



DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON WEDNESDAY 31ST MAY 2017 AT 5:00PM

PRESENT:

Councillor C.P. Mann - Chair
Councillor D.T. Davies Vice-Chair

Councillors:

C. Andrews, D. Cushing, W. David, Mrs C. Forehead, A. Hussey, L. Jeremiah, G. Kirby,
Mrs G. D. Oliver, Mrs M.E. Sargent, G. Simmonds, R. Whiting and W. Williams.

Together with:

C. Forbes-Thompson (Interim Head of Democratic Services), J. Tyler (Administrative Assistant) and E. Sullivan (Interim Scrutiny Officer).

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P. J. Bevan and C. Thomas.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made at the beginning or during the course of the meeting.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 1st March 2016 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

4. ANNUAL REPORT FOR DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

Mrs C. Forbes-Thompson, Interim Head of Democratic Services presented the report which set out the current services and support provided to Members, along with an overview of how the resources within the Democratic Services Team were being maximised.

Members were reminded of the different support functions undertaken by the Democratic Services Team which were noted to include Committee Services, Members Training and Development, Scrutiny, Cabinet Support, Civic Office as well as general support in terms of typing services, printing, copying and stationery supplies.

It was noted that Committee Services had facilitated 193 committee meetings over the last 12 months and successfully implemented the requirements of the Welsh Language Standards regarding the publication of all public meeting agendas in Welsh and that Cabinet minutes are also made available in Welsh.

In relation to Members training and support, Members were advised that a full review would be presented to the Committee in September 2017. Mandatory, Recommended and Requested training opportunities have been made available throughout the year and 5 Members Seminars had also been organised. Subjects covered by the seminars included Medium Term Financial Planning, Rent Smart Wales, City Deal Programme and the Launch of the Corporate Parenting Handbook.

Mrs Forbes-Thompson provided an overview of the support provided to Scrutiny which included the presence of the Scrutiny Manager, Scrutiny Officer or Solicitors at all meetings. A Task and Finish Group to consider the Operation and Management of the Council Owned Car Parks had also been established this year and a report would be presented to the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee on the outcome of the data gathered to date and a way forward for the Group as a result of the local government elections and the impact on the group's membership.

The Wales Audit Office Scrutiny Review that commenced in 2015 will be concluded shortly with a final report presented to the Scrutiny Leadership Group in due course. The report will include feedback on the outcome of the recent peer review process undertaken in conjunction with Monmouthshire and Newport Councils.

The relocation of Mrs Joy Thomas, Civic Office Assistant, to the Cabinet Office was noted. The requirement of an additional Officer to cover webcasting requirements and the additional demand that this placed on the section was acknowledged. Mrs Forbes-Thompson confirmed that viewing figures continued to be low and alternative broadcast methods would be looked at when the current contract comes to an end.

The Committee were advised that 100% of Members that were eligible to produce an Annual Report last year had done so and Caerphilly continued to be one of the only councils to consistently achieve this publication rate.

IT options had been reviewed and equipment demonstrated both to this committee and at the recent induction marketplace meet and greet session. The smaller lap-top with detachable screen seemed to be a very popular option and would enable the use of the Mod. Gov ap which allowed users to both read, annotate and download meeting papers on and offline.

The Induction Programme for new Members was progressing well and the role of Mrs Emma Sullivan in the planning and organisation of the marketplace meet and greet event was noted.

In conclusion Mrs Forbes-Thompson acknowledged the work of the various staff Members, including Helen Morgan, Senior Committee Services Officer, Karen Green, Cabinet Office PA, Mark Harris, Chauffeur in the wider provision of support for Members and introduced Jade Tyler newly appointed Administrative Assistant to the committee. It was noted that Jade would be the primary contact for Members stationery requirements.

The Chair thanked Mrs Forbes-Thompson and Members questions were welcomed.

A Member queried if the webcast was being advertised given the low number of viewers. Mrs Forbes-Thompson confirmed that this was done via the website and the Councils Facebook page and Twitter feed. She also advised that an archive of the last 18 months of webcast meetings was available and confirmed that the process would be reviewed. Members were advised that Monmouthshire Council used the You-Tube platform for broadcasting, which although did not include the functionality of the Public I system was cost neutral. Members commented on the poor quality of the audio on current webcasts and were advised that this was due to the difficulty in achieving a balance between volume and feedback.

