

A Report of the Democratic Services Committee

Review of Support to Members

January 2016



**The City of Cardiff Council
Cyngor Dinas Caerdydd**

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TERMS OF REFERENCE

Under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 the Review of Support to Members Inquiry was tasked to review the provision and adequacy of staff, accommodation and other resources made available to discharge the Council's Democratic Services function and support to Elected Members.

The purpose of the Inquiry was to:

- (1) receive an outline of current direct resources relating to support for Members;
- (2) consider guidance and protocols on support; and use of resources;
- (3) receive a summary of the range of duties and services currently provided to Members including level of demand and usage;
- (4) review analysis of Member surveys;
- (5) consider and make recommendations on future provision and services for Members within the budgetary framework;
- (6) note that the provision of services outside of the Directorate namely Members Enquiry Service provided by C2C would be the subject of a separate report to the Committee in March 2016.

The remit of the Task Group **did not** include the provision of Members IT as this was managed through the Members IT Project Group and was currently under review and the Democratic services Committee would receive an update report at its meeting on 20 January 2016.

EVIDENCE RECEIVED

The following documentation was received and discussed:

- Democratic Services Budget 2015/16 approved by Full Council 26 February 2015 – directly managed by the Committee & Members Services Manager:
 - (1) Elected Members - includes Members Allowances; expenses & Training;
 - (2) Committee and Members Services – service budget which includes employee costs.
- Democratic Services Staff Structure 2015/16 – Appendix 1 attached.
- Democratic Services Strategy 2014/17 agreed by the Democratic Services Committee on 2 April 2014 -
[http://cardiff.moderngov.co.uk/Data/Democratic%20Services%20Committee/20140402/Agenda/Member%20Training%20and%20Development%20Strategy%20and%20Action%20Plan%20\(174k\).pdf](http://cardiff.moderngov.co.uk/Data/Democratic%20Services%20Committee/20140402/Agenda/Member%20Training%20and%20Development%20Strategy%20and%20Action%20Plan%20(174k).pdf)
- Members Handbook Extract - Guide to Elected Member Support Services current level of services available since May 2012.
http://cmsweb.cardiff.gov.uk/cardiff/objview.asp?Object_ID=14936&

Democratic Services Functions

- List of duties & services provided by Member Services as reported to Democratic Services Committee on 30 September 2015.
<https://cardiffintranet.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s6962/Item%206%20-%20Democratic%20Services%20Update%20Report%20for%20DS%20Committee.pdf>
- Elected Member demand & use of Member Services;
- Number of Council; Committee and other meetings serviced by Committee and Member Services in 2014/15 Municipal Year – Appendix 2 attached

Members Surveys - analysis

- Communication with Members – 'Let's Talk about it' - October 2015 – Appendix 3 attached
- Extract from - Scrutiny Research Questionnaire – reported to Democratic Services Committee on 14 October 2014
[http://cardiff.moderngov.co.uk/Data/Democratic%20Services%20Committee/20141016/Agenda/Members%20Library%20Service%20\(807k\).pdf](http://cardiff.moderngov.co.uk/Data/Democratic%20Services%20Committee/20141016/Agenda/Members%20Library%20Service%20(807k).pdf)

Legislative Updates

- Local Government (Wales) Bill (2nd Bill) – Consultation started November 2015 – reported to Democratic Services Committee on 20 January 2016.
<http://cardiff.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s8704/Item%20-%20Report%20to%20Democratic%20Services%20Committee%20-%20Final.pdf>

Benchmarking Research

- Benchmarking data on support to members undertaken in December 2015 & January 2016 with Welsh Local Authorities; other good practice Authorities; and data sourced from the Association of Democratic Services Officers.

KEY FINDINGS

The information provided to the Task Group was considered in detail over two meetings on 14 December 2015 and 11 January 2016 and the following findings were agreed:

1. The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 places a duty on the Committee to ensure sufficient support is provided to Elected Members so that they can effectively carry out their roles as community leaders and duties in the operation of the local authority;
2. Members and Committee Services provision had been amalgamated as a combined service in 2008 with a resultant realignment of management and a reduction in 2 Manager's posts. Over the last 5 years further reductions have been made in dedicated Member support posts to meet savings targets and to take account of increased use of technology by the new cohort of Elected Members. This has resulted in services to Members becoming more reactive than proactive and support functions not being actively promoted as capacity to provide a service to all 75 members was no longer viable.
3. As part of the 2015/16 budget the dictation bank provision was removed along with the remaining permanent Member Services Support Officer post.
4. The current Member Services support provision is one full-time post which has been filled on a temporary basis until 31 March 2016 through the virement of resources from vacant posts in Scrutiny Research.
5. Reductions in Democratic Services support has also resulted in no dedicated support for Member Development and support to Members to produce Annual Reports; Members IT etc. These tasks have fallen to the Committee & Members Services Manager and the Committee support team.
6. The 2014/15 Budget cut resulted in the removal of the refreshments budget line for Elected Members which included the hot drinks provision in Members Business facilities at City Hall and County Hall – although to date these facilities have been maintained on a reduced cost basis, funded by the virement of resources to ensure a balanced budget.
7. The provision of Members hard copy Yearbook was also removed as part of the 2014/15 savings.
8. Savings made in 2015/16 on photocopying and postage costs were offset against the repayment of the capital spend for the Members IT project which is required to be paid over 3 years.

