

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES – ACTIVITIES & SERVICE SUPPORT

Reason for this Report

1. The purpose of this report is to inform the Democratic Services Committee on the performance of the Council's Democratic Services since the last meeting 13 January 2020.

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.

Member Services

3. The Member Services Team has remained unchanged since the last meeting of the committee. At the start of the initial Coronavirus lockdown the Team began agile working and with the exception of a small number of essential tasks has continued to work remotely to provide the service.

Member Enquiries

4. The Members Enquiry System (MES) is an important tool to effectively deal with the issues raised by residents with their Councillor. Members Services team have operational responsibility for the Members Enquiry System (MES) which includes logging enquiries to provide Senior Managers with data on the key service issues, logging frequency and trends. The complexity and multi-service nature of some enquiries means that response times can exceed the 10 working day Service Level Agreement (SLA).
5. It was agreed with Community Councils, following the adoption by Cabinet of the Community Council Charter on 13 December 2018, that Member Services would continue to provide the MES service to the six Clerks Community Councils and that this would be reviewed annually.

6. The Members Services team is continually monitoring the MES and responses for Councillors and chasing or escalating matters as necessary. The team liaise closely with agents in Directorates and regularly meet with teams to deal with specific issues in particular in relation to Requests for Service.
7. In March 2020, the normal 10 day SLA for Member Enquiries was suspended due to need for the Authority to prioritise the support for the communities of Cardiff during the pandemic. During this time the Member Services team continued to record and process enquiries the decreased the number of enquiries that were received between March and June. Subsequently the levels have returned to near normal levels and the team undertook light touch monitoring of the progress of enquiries.
8. In November, the SLA was restored on the understanding that not all service areas would be able to achieve the 10 day target. Table 1 provides an update on the method of reporting Member Enquiries and provides a comparison of the previous year's data:

Table 1

Enquiry Method	Q4				
	2019-20		2020-21		Change
Total Enquiries	1565				
Member Self-serve	739	47.22%			
Logged by Officer	826	52.78%			
Time taken to close in days.	12.4				
	Q1				
Total Enquiries	1828		1300		-28.88%
Member Self-serve	744	40.70%	603	46.38%	13.9%
Logged by Officer	1084	59.30%	697	53.62%	
Time taken to close in days.	9.6		12.9		3.3 Days
	Q2				
Total Enquiries	1565		1764		12.72%
Member Self-serve	872	44.54%	844	47.85%	7.43%
Logged by Officer	1086	55.46%	920	52.15%	
Time taken to close in days.	10.5		11.5		1 Day
	Q3 ¹				
Total Enquiries	1128		845		-46.01%
Member Self-serve	739	47.22%	412	48.76%	3.25%
Logged by Officer	826	52.78%	433	51.24%	
Time taken to close in days.	11.1		7.2		-3.9 Days

9. The data above shows:
 - a. The initial decrease in the number of enquiries due to the pandemic.
 - b. The improvement in the number of self-serve enquiries that have been made. This increase could have been expected with the agile working of councillors due to lockdown. The initial increase has not been a sustained and further investigation may be needed to identify the barriers which are preventing the continued use of the self-serve system.
 - c. The increase in time taken to complete enquiries which reflects the impact that the pandemic has had particularly when the initial "lockdown" was in force and the agile working process were being developed.

¹ The 2020-21 figures represents the data at the time of publication and not for the full quarter.

10. The Nethelpdesk software which is used to support the MES was updated at the end of October. The Members Services Team received initial training and minor implementation issues were quickly addressed. Additional training is planned with the intention of utilising the new functionality to further developing the service.