A Member raised concern with regard to the current and continuing workload of the Democratic Services team and sought reassurances that should this become more intensive that this committee be informed. Mrs Forbes-Thompson acknowledged that the present workload was challenging and was being carefully managed and forward planning in this regard had been undertaken and following the completion of the induction process should see this become more balanced.

A query was raised in relation to electronic voting and when the system would be reintroduced. Mrs Forbes-Thompson confirmed that the previous trial of the system had left Members less than confident in its use, however, further training on its use would be offered in due course and Member seminars would be utilised as training sessions to provide more practice opportunities with the system.

Having fully considered the report and its content it was moved and second that the Annual Report for Democratic Services be noted and by show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the Annual Report for Democratic Services be noted.

5. TRAINING AND INDUCTION (VERBAL UPDATE)

Mrs Emma Sullivan, Interim Scrutiny Officer provided a verbal update on Members Training and the Induction process.

Mrs Sullivan advised that the Induction Programme was now almost half way through and confirmed that the feedback received on the Marketplace meet and greet event had been very positive. Mandatory training sessions had been very well attended and mop-up sessions would be offered to those unable to attend, these would be offered in either a small group setting or 1-2-1 session depending on the needs and availability of Members.

In terms of training the Officer confirmed that the requested training needs analysis questionnaire would be compiled over the next couple of weeks and would include a skills audit section for the first time. This would allow the training offered to be more tailored to Councillors individual needs and aspirations and hopefully provide a more rounded training experience. A report on the outcome of the questionnaire would be presented to this committee in September. Members were also advised that the renewal process for the WLGA Charter for Members Support and Development would begin later in the year for completion in January 2018.

Members were referred to a handout circulated at the meeting on the National Training Framework on Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence and the proposed specialised subject syllabus for Councillors. This mandatory training would be rolled out to Members during October 2017 and was comprised of an e-learning awareness raising module, approximately 45 minutes in duration and a series of short video clips. The political group room computers would be utilised for the on-line segment of the training and Councillors would be fully supported by Democratic Services staff in terms of logging in to the system and printing the required certificate of completion. The video clips would then be played prior to a meeting of Council to try and maximise attendance, with additional sessions

offered depending on the numbers outstanding. More IT literate Members may wish to complete the training at home and will be assisted to do so, however those completing the training off site would be required to forward a copy of the certificate generated at the end of the module to Democratic Services in order to evidence completion.

The Chair thanked the Officer for the update and full discussion ensued.

Members welcomed the proposed National Training Framework syllabus as a much needed awareness raising strategy.

A Member queried if alternative methods of training delivery had been looked at for the mandatory sessions. Mrs Sullivan confirmed that the Code of Conduct training had been recorded and would be offered along with handouts to those Members who find that they cannot attend any of the alternative sessions scheduled. In terms of the Information Governance training, Members have expressed the wish to continue with facilitator led sessions for this subject as the questions and comments made by other Councillors often highlight similar experiences and they find this of great value. Alternative methods of delivering training will also form part of the training needs analysis which will be used establish Members preferences and try to secure training solutions without losing this value.

Having fully considered its content the Democratic Services Committee noted the update.

6. ANNUAL REPORTS FOR ELECTED MEMBERS 2016/17 (VERBAL UPDATE)

Mrs Emma Sullivan, Interim Scrutiny Officer provided an update on the progress of the Annual Reports for Elected Members 2016/17.

Members were advised that the templates for 2016/17 would be circulated shortly and as in previous years would be pre-populated with Councillors committee membership, outside body membership, attendance and training records, with a space left to add in constituency activity. Once again the information for inclusion would be accepted in any format and there would be provision for Councillors wishing to come in and complete their report on a one to one basis. Members were reminded that completed reports needed to be returned by the first week of July in readiness for publication on the 31st July 2017.

The Chair thanked the Officer for her update and Members questions were welcomed.

A Member queried if Annual Reports were publicly available and was advised that they could be viewed via the Councillors profile page on the website.

A Member queried if non-returned or new Members would be required to produce an Annual Report and the Officer confirmed that only returning Councillors who have been in office for 12 months would be required to complete an Annual Report.

Having full considered the content the Democratic Services Committee noted the update.

Approved as a correct record subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 28th September 2017 there were signed by the Chair.

The meeting closed at 17:50pm

CHAIR