available it is hoped that it will automatically be downloaded to all Members and appropriate training will be provided to maximise its use and reduce the need for paper copies.
- g. It should be noted that with the delivery of all of these proposed print savings will not negate the £13,000 saving identified in paragraph 5 above. Members are asked to consider which printing options could be used to assist in meeting this savings target.

### 13. Elections

- a. As Committee members will be aware, there have unfortunately been 3 unplanned casual vacancy by-elections and a short notice European Parliamentary Election this year. The cost of the by-elections have to be met by the Authority. This has an impact on the level of funding transferred into the Elections Reserve which is used to meet the cost of the next Local Government Election.
- b. These unplanned events have required additional work from the team which had scheduled other essential tasks during what was expected to be a non-election year. These tasks included engagement with the Local Government and Boundary Commission for Wales as part of the review of all electoral ward boundaries due to conclude in 2020, and completing a Polling District, Places and Stations review before the end of 2019.
- c. As part of its usual duties the team is also undertaking the annual canvass of 151,000 residential properties in the Cardiff area. Due to the likelihood of an unscheduled General Election being called in the near future, a significant percentage of the forms have been returned which require rapid processing in order to update the Electoral Register prior to the commencement of any election timetable. A series of reminders have been circulated and the physical canvass is due about to begin but this has required the recruitment and training of a large number of new canvassers.
- d. In addition, the fluidity of Brexit has created a number of challenges in terms of effective planning for a possible General Election. Without specific dates the identification of suitable venues to accommodate the verification and count for the

four Parliamentary Divisions covered by Cardiff Council is ongoing. The booking of 204 polling stations with only a few weeks' notice is also a matter of concern. Additional planning is also being undertaken to identify potential implications on Council business should a General Election be called based on estimates indicated by the most recent intelligence based predictions.

- e. Additional resources have been corporately provided to support the Elections Team but the impact of a potential fourth by-election and the possibility of a General Election will have wider implications for the Democratic Services Team including the co-ordination of any governance related matters relating during the pre-election period and the scanning and processing of postal votes for a General Election.

#### 14. Staffing

- a. Since the last meeting of the Democratic Services Committee, two members of the Committee and Members team have left the Authority and recruitment exercises for both posts has been undertaken. This process has left these posts vacant for longer than anticipated and increased the workload for the Committee and Members Services Teams.
- b. The Members Services Officer post is currently being filled by an employee on a trial basis. Should this trial be successful the employee will permanently join the team. However, if the individual or the Head of Democratic Services decide that the trial was unsuccessful a further recruitment process will be commenced.
- c. The Committee and Member Services Manager post has been advertised with a closing date for applications of 11 October 2019. In the interim, an acting up opportunity and the recruitment a temporary employee are being progressed to ease the workload of the team.
- d. The Elections team have one team member on maternity leave and the post is being backfilled using acting up arrangements.
- e. One of the Principal Scrutiny Officers is currently being filled on a temporary/acting up basis until 31<sup>st</sup> December 2019. A recruitment process for a permanent employee is to be progressed shortly with the successful applicant expected to start in January 2020.

#### **Future Challenges**

15. The Democratic Services Team is continually looking at the likely demands being placed upon them in the forthcoming years.

#### 16. New Legislation – Local Government and Elections Bill

As part of a new bill the Welsh Government has expressed its intention to introduce several requirements which will impact the provision of Democratic Services which include the introduction of:

- a requirement to broadcast all public meeting of Local Authorities.
- the reduction in voting age for welsh assembly elections from 18 to 16.

- A requirement to publish a scheme (a “petition scheme”) setting out how the council intends to handle and respond to petitions (including electronic petitions)
- A requirement to enhance the use of Remote Attendance.
- Statutory Joint Committees

A number of officer’s from across Wales including the Monitoring Officer, Head of Democratic Services and the Elections Manager from Cardiff have been involved in Welsh Government Working Groups on these matters. It is hoped that any initial expectations of the Welsh Government and the potential impact on local authority resources and budgets can be considered.

It should be noted that similar Electoral legislation from the UK Government will be required to enable all elections held in Wales to include 16-18 year olds. It is uncertain at this stage when this UK legislation will be progressed.