Scrutiny Services

11. The Scrutiny Services Team began the year with 5 Principal Scrutiny Officers (PSOs) with one of them being on a temporary contract. A recruitment exercise was undertaken to address this temporary arrangement. One of the PSOs also decided to retire and this recruitment also enabled this vacancy to be filled. Alison Jones and Naomi Tomic were appointed from a high quality field of candidates who faced one of the first remotely held interview processes undertaken by the Council.
12. The scrutiny arrangements were revised following the lockdown and the Covid-19 Scrutiny Panel was created. Without the full complement of Scrutiny Committees it was agreed that three of the scrutiny officers could be redeployed until September. One PSO was seconded as the temporary Community Safety Manager with the other two seconded to the role of Team Leaders within the Council's Track and Trace Service.
13. The remaining two PSOs and the Scrutiny Research Officer provided support to the Covid-19 Scrutiny Panel and progressed plans for the implementation of the Impact of Scrutiny Model. The reduced Scrutiny Service supported 3 Panel meetings which provided a measured and proportionate scrutiny response during the early stages of the pandemic. It has been acknowledged that these scrutiny arrangements provided a appropriate level of assurance and an effective method for continuing the scrutiny function in challenging circumstances.
14. In July, Council agreed to the restoration of the 5 Scrutiny Committees and the redeployed staff were returned to support these standing committees.

External and internal Audits.

15. The Action Plan developed to meet the recommendation of the Wales Audit Office report entitled Overview and Scrutiny – Fit for the Future has been reviewed and is being progressed with an extended timeline. This should enable the successful completion of all of the WAO recommendations during 2021-22. An internal Audit of the Scrutiny Function was also completed in March. The objective of the audit was to ensure that *“Scrutiny Committees demonstrate effective outcomes from Scrutiny activities that represent good value”*. The recommendations of the internal Audit dovetail neatly with the of the outcomes of WAO Audit and all actions will be completed within the same timescale.

Corporate Apprentices – Democratic Services

16. The two Democratic Services Corporate Apprentices successfully completed their Business Administration Level 2 Foundation Apprenticeship with Cardiff & Vale College in June 2020. Unfortunately at the end of their apprenticeship there were no vacancies within the Democratic Services Team but they were supported to find other roles with one of them being employed in an administrative role within the Council.

17. The latest round of corporate apprentice recruitments is currently in progress but the Team was not currently in a position support any apprentices. The recruitment of apprentices will be kept under review for the future.

Electoral Services

18. The Electoral Services Team has continue to work remotely since the lockdown with only one member of the Team in the Office on any day to ensure that any essential tasks are completed.
19. In August the Electoral Services Manager decided to leave the Authority. A replacement has been recruited and will start on 4th January 2021. Interim management arrangements have been put in place until the new manager joins the Authority.
20. The team is continuing to work on the following key tasks:
- a. The Annual Canvass
 - b. Publication of the Electoral Register on 01 December 2020.
 - c. Promotion of the Franchise Change to enable 16-17 year olds to vote in the Senedd Election.
 - d. Preparation for the 2021 Elections:
 - Police and Crime Commissioner
 - Senedd
 - e. Preparation for the implementation Local Democracy and Boundary Commission recommendations for the 2022 Local Government Elections

Committee Services

21. The Committees team began the year with a vacancy in the role of Senior Committee and Member Services Officer. A recruitment was undertaken and Mandy Farnham was appointed to the role leaving a vacancy for a Committee and Member Services Officer.
22. To address this vacancy and the inability to recruit to the role of Note Taker for Education Appeals other options are being considered to provide career progression opportunities within the team and enhance its capacity to support and develop services for Elected Members.
23. Since March 2020 the team has developed the use of remote meetings and has successfully delivered a remote meeting capability which brings additional administrative and preparatory work.

Remote Meetings

24. Under statutory powers granted in the Coronavirus Act 2020, the Welsh Ministers have issued The Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Meetings) (Wales) Regulations 2020 ('the Regulations'), which temporarily relax the rules governing local authority meetings during the COVID-19 response period. The Regulations came into force on 22nd April 2020 and have effect until 30th April 2021.
25. The Regulations allow meetings of a local authority to be held remotely using any equipment or facility which allows Members to speak to, and be heard by, each other

(whether or not Members can also see each other). The new rules on remote attendance apply to any meetings of the Council, Cabinet, Committees or Joint Committees (or Community Councils) held before 1st May 2021.

26. Officers produced an Elected Member Protocol for Remote Meetings, covering pre-meeting preparation and effective Elected Member participation in a remote meeting. The webcasting of remote meetings could not be provided with the existing equipment and an alternative solution was procured which enabled “screen capture” of the remote meeting which could then be published remotely to the webcasting provider. As a result the authority has successfully held 58 remote meetings which have been either recorded and uploaded or streamed live to the [Council’s webcasting website](#).

