



DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MULTI-LOCATIONAL MEETING HELD IN PENALLTA HOUSE AND VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON WEDNESDAY, 20TH SEPTEMBER 2023 AT 5.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor M.P. James – Chair
Councillor L. Phipps – Vice Chair

Councillors:

D.T. Davies, A. Farina-Childs, A. Hussey, L. Jeremiah, C. Mann, C. Thomas, G. Ead, A. McConnell, J.A. Pritchard and A. Whitcombe.

Together with:

L. Lane (Head of Democratic Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Manager), E. Sullivan (Senior Committee Services Officer) and S. Hughes (Committee Services Officer).

RECORDING, FILMING AND VOTING ARRANGEMENTS

The Chair reminded those present that the meeting was being live-streamed and recorded and would be made available following the meeting via the Council's website – [Click Here to View](#). Members were advised that voting on decisions would be taken via Microsoft Forms.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C. Forehead and D. Price.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received at the commencement or during the course of the meeting.

3. DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE HELD ON 14TH MARCH 2023

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the meeting held on 14th March 2023 be approved as a correct record. By way of Microsoft Forms (and in noting there were 9 for, 0 against and 2 abstentions) this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Democratic Services Committee meeting held on 14th March 2023 (minute nos. 1 – 5) be approved as a correct record.

Consideration was given to the following reports.

4. ANNUAL REPORT FOR DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

The Head of Democratic Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer presented the Annual Report which included details of the current and planned services and support provided to elected Members. It was noted that the report also provided an overview of how the resources within the Democratic Services Team are being maximised in the provision of the support, and the conclusion was that adequate arrangements are currently in place. Members were provided with a brief overview of the many different functions within the Democratic Services Team, which were also detailed within the report.

A Member commented on two sets of minutes which contained inaccuracies and requested that all minutes be proofread by Officers for spelling and grammatical errors, which was duly noted by Democratic Services Officers. Another Member noted the excellent record of work produced and moved that the Committee acknowledge and appreciate all the hard work and efforts of the Democratic Services Team over the past year.

The Democratic Services Committee noted the contents of the report and commented on the support provided during 2022/23.

5. CONSULTATION ON THE PROPOSALS TO REPLACE THE WALES CHARTER FOR MEMBER SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT

The Head of Democratic Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer presented the report to consult with the Committee on the proposals to replace the Wales Charter for Members Support and Development with a Voluntary Self Evaluation Framework as described in Appendix 1 to the report. It was noted that the views of the Committee will be conveyed to the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) following the meeting.

A Member drew particular attention to the report detailing casework support and guidance on managing casework, and a question was raised as to whether casework management systems could be introduced in Caerphilly County Borough Council. In response, the Head of Democratic Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer advised the Committee that all comments will be taken on board and if casework management systems is an area that Members want to focus on, if the Framework is adopted, it is something that could be looked at going forward.

Members considered and commented on the consultation document at Appendix 1 to the report in order to provide feedback to the WLGA.

6. MEMBER SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT/MEETING TIMES SURVEY - OUTCOME AND CONSIDERATION

The Senior Committee Services Officer reported the outcome of the Members survey relating to Member Support and Development and the timing of meetings. A draft Member Support and Development Programme was also presented for consideration and approval and to make recommendations to Council regarding the timings of Council meetings.

The Committee was informed that at its meeting on the 14th March 2023, the Democratic Services Committee endorsed a Training Needs Questionnaire which was circulated to all 69 County Councillors, Co-opted and Lay Members. The views of Voluntary Sector representatives and Town and Community Councillors on meeting times, venues and platforms were also sought as part of this process.

It was noted that there were 21 responses received from Councillors giving a response rate of 31% and the Partner Questionnaire, which was circulated to Co-opted, Lay, Voluntary Sector Representatives and Town and Community Councillors, generated a 27% response rate. During the course of discussion Members raised concerns regarding the response rate to the survey, which they considered to be very low. A number of suggestions were made to improve response rates which included additional reminder e-mails to Members, raising low response rates with group leaders, inclusion on agendas at group meetings and also to consider the opportunity of incorporating the questions as part of the induction process.

In response to a Member's query, it was confirmed that the survey cannot be re-circulated at this time as the report sought to provide an analysis and outcome of the responses received. However, the Committee was advised that another survey will be undertaken prior to the end of the Council term and measures can be put in place to encourage more participation in the consultation exercise. It was highlighted that although Members no longer have a dedicated support officer, the Democratic Services Team are available to assist and signpost Members if required.

A number of concerns were raised regarding the efficiency of the CRM in that whilst Members queries were acknowledged the system fell short further down the line which led Members to contact individual officers. The concerns were noted by the Head of Democratic Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer, who advised that they will be fed back to the relevant service area.

In response to a Member's query, the Head of Democratic Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer provided an update on the provision of mobile phones. The Committee was advised that Member's will shortly receive an e-mail advising of the replacement app for the MaaS360 and how the new app can be installed on personal phones. Members will also be given the opportunity to come in for technical support from IT colleagues on how to install and use the app. It was explained that once this process has been completed, a further review of the provision of mobile phones will be undertaken and an update brought back to the Democratic Services Committee in due course.

Following consideration of the report it was moved and seconded that the recommendations be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms (and in noting there were 12 for, 0 against and 0 abstentions) this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that: -

1. The responses to the Training Needs Analysis Questionnaire be noted and the draft Members Support and Development Programme as attached in Appendix 1 be approved.
2. The responses to the meeting times survey be noted and considered and RECOMMENDED to Council the continuation of the meeting times for Council meetings.

The meeting closed at 5.40 pm.

Approved and signed as a correct record subject to any corrections made at the meeting held on 22nd November 2023.

CHAIR