## 17. Budget Savings

The Budget Strategy 2020/21 sets out a budget gap of £25m for next financial year and a budget gap of £101m over the following four years (April 2020 to March 2024). To contribute to the £25m budget gap it has been proposed that the Council will make £18.5m savings through efficiency, transformation and growing income.

To meet these targets Governance and Legal Services have been asked to identify possible efficiency savings of 7.5% or £219,000, an additional £14,000 of income, and other service change and transformation opportunities. Democratic Services’ element of these savings make up £64,000, for which the Director has indicated that with current meeting levels, the service is unable to identify these savings. However, some options have been put forward for further consideration including a review of the meetings cycle and the scrutiny function. Without the possibility of holding fewer meetings and the level of staffing resources necessary to support them the savings targets are unlikely to be met.

## 18. Member Development

- The Democratic Services Committee has a key role to play in the provision and delivery of effective Member development including the prioritisation and designation of learning opportunities as either essential, advisory or optional.
- A since 2017 number of learning opportunities have been identified by the Committee and designated as essential. A number of recent essential sessions have been held with further sessions of each the following topics being planned:

Session	Number of councillors in attendance	Percentage of councillors in attendance	Remarks
Children's Rights in Practice, Part 1	46	61%	3 sessions
Children's Rights in Practice, Part 2	40	53%	2 sessions

Session	Number of councillors in attendance	Percentage of councillors in attendance	Remarks
Corporate Safeguarding Guide	35	47%	2 sessions
Corporate Parenting	23	31%	1 session and E-learning

- c. The designation of member learning and development as essential requires a significant commitment from the team to arrange a series of sessions to enable maximum participation. Opportunities to improve the number of Members attending each session and to reduce the volume of resources needed to arrange and administer each session are being considered. These include limiting the number of sessions provided, additional promotion of the sessions and the inclusion of attendance details at topics designated as essential as part of the overall members attendance figures. The view of the Committee on these proposals would be appreciated.

#### 19. New Audio Visual Conferencing System and Webcasting Facilities

Cardiff Council is seeking to update a number of its electronic meeting systems used to facilitate its formal public meetings into an integrated system which will include the provision of:

- a. A robust network in its City Hall Council Chamber which will facilitate the use of the any electronic equipment necessary to support the requirements of a public meeting.
- b. An integrated control system to manage its associated components which will include: microphones, cameras, electronic voting, display screens, display a speaker list, display speaker timings, display voting results, agenda management, device charging facilities, support for welsh translation, audio enhancement and support for those with hearing impairments.
- c. The provision of a separate portable digitised meeting system which is capable of being set up in a variety of venues which have wi-fi access without the need for a significant level of technical expertise.
- d. An effective webcasting service which is able to utilise the outputs from the City Hall Council Chamber or the portable digitised meeting system to provide a dual language broadcast facility which can be live streamed and archived for later viewing.

The Head of Democratic Services taking the lead in the delivery of these facilities which is due to be completed by May 2020. Some funding from the reserve funds held by Democratic Services will be used to support the achievement of this project.

#### 20. Democratic Engagement

The guidance for the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 refers to two of the 'Making the Connections' principles:

- i. **Citizens at the Centre:** services more responsive to users with people and communities involved in designing the way services are delivered.
- ii. **Public Engagement:** every person to have the opportunity to contribute, and connect with the hardest to reach.

The role of local government scrutiny is integral to helping people feel they are able to influence what goes on in their locality. Better communication about local decision making processes and greater representative participation will help ensure more direct experiences of community life inform strategic thinking and operational practice. The Measure places a requirement on local authorities to make arrangements that enable all persons who live or work in the area to bring to the attention of the relevant overview and scrutiny committees their views on any matter under consideration by the committee.

Guidance for the Measure suggested that “Council’s may wish to adopt a multi-method communication strategy that may inform and be guided by FWP’s since some of the issues identified may be of little interest to the public at large and of great interest to relatively small groups of people. Use of the most appropriate forms of media and communication for different sections of the public may encourage wider engagement and participation in the work of overview and scrutiny committees.

Although the required arrangements are in place, including: a scrutiny website, publication of scrutiny work programmes and the introduction of webcasting for all Scrutiny Committees. However, the most recent Wales Audit Office report, Overview and Scrutiny - Fit for the Future, identified that “the Council recognises that it needs to do more to engage the public and other interested groups in its scrutiny activity”.