27. Although remote meetings have been successfully delivered, a number of challenges still remain. These include:

- a. Technology – The Microsoft Teams software which is currently being used for remote meetings and has worked well, but does not have the facility to support simultaneous Welsh translations.
- b. Public access – the rules on public access to meetings are temporarily relaxed by the Regulations, but the Welsh Government’s accompanying Explanatory Memorandum says that Councils ‘may, if practicable, enable members of the public and the press to attend certain meetings remotely.’ In Cardiff, this has been achieved with Planning, Licensing and Scrutiny committee meetings which have supported public and external participation at their meetings.
- c. Welsh language – the Welsh Language Standards for public meetings remain unchanged, which means the Council should make available simultaneous translation from Welsh to English if anyone attending a meeting wishes to use the Welsh language. The Welsh Language Commissioner has acknowledged the exceptional challenges presented during the COVID crisis and indicated that, whilst he is keen to see opportunities to use the Welsh language maintained, he will deal with complaints ‘on a case-by-case basis and give careful attention to the exceptional and particular circumstances’.

Discussions are ongoing with IT solution providers and Bilingual Cardiff to seek suitable IT functionality for future meetings. However, as explained in previous paragraphs the current software limitations do not support this requirement and therefore consecutive translation is being used to support the use of the Welsh Language at remote meetings until a better solution can be provided.

- d. Duration of Remote Meetings – The initial intention was for remote meetings to focus on essential business and it was anticipated that these meetings should last approximately 2 hours. Experience has shown that with the return to more normal business, the length of some meetings has increased significantly with some lasting up to 8 hours.

Remote meetings are very intense for the participants particularly with them having to focus on a computer screen for an extended period of time. This

presents a number of challenges including maintaining the concentration of participants and reducing the effects of screen fatigue.

To reduce the adverse impact of working from home and participating in remote meetings, Elected Members and Council staff have been provided with guidance which includes some practical advice to help them to work safely and comfortably from home when using a computer, laptop or tablet. In addition the Governance Update report presented to Council in September proposed the estimated duration of remote meetings and breaks that should be taken for remote meetings in accordance with the Council's Health and Safety Guidance which reflects the requirements of t.

The estimated meeting duration and breaks have not been consistently applied which has created challenges for Elected Members, officers, external participants and the Committee Services Team who are required to work with for extended periods using their DSE to provide behind the scenes support meetings.

e. Resources for Remote Meetings

The preparation, recording and uploading of remote meetings is resource intensive for the Democratic Service Team. In addition to their normal meeting duties, remote meetings often require separate Democratic Services Officers to organise and co-ordinate the remote meeting, particularly those involving the public or external participants, whilst another is required to record and upload the meetings. Team members will also be involved in the essential work required to progress the provision of remote meetings. This will include the procurement and testing of equipment, the development of procedures and the delivery of training for anyone involved in the Council's Programme of Meetings.

28. Progress is continuing to be made on the provision of remote meetings these include:

a. Simultaneous Welsh Translation

The Welsh Government has been in discussions with Microsoft to progress its dual language functionality as a matter of urgency. Until a suitable solution is provided by Microsoft some work-around solutions and improvements are being considered and will be tested in the near future as part of the ongoing development of remote meetings.

Other remote meeting software has been considered. There are a number of concerns regarding the security, procurement, timescale of implementation, training, and support of the other software systems that are available. These difficulties may need to be overcome if Microsoft were unable to complete the implementation of the dual language facility in the near future.

The Head of Democratic Services and the ICT Services Manager will be attending a meeting in December being facilitated by the WLGA on behalf of all 22 Local Authorities to discuss remote meetings with the Welsh Government.

b. Hybrid Meetings

A hybrid meeting would allow a small number of participants to attend a socially distanced physical meetings using microphones and cameras, as in Committee Room 4, and link to a remote teams meeting with a larger number of remote attendees. The audio visual elements would be integrated and provide a seamless meeting for participating, viewing and broadcasting.

An initial survey has been undertaken in County Hall to determine the technical requirements to achieve a hybrid meeting. A quote and installation plan is being considered and if successful small scale testing will be undertaken to determine how this can be implemented on a wider scale.

