

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

30 NOVEMBER 2020

Present: County Councillor Jones-Pritchard(Chairperson)
County Councillors Burke-Davies, Bowden, Goddard, Goodway,
Kelloway, Lay, Naughton, Keith Parry, Mia Rees and Sandrey

27 : 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.

28 : MINUTES

To minutes of the meeting held on 30 January 2020 were approved by the Committee as a correct record and were signed by the Chairperson.

29 : DEMOCRATIC SERVICES ACTIVITIES AND PERFORMANCE REPORT (TO FOLLOW)

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.

The Member Services Team had 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.

The Members Enquiry System (MES) was 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).

The Committee drew attention the information in the report, referring to Members self-serving, which was 47.22%. It was important that the Members Services Team were utilised to capacity to support the enquiries, going forward into 2021.

The Committee was advised that possible improvement in the number of self-serve enquiries could have been expected with the agile working of councillors due to lockdown. The initial increase has not been sustained and further investigation may be needed to identify the barriers which are preventing the continued use of the selfserve system.

The Committee was provided with information on the new NethelpDesk system supporting members enquiries, Halo. Halo was being rolled out across the organisation and would be monitored by Members Services. The Members Services Team would have access to monitor and distribute all enquiries.

Members of the Committee were of the view that if possible members should be logging their own enquiries, which allowed Members Services Team to address alternative matters such as ward issues and mail merges.

The Chairperson suggested that a note be sent to all members to encourage the use of the self-serve system.

The Committee was provided with an update on Scrutiny Services.

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.

The Committee was advised that 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.

The Committee was provided with an update in relation to Electoral Services.

In August the Electoral Services Manager decided to leave the Authority. A replacement has been recruited and would start on 4th January 2021. Interim management arrangements had been put in place until the new manager joins the Authority.

Electoral Services were also dealing with matters in relation to Boundary Review.

The Committee was provided with an update in relation to Committee Services.

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.

To address this vacancy and the inability to recruit to the role of Note Taker for Education Appeals other options were being considered to provide career progression opportunities within the team and enhance its capacity to support and develop services for Elected Members.

Members of the Committee drew attention to the vacant posts and asked if the Council used exit interviews to establish why that particular member of staff was leaving.

The Committee was assured that exit interview were provided in order to identify the reasons for leaving. In relation to Education Appeals this was as a result of the volume of work and the salary scale.

Members of the Committee asked why the post of Note Taker for Education Appeals could not be supported by Education.

The Committee was informed that the role of Note Taker for Education Appeals had to independent of Education. To date a Members Services Officer had supported this role.

The Committee was advised that under statutory powers granted in the Coronavirus Act 2020, the Welsh Ministers had 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 had effect until 30th April 2021.

The Regulations allowed meetings of a local authority to be held remotely using any equipment or facility which allowed Members to speak to, and be heard by. The new rules on remote attendance applied to any meetings of the Council, Cabinet, Committees or Joint Committees (or Community Councils) held before 1st May 2021.

The Committee discussed the impacts of remote meetings, with 6-7 hour Council meetings and the impact this would have of both staff and members.

The Committee discussed the possibility of the Council using Zoom as a communication platform, along with the possibility of Hybrid meetings.

Members of the Committee suggested that the Constitution Committee address the length of meetings and possibly amend procedure rules.

The Committee was provided with information on the operation of Hybrid Meetings and how they would be managed.

Members explained that in order for meetings to be run accordingly, the meetings had to be chaired accordingly and in line with Council meeting procedure rules. The Constitution Committee could also look at voting methods.

The Committee agreed that the Constitution Committee look at the procedure rules.

The Committee was provided with an update on Webcasting.

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.

The Committee was provided with information on Member Development.

The use of the Cardiff Academy and how certifications were issued following completion.

The following training programmes were being organised:

1. Local Development Plan – Consultation
2. Biodiversity
3. Corporate Parenting Training
4. Cyber Security

The Committee discussed members wellbeing and a possible virtual social event would be organised in the near future.

30 : INDEPENDENT REMUNERATIONS PANEL DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22

The Committee considered the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales report.

This was the thirteenth Annual Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (the Panel), and the tenth published under the requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 (as amended).

Although this draft Report was in respect of the Panel's determinations for 2021/2022 consideration has inevitably been influenced by the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. The ongoing issues affected the operation of all local authorities and would continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

As with all the Panel's Annual Reports the determinations on member remuneration were underpinned by the principles set out in Section 1. In May 2020 the Panel published a Supplementary Report that set out specific principles relating to the provision of financial support for care needs. These were incorporated in Section 10 and would be included in future Annual Report.

The Committee discussed the Principles of Members Remuneration, Codes of Behaviour and payments to Elected Members.

The Committee noted the recommendations in the report.

31 : CONSULTATIONS REPORT

The Committee considered the Consultations Report.

The report was to enable the Committee to consider the Welsh Government's consultation documents, and the Committee's responses in respect of:

- Changes to adoption absence for local authority members
- Arrangements for the Access to Elected Office Fund Background

Adoption Absence 2.

The Family Absence for Members of Local Authorities (Wales) Regulations 2013 (the Regulations) govern adopter's absence (the form of leave taken by an individual adopting a child). The Welsh Government proposed amending the 2013 Regulations so as to extend the period of adopter's absence for members of councils from 2 weeks to 26 weeks and, as far as practicable, to align procedures relating to adopter's absence with those which currently govern maternity absence.

Access to Elected Office Fund 3.

The Welsh Government was committed to increasing diversity across all aspects of public life. This included tackling the barriers which prevent individuals' active participation in local democracy through standing for elected office. Welsh Ministers have committed to identifying ways to address these barriers and increase opportunities for underrepresented groups to play a full role in supporting and representing their communities.

RESOLVED:

The Committee Agreed to:

1. note the provisions of the Welsh Government consultation documents, set out in Appendix A and Appendix B, in so far as they relate to matters within the remit of the Committee, and provide comments as appropriate; and
2. delegate authority to the Head of Democratic Services, in consultation with the Chair, to prepare and submit a response to the Welsh Government's consultation on behalf of the Committee.

32 : FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME (TO FOLLOW)

The purpose of this report was to propose topics for inclusion on the Democratic Services Committee Forward Work Programme.

The following is a list of the activities that have been previously agreed or proposed:

- a. Review the Elected Member Learning and Development Strategy
- b. Creation of Elected Member Role Descriptions.
- c. Implications of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill
- d. Delivery of a Potential Candidate session for those wishing to stand in the 2022 Local Government Elections
- e. Proposals for Local Democracy Events
- f. Review of the Member Mentoring scheme
- g. The Personal Review process for elected members
- h. Member Development Programme 2021-8. The following paragraphs identifies key topics which could be considered for inclusion in the Democratic Services Committee's Work Programme for 2021

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- a. Induction programme for the Councillors elected in 2022 Local Government Elections
- b. The identification of ICT and associated equipment necessary for Elected Members following the 2022 Local Government Election
- c. The identification of services that are considered essential for Elected Members to enable the prioritisation of the Democratic Services Teams finite resources.
- d. Member Surveys – Annual and Exit

The Committee discussed budget issues including local authority costs.

RESOLVED:

The Committee AGREED to:

Recommend that the Democratic Services Committee considers this report and identifies and prioritises topics for consideration at future meetings of the committee.

33 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

There were no urgent items.

34 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING - 11 JANUARY 2021

The meeting terminated at 7.09 pm