To progress this aim, the Fit for the Future Action plan included the an action to “Consider the development of a Scrutiny/Democratic Services social media account to promote democratic activity including the publication and promotion of the FWP.” Any social media account will also provide an opportunity to promote other Democratic Services activities to encourage the residents of Cardiff to participate in the decision making processes of the Council.

Some initial work has been done to link the Council webcasts to “Facebook live” to encourage more viewers to the webcasts. The options for the development of a Democratic Services Communications Strategy including the possibility of creating and maintaining a Democratic / Scrutiny social media presence are being progressed. Any options other than do nothing are likely to require some resources in terms of appropriate levels of initial funding and a time commitment for team members to manage and maintain any social media presence.

## 21. Democratic Renewal

The Welsh Government has recently confirmed that the next Local Government Elections will be held in 2022. The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) is already co-ordinating working groups which follow on from the Diversity in Democracy programme that was used to promote greater participation of the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities in the democratic processes.

It is hoped that in October 2020 and as part of Local Democracy Week that the Council invite representatives from across Cardiff to “Potential Councillor” sessions to increase awareness of the roles and responsibilities of Elected Members. It is hoped that these events will assist in engaging those from all communities of Cardiff who may be considering standing for election in 2022. The event will be non-political but could be used to signpost individuals to the next steps in standing for office as a councillor and representing their communities as a member of Cardiff Council.

## 22. Continuing Efficiencies

The Democratic Services Team are continually reviewing processes and procedures to ensure that they are fit for purpose and form a valued part of the services provided by the team. Every opportunity to identify service efficiencies is being made. Should any proposed efficiency change the delivery of services to Elected Members, consultation will be undertaken before the implementation of any change in service.

The Committee is requested to consider those services which they currently receive and any services or facilities which are no longer required or should be reviewed to make efficiency savings.

## 23. Development of Cost Information

It is acknowledged that the detailed cost projections for these challenges is still being developed. The committee’s direction on those challenges which they consider a priority can be developed further and reported back to the next meeting on 13 January 2020.

## **Legal Implications**

24. Under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, Part 1, the Democratic Services Committee is responsible for overseeing the democratic services functions of the Council, ensuring this work is adequately resourced and reporting to full Council accordingly.

25. The Democratic Services functions (which must be discharged by the Head of Democratic Services) are defined as follows:

- (a) to provide support and advice:
  - to the authority in relation to its meetings;
  - to committees of the authority and the members of those committees;
  - to any joint committee which a local authority is responsible for organising and the members of that committee;
  - in relation to the functions of the authority's scrutiny committees,
  - to members of the authority, members of the executive and officers;
  - to each member of the authority in carrying out the role of member of the authority (but excluding a member’s role as an Executive member);
- (b) to promote the role of the authority's Scrutiny Committees;
- (c) to make reports and recommendations to Council in respect of the number and grades of staff required to discharge democratic services functions and the appointment, organisation and proper management of those staff; and
- (d) any other functions prescribed by the Welsh Ministers.

26. In determining how to exercise its functions, the Committee must have regard to the statutory guidance issued by the Welsh Ministers.
27. The information set out in the body of this report enables the Democratic Services Committee to oversee the work of democratic services, ensure the work is adequately resourced and report to full council as appropriate.

### **Financial Implications**

28. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. The budget position, and financial implications are contained within the body of the report, for which close financial monitoring will need to continue to inform decision-making and control.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

29. The Committee is requested to consider the report and provide any feedback on the support and services provided to Councillors and in particular those relating to:
  - a. The printing facilities provided to Councillors (paragraph 9. b. refers),
  - b. The printing options which could be used to assist in the achievement of the savings target (paragraph 9. g. refers),
  - c. The identification of any services or facilities which are no longer required or should be reviewed to make efficiency savings (paragraph 22 refers).

**GARY JONES**  
**HEAD of DEMOCRATIC SERVICES**  
09 October 2019

### **Background Papers:**

[Local Government \(Wales\) Measure 2011](#)

[Statutory Guidance from the Local Government Measure 2011](#)

[Cardiff Council – Overview and Scrutiny – Fit for the Future? - Wales Audit Office](#)