Hybrid meetings would also support the increased use of the simultaneous Welsh translation for physical attendees and the broadcast viewers but NOT the remote attendees. The remote attendees would have to use work-round options until the suitable software was developed.

c. Printing of Meeting Documents

Use of the new Modern.gov application enables the creation and distribution of meeting documents in an electronic format. However using this application on a single device whilst in a remote meeting is proving to be challenging for some Elected Members. A survey of Elected Members has been undertaken to establish their personal needs for the provision of printed meeting documents. Although this increases the overall printing costs it will assist in effective budget management for the printing and distribution of these documents.

Webcasting

28. The Council has procured its webcasting contract which was awarded to Public-I. The 3 year contract has enabled the Council to reduce its webcasting costs and to maintain the volume of webcasting hour. It should be noted that it was initially planned to have only 100 hours of webcasting in 2020-21 with each of the remaining 2 years of the contract having 200 hours of webcasting hours to support the requirements of the Local Government Bill.
29. Public meetings were advertised on the Council's website and at the time of publication the information in Table 3 below provides a summary of the public meetings that had been webcast since 01 Jan 20

Table 3

Time Period		Meetings	Duration (Hrs)	Live	Archive	Total
01-Jan-20	31-Mar-20	14	42:10:52	2441	512	1,929
01 Apr-20	25-Nov-20	58	105:35:34	750	8,408	10,182
Total		72	138:39:49	3191	8,920	12,111

30. Table 4 below shows the breakdown of the information in Table 3 and includes number, duration and views of the meetings by committee type that were webcast from 01 Jan 20. It should be noted that the target for the number of views was 5,500 for the 2020-21 period. Due to the larger than expected number of webcasting hours that were used in the six months until September, an additional 50 hours of webcast time has been procured to ensure that the requirements of the Regulations were met and any costs were kept to a minimum.

Table 4

Body	Meetings	Total Duration	All views	Live views	Archive views
Council	9	23:45:54	3967	1428	2539
Audit Committee	4	07:21:26	325	44	281
Cabinet	7	06:42:53	2429	221	2208
Planning Committee	9	15:34:02	2953	1124	1829
Scrutiny					
COVID-19 Scrutiny Panel	3	15:12:06	319	69	250
Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee	3	08:16:52	149	22	127
Community & Adult Services Scrutiny Committee	6	14:39:58	374	57	317
Economy & Culture Scrutiny Committee	7	08:23:10	320	46	274
Environmental Scrutiny Committee	7	14:47:26	311	38	273
Policy Review and Performance Scrutiny Committee	6	12:42:37	457	70	387
Totals	32	74:02:09	1930	302	1628
Other Meetings					
Local Authority Governor Panel	1	00:03:06	22	1	21
Pensions Committee	1	00:20:13	14	4	10
Licensing Committee	2	01:14:03	78	10	68
Public Protection Committee	3	05:41:16	268	39	229
Standards & Ethics Committee	1	01:48:11	56	11	45
Totals	8	09:06:49	438	65	373
Joint Committees					
Glamorgan Archives Joint Committee	2	01:47:19	40	6	34
Prosiect Gwyrdd	1	00:19:17	29	1	28
Totals	3	2:06:36	69	7	62
	Meetings	Total Duration	All views	Live views	Archive views
Grand Total	72	138:39:49	12111	3191	8920

Modern.Gov

31. Modern.Gov is the Committee Management System used by the Democratic Services team to co-ordinate the production of agenda, minutes, Forward Plans and provides a dual language website with an array of information. Modern.Gov has been procured for a further three years and members of the team were playing an active role in developing its functionality.
32. The new Modern.gov App is available is available for use with IOS and Windows based systems. It is a significant improvement on the old version with greater stability, wider functionality and it's easier to use. The new App is available for all Council devices and provides access to those with appropriate permissions to public and exempted meeting information. This enables the authority to provide a reduced paper solution for the production and circulation of reports, minutes and agenda.

Office 365 for Elected Members

33. 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 would no longer be required and provides more collaborative features which should enable users to work more effectively.
34. The migration of Democratic Services Team to Office 365 was completed on 31 August 2019 and all Elected Members are expected to have completed their migration by 01 December 20.