9. In 2016/17 the Directorate has been set a corporate target of savings which the Director Governance and Legal Services would only met by offering up two vacant posts from a team of four in Scrutiny Research and by making a further reduction to the photocopying budget. This proposal would result in no future funding of the temporary Members Services Officer post in Committee & Members Services.
10. Demand for support services by Members is variable; it includes preparing and, or formatting ward correspondence including mail merges and emails; processing service requests; providing general information on services & contact numbers; providing meetings information; room bookings etc.,
 - Regular Daily usage - 7 Members;
 - Weekly usage - 17 Members;
 - Occasional users - 27 Members;
 - Ward Surgery Notices – all Wards annually and 9 Wards requiring updates or Street Surgery notices on a regular basis;
 - Newsletters/ Residents information - 5 Wards on a regular basis;
10. The provision of support services for Elected Member was particularly important for those Members with no political affiliation; single Member Ward Councillors; those with large case work; or those with specific support requirements.
11. The Task Group received and considered the information contained in the Elected Members Handbook May 2012 on the level services provided to Members in relation to general ward correspondence; mail merges; and duplication of documents and identified the need for these services to be maintained and for the information to be clearer and less ambiguous.
12. The range of duties undertaken by Committee Support Officers was a significant work load, and was not uniquely support to Council and committee meetings but included additional tasks such as: - organising and webcasting Council and Planning meetings; the operation of the City Hall Conference System; managing and developing Modern.Gov; braille translation of documents; promoting access and arranging public participation.
13. The number and frequency of meetings previously reviewed by the Constitution Committee required revisiting including reassessing the focus of Council meetings and whether improvements could be made to its effectiveness; its suitability as a public engagement forum and whether there were other ways of managing the meeting; dealing with Elected Member questions and public questioning; improving decision making processes; and increasing participation and engagement. It was noted that this was a matter for the Constitution Committee, however the number of meetings directly impacted on the resourcing of the Committee & Member Services team.

14. It was noted that the Members IT review as a result of Members concerns was in progress, and that a trial of an upgraded model had been evaluated and had proved to provide greater accessibility and improved user experience. A report would be submitted to the 20th January 2015 Democratic Services Committee.
15. The findings of the survey on Communication with Members - 'Let's Talk about it' - October 2015 and the extract from - Scrutiny Research Questionnaire - October 2014 were noted.
16. The Welsh Government is consulting on a second Local Government (Wales) Bill. The stated purpose of the Bill was to establish new Counties by the merger of existing Counties and County Boroughs, to establish a new and reformed legislative framework for local government democracy, accountability, performance and finance, and to establish a statutory Public Services Staff Commission. The consultation intended to provide the opportunity for comments on the proposals to be considered by the Welsh Government after the May 2016 elections, to inform its decision on how to proceed. The deadline for responses is 15 February 2016.
17. Part 4 of the draft Bill imposes statutory duties upon the Members of the proposed new County Councils relating to the performance of their functions. Members are placed under a statutory obligation to attend meetings; hold regular ward surgeries; answer correspondence within 14 days; complete compulsory training courses; and publish an annual report. Although the requirements on Members are not dissimilar to those already supported by the Members Services team, the statutory nature of these requirements would mean that there is a need for adequate dedicated administrative and officer support for Members to fulfil their obligations.
18. The draft Bill places a duty on each Member of a County Council to prepare an annual report, which must be submitted to the Council's Head of Democratic Services. The annual report must be about the Member's activities as a Member of that Council during the 12 month period to which the report relates and it must set out the results of those activities, if those results are known to the member (draft Bill, Part 4, Chapter 2). All annual reports are published on the Council's website and there will be a requirement for these to be published bilingually.
19. The procedure for handling complaints about an alleged failure by a Councillor to abide by the duties imposed is set out in Chapter 3, Part 4 of the draft Bill. The Council's Standard & Ethics Committee was advised of these requirements at their December meeting and have prepared their response to the consultation.
20. A summary of research on good practice in other Local Authorities was provided in order to benchmark future provision of services to Members in Cardiff. Details were obtained directly from the following authorities: - Gwynedd,

Carmarthenshire, Swansea, Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen, Nottingham; with data sourced from the Association of Democratic Services Officers (ADSO) from Kirklees, Islington, Kensington & Chelsea and Medway. Three of the local authorities provide Political Assistants to the main political groups approved by Council under the provisions of Section 9 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and are funded by the authority; the majority of the Councils Members support teams undertake research, diary management, chased up outstanding queries; provided audio dictation facilities for correspondence; managed ward surgery information; and provided an information service. Details of direct staff resources were also identified and it was clear that in comparison Cardiff Members received less dedicated support.

