

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

6 FEBRUARY 2023

Present: Councillor Cowan(Chairperson)
Councillors Ash-Edwards, Davies, Derbyshire, Goodway,
Naughton, Palmer, Jackie Parry, Simmons and Thomson

55 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllr Lay. Cllr Davies indicated that he would be late joining the meeting.

Members were advised that there was a vacancy on the Committee as Cllr McEvoy had resigned from the Committee due to other commitments. Cllr McEvoy has indicated that he would reconsider whether he is able to rejoin the Committee following the Council meeting in May.

56 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

57 : MINUTES

To minutes of the meeting held on 28 November 2022 were approved by the Committee as a correct record and were signed by the Chairperson.

58 : MEMBER INDUCTION UPDATE

The Committee was provided with an update on the progress of Member induction following the Local Government Elections in 2022. Members were advised that updated figures on the number of Members that have completed mandatory training modules would be provided in the Annual Report. Officers receive weekly updates on mandatory training sessions completed and provide the information to Group Whips.

Members were advised that the response to an online feedback survey on mandatory training was low.

Members were invited to ask questions or make observations, which are summarised as follows:

- Members sought clarification on whether members need to have completed finance training in order to vote on the Budget. Officers advised that finance training was not designated as mandatory as there was no legal or constitutional requirement for members to complete it. Additional training will be provided on the Budget process and is recommended for Members who have not been through the process before.
- Members expressed surprise and disappointment that the level of completion of mandatory training was still not 100%, and expressed the view that a

message should be sent to Cllrs regarding their duty to attend, with a follow-up letter to be sent to the Standards and Ethics Committee. Officers advised that Group Whips are being apprised of the situation.

- Members suggested that clearer information be provided to Cllrs about the duration of the Marketplace event. Officers advised that it had been suggested that the stalls be available at a later date, and this would be examined.
- Members proposed that there ought in future to be training on Modern.gov or its equivalent for new Members. Officers advised that integrating training on Modern.gov with training on the conference system or Members Enquiry System could be examined.
- Members discussed the possibility of conducting surveys using the Microsoft Teams survey tool during training sessions. Officers advised that this could be examined. A simple poll could be conducted through the Chat function, and this could be trialled.
- Members suggested that Cllrs be reminded that their Council Tax payments need to be up to date in order for them to be able to vote on the Budget. Officers advised that Members would not be able to participate in the Budget meeting if their payments were not up to date. Officers check with Finance whether Cllrs are behind with payments, and follow up with Cllrs if they are.
- Members discussed how to improve awareness of the induction process among candidates prior to election. The suggestion was made that information on the process be circulated earlier, before or shortly after the Christmas period prior to the election. Members suggested that the information be made available on the Council website and advertised on social media, in order to reach independent candidates and candidates from parties not represented on the Council. This should be done in the September prior to the election. Officers advised that the induction planning should begin at the beginning of 2026 so that the information can be presented on the website before the end of the year. Officers advised that the Member Development portals will be examined to improve public engagement. These could then be used to publicise information on induction.

RESOLVED:

- 1 To note the content of the report
- 2 To assist the Head of Democratic Services to identify opportunities to:
 - a. Improve awareness of the induction process to candidates standing for election;
 - b. Achieve a higher level of evaluation form responses for any training event.

59 : DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE SURVEY

The Committee was provided with an update on the outcome of the Demographic Profile survey, also known as the Diversity survey, undertaken following the Election

in 2022; and a comparison with a similar survey undertaken in the 2017- 2022 administration prior to the election.

Members were advised that there had been an increase in female respondents; a reduction in Members aged over 65; a reduction in married Members; and an increase in Members who do not regard themselves as belonging to a religion. The percentage of Members from a BAME background is lower than in the Cardiff population. Compared to the previous administration, there is a higher proportion of Members whose first language is Welsh, and of Members with Welsh language skills.

It is expected there will be exit survey in 2026-27, with questions from Democratic Services Committee and Standards and Ethics Committee. The latter committee is looking at conducting a survey in 2024 that will include questions on inappropriate behaviour.

Members were invited to ask questions or make observations, which are summarised as follows:

- Members suggested that future surveys should include an option in the marital status section for Members who are in a relationship but not cohabiting.
- Members wondered whether newly elected Members were unaware of the opportunities to learn Welsh provided by the Council. Officers advised that Members had been made aware of the free courses.
- Members discussed the younger age profile of the Council and the fact that two thirds of Members work full or part-time. It was suggested that the timing and scheduling of meetings ought to be adjusted to reflect this. Officers advised that the calendar of meetings for 2023-24 was in preparation. Most meetings begin at 4.30pm or later, with only meetings of regulatory committees, such as Licensing, Planning and Public Protection, taking place during the day.

RESOLVED:

1. To note the information set out in the report and Appendix A.
2. To approve that a review of the questions of future surveys within the remit of the Democratic Services Committee be undertaken.
3. To approve that a survey to support the remits of both the Democratic Services Committee and the Standards and Ethics Committee be developed for delivery early in 2024.

60 : DEMOCRATIC SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT 2022

The Committee was provided with an outline of the report, which detailed the work of the Democratic Services Team during 2022, including Member induction, opening Scrutiny to greater public engagement, and webcasting.

Members were advised that the team is understaffed by 1 Grade 4 post. Recruitment for an additional Grade 6 post will get underway shortly.

Members were invited to ask questions or make observations, which are summarised as follows:

- Members expressed their gratitude to the Democratic Services Team for their hard work over the year, and praised the level of detail in the report.
- Members suggested that a video to accompany the report be prepared, to encourage people to learn more about the work of the Democratic Services Team and Committee.

RESOLVED:

1. To delegate authority to the Head of Democratic Services, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee, to finalise the Annual Report, having regard to comments provided by Members of the Committee; and
2. To agree that the Annual Report be presented to full Council by the Chair of the Committee.

61 : ACTIVITIES & SERVICE SUPPORT

The Committee was provided with an update on the performance of the Council's Democratic Services since the last meeting on 28 November 2022, which included information on an upgrade to the EasyConf conferencing system; the Member Enquiries System; and Member development.

Members were invited to ask questions or make observations, which are summarised as follows:

- Members discussed whether it would be appropriate to increase the response time for answering Member enquiries from 10 to 15 working days for routine enquiries, with a shorter window for urgent enquiries. The view was expressed that the response time for urgent enquiries should be 1 week. Officers advised that they would bring back a definition of what is an urgent enquiry to the next meeting, and consult with Senior Officers on whether a 1-week response time was achievable.

RESOLVED:

To note the report.

62 : 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.

RESOLVED:

To approve the Committee's Forward Work Programme.

63 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

No urgent items were received.

64 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting is to be confirmed.

The meeting terminated at 5.15 pm