Members ICT

35. Following the 2017 Local Government Elections many Elected Member were returned to office and decided that they would prefer to keep the ICT equipment which they had been previously issued as they were comfortable with its use and the equipment provided the necessary functionality. The equipment that was issued included an array of diverse of range of equipment including windows tablets, iPads Laptops and other devices include iPhones and other android smartphones.
36. With the introduction of Office 365, remote meetings and agile working exposed significant compatibility and capability issues with the existing ICT equipment. Many smartphones were unable to utilise the functionality of the Office 365 software due to the age of the device and its inability to update its operating software essential to support its effective operation and maintain the security of the device.
37. This situation was replicated with the introduction of Microsoft Teams for remote meetings. The basic requirements of a laptop or tablet to run Teams meant that the older devices needed to be replaced to ensure that the user could securely join remote meetings. Elected Members have also requested to have additional ancillaries to assist them with agile working.
38. A total of five smartphones and 17 Laptops have been purchased to ensure that Elected Members were able to utilise the functionality of the new softwares.

Member Development

Essential and other Member Learning sessions

39. A number of essential members learning sessions have been identified previously but the team has had a lack of capacity to support the progression of these activities.

Identified learning has included:

- Planning – for all Members
- Local Development Plan
- Rights of a Child in Practice Parts 1 and 2
- Biodiversity & Natural Environment (Cabinet decision)

A plan to deliver all current essential E-Learning and face to face (remote) member development will be provided to the next meeting of the Committee in January. The Committee is requested to identify any priorities for the delivery of the essential and other Member development topics.

E-Learning

40. The implementation of the Elected Members E-Learning portal has been completed and all members have been informed and provided with the relevant links and guidance to complete the Cyber security and Violence against women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence E-Learning modules which were designated as essential learning.

At its last meeting the Committee identified other learning which should be undertaken which included Corporate Safeguarding, Fraud Awareness and Corporate Parenting. Further reminders and monitoring has not been undertaken to date but this may be something that the team will need to prioritise in the near future.

Other Member Learning

41. Although the progression of the planned member development activities has been curtailed in recent months, there has been a significant number of development sessions to ensure all Members were able to attend remote meeting and gain an understanding of the procedure that were to be used during remote public meetings.

A few Elected Members have also identified personal development activities which have been supported and this has enabled them to attend seminars and conferences remotely.

Member Wellbeing

42. During the pandemic Elected Members, Council employees and the residents of Cardiff have had to adjust to the challenges of their personal wellbeing. Wherever possible the Team has supported any requested for assistance and has promoted the use of the [Carefirst services](#) to provide additional wellbeing support to councillor.
43. Councillor Sandrey has requested that more be done to support Elected Member in respect of wide contact with their peers. In normal circumstances it was easy for Councillors to interact with each other outside of their personal and political groups. The introduction of remote meetings has prevented this type of friendly interaction and may contribute to the isolation of some individual. Councillor Sandrey requested that this situation be addressed potential with the development of remote “Coffee Mornings” or “High Tea” informal remote meet ups for councillors. The Committee is requested to consider this request and identify if this facility would be useful and to identify how it should be provided.

Legal Implications

44. 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. .
45. 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.

46. In determining how to exercise its functions, the Committee must have regard to the statutory guidance issued by the Welsh Ministers.

47. 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

48. The increased expenditure on ICT equipment and printing will be offset by the reduction in costs for webcasting provision, member development, traveling and other member expenses. Therefore there are no financial implications directly arising from this report, with any service and activity costs to be contained within the revenue budget.

49. Initial discussions on the funding for development of hybrid remote meetings and the associated costs have been held. Considerations are ongoing, but it has been identified that these costs could be met from the capital funding that has been allocated for the procurement of a new conferencing system as the provision of a hybrid facility will form a stepping stone to achieving the requirements of the new system.

RECOMMENDATION

50. The Committee is requested to consider the detail in the report and:

- a. note the content of the report.
- b. provide any feedback on the Support Services provided to Councillors
- c. receive a report on the updated Member Development programme for 2021 at the next meeting of committee.
- d. Identify any matters it would wish to add to the Work Programme.

GARY JONES
HEAD of DEMOCRATIC SERVICES
27 November 2020

Background Papers: None