The Task Group identified a number of improvements that were ongoing and other areas that could be managed and developed to support Members in the future which would require a level of staff resources : -

- a) It was welcomed that following requests by Members, Scrutiny Chair's letters issued following meetings now appeared electronically alongside the minutes of the meeting agenda page. The next step was to include all Chair letters and Cabinet responses for the whole municipal year.
- b) Improve communication from the Welsh Government on their work programmes and published data;
- c) Refresh the Members Handbook and ensure it is kept up to date and details such as organisation charts of senior managers and operational managers including contact details are published alongside the Handbook on the intranet pages;
- d) Reference copies of Council papers to be kept in an easily accessible location;
- e) Continue to develop and improve the data available; and review the indexing on the Members on Line Information System (MOLIS) so that it is easily accessible to members and include the following data if available: -
 - Registers of Council licences for example, Skips, Scaffolding, Alcohol, Food, Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMO) Licences
 - Officer decision register on Cardiff Council website to have same level of detail as that e-mailed to Councillors
 - Section 106 register sent to the relevant ward members
 - Comparative performance information for school governors.
 - Contractor complaints/performance: work scheduling, contract management and how contracts can be reviewed
 - Member briefings and training materials after despatch or delivery
 - Good Council practice for example Association of Public Service Excellence, National Strategic Indicators (NSI's) and Public. Accountability Measures (PAM's)
 - Performance data with other Welsh Councils and core cities in England.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the completion of this inquiry the Committee recommended that:

1. The Director Governance and Legal Services submit a growth bid for 2016/17 to fund a permanent Member Support Assistant post and no reduction in services to Members be made to the Committee & Member Services budget.
2. The Constitution Committee undertake a review of the number and frequency of meetings; the effectiveness and purpose of Council meetings; and the remits of the committees to see if there is scope to combine roles or revise terms of reference to avoid duplication.
3. The Elected Members Handbook May 2012 be reviewed and updated to make clearer the services available to Members and delete provisions that have already been removed such as the dictation service. That this provision be subject to the permanent support arrangement as identified in Recommendation (1) above.
4. The Democratic Services Committee receive a report from the Director Governance and Legal Services on the Welsh Government consultation on the draft second Local Government Wales Bill and provide their comments to input into the consultation process in particular to highlight concerns on the restrictive nature of the requirements and the need for direct consultation with Members by Welsh Government on the future proposals.
5. The Committee and Members Services Manager in preparation for the next Municipal Year considers how the provision of the helpful information formerly in the Members Yearbook can be made available in an economical format to Members if the consensus of Members is that this would be a valuable tool that they wish to re-introduce.
6. The Director Governance and Legal Services submit a bid for 2016/17 to re-instate an appropriate budget for the provision of hot drinks facilities at a minimal cost in the County and City Hall Members rooms, and that the Committee & Members Services Manager negotiate a base cost for this provision with Cardiff Catering.
7. Cardiff Catering is requested to ask the vending service provider to provide more healthy and less sugary food in its facilities.
8. The list of suggestion made by Members for improved support is taken on board as part of the provision of the permanent support arrangement as identified in Recommendation (1) above.

METHODOLOGY

Members of the Inquiry included: -

Members of the Democratic Services Committee - County Councillors Clark (Chairperson), Goddard, Hyde, Murphy and Robson.

As it was felt important to consult the Party Groups, Party Whips were invited to participate - County Councillors Holden (Plaid), Hunt (Labour), Margaret Jones (Liberal Democrats) and McKerlich (Conservative).

The Cabinet Member for Skills, Safety & Engagement was invited to attend the meetings and received the documentation but unfortunately due to other commitments had to send his apologies.

The Inquiry took place over two meetings which took place on 14 December 2015 and 11 January 2016.

The Members received evidence from Marie Rosenthal, Director Governance & Legal Services; Gill Nurton, Committee & Members Services Manager; and Tracy Hughes, Finance Officer.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Democratic Services Staff Structure 2015/16

Appendix 2 – Number of Council, Committee and Other meetings serviced by Committee & Members Services 2014/15 Municipal Year

Appendix 3 – Communication with Members – ‘Let’s Talk about it’ October 2015

Appendix 4 – Support to Members Benchmarking data

**Governance & Legal Services – Committee & Member Services,
Room 286, County Hall, Atlantic Wharf, Cardiff CF10 4UW**

Tel: 029 2087 2032

Email: democraticservices@cardiff.gov.uk