



DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH
(SIRHOWY ROOM)
ON WEDNESDAY 16TH SEPTEMBER 2015 AT 5:00PM**

PRESENT:

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

Councillors:

P. Bevan, D.G. Carter, H.W. David, W. David, Mrs C. Forehead, Ms J.G. Jones, Miss L. Jones, G. Kirby, Mrs D. Price, Mrs M.E. Sargent, Mrs E. Stenner and J. Taylor.

Together with:

A. Price (Interim Head of Democratic Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Research Officer), C. Evans (Committee Services Officer).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mrs P. Griffiths.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES - 27TH MAY 2015

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 27th May 2015 be approved as a correct record and were signed by the Chair.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

4. THE MEMBER'S PORTAL (PRESENTATION)

S. Sansom, EGovernment Development Officer provided Members with a presentation, which outlined the purpose of the Members Portal.

The Members Portal (Portal), which went live in autumn 2012, was specifically designed for

Members, in consultation with Cabinet, Democratic Services Committee, CMT and Democratic Services Staff. The Portal, which is profile driven, aims to provide a single online place for Members to access the information they need and help to reduce the amount of paper they handle and store.

The Officer provided a demonstration on the functions and information available within the Portal, highlighting frequently used or relevant information such as forms and Planning application information. Members discussed the various functions within the system and sought further information on forms. Officers highlighted that there are a variety of Councillor specific forms which can be printed and completed (further development for online completion is under consideration), and forms to make service requests, which can be completed online and status of the request can be checked on the same page.

Members identified some issues in that information for Planning Applications, Service Requests and Committee Papers are not always available on the system. The Officer explained that full Planning Application information is not available on the Portal. Service Request information is provided via a back office system, which requires updating daily within the relevant service areas and Committee Papers are uploaded to the Portal via the Modern.Gov system. Members were assured that feedback and comments would be considered with the relevant departments and back-office systems.

A Member queried the input of Democratic Services Officers into the System and implications on the team. Members noted that there are elements within the system that are updated by Democratic Services and it was recommended that Members consider taking part in a focus group, which aims to consider the system, duplication and ensuring that Officers time is effectively spent providing a quality resource.

The Democratic Services Committee thanked the Officer for the presentation and noted the report.

5. SCRUTINY REVIEW 2015

The report outlined the findings and recommendations identified from the review of scrutiny arrangements. The review was carried out to identify improvements to the operation of scrutiny following recommendations from the Wales Audit Office report 'Follow-up of the Special Inspection and Reports in the Public Interest', dated January 2015. The Scrutiny Review report was considered by Democratic Services Committee on 16th September 2015.

The report identified the issues for improvement both contained in the WAO report and identified by workshop groups attended by Members and Officers. The outcome of the workshops highlighted issues in relation to agendas, forward work programmes and witnesses, information and reports, task and finish groups, scrutiny support, the role of Cabinet and scrutiny members at committee, meeting organisation and chairing skills, and finally the external scrutiny role of local authorities.

Members were advised that the Project Group developed its recommendations based on the issues raised by both Members and Officers and consider that the recommendations will address the issues raised by Wales Audit Office.

Following discussion on the content of the report, it was moved and seconded that, subject to an amendment to recommendation (iv), to allow Scrutiny Chairs to accept urgent items to be added to scrutiny committee agenda, the recommendations in the report be approved. By show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RECOMMENDED to Council that, for the reasons contained in the report:-

- (i) A limit of no more than 4 items be placed on scrutiny committee agendas.

- (ii) There be a limit placed on the number of special scrutiny meetings held per scrutiny committee, of two additional meetings per annum, with priority for MTFP.
- (iii) Cabinet and scrutiny committee forward work programmes include a brief narrative on key issues to be covered in the reports.
- (iv) Scrutiny committees discuss their forward work programmes at each meeting and confirm the 4 items to be discussed at the following meeting. The Chair of the relevant committee will decide whether any additional items are to be added to the agenda if presented urgently before the next meeting, subject to the limit of 4 items per agenda and acknowledging a special meeting can be arranged if necessary.
- (v) Scrutiny Leadership Group recommend whether referrals of individual Ombudsman reports from Standards Committee should be referred to scrutiny committee (and if so which committee) or Audit Committee.
- (vi) The positions of non - statutory co-opted members (without voting rights) of Health Social Care and Wellbeing and Education for Life Scrutiny Committees be removed and a list of stakeholders and external witnesses be developed for each scrutiny committee (maintained and agreed by Scrutiny Leadership Group). These can be called upon for specific agenda items to give evidence.
- (vii) An expert witness protocol be developed to ensure that witnesses are fully briefed and, in accordance with good practice, to ensure that evidence provided to the scrutiny committee is balanced and fair.
- (viii) Information items be removed from scrutiny committee agendas and instead be placed on the Members Portal in consultation with Democratic Services Committee.
- (ix) A prioritisation matrix be developed for requests for reports from Members and the public.
- (x) Comments from the workshops about report content be fed back to the relevant Directors. The quality of reports will be reviewed and monitored by Scrutiny Leadership Group for 6 months from the implementation of the new arrangements.
- (xi) A protocol be developed for task and finish groups and agreed by Democratic Services Committee, with a limit of two task and finish groups to run at a time, to ensure that the burden on limited resources is managed appropriately.
- (xii) The members training programme be further developed to incorporate relevant comments from the workshops including developing cabinet members role and be monitored by the Democratic Services Committee and Cabinet Member with responsibility for HR, Governance and Business.
- (xiii) That guidance on the format and content of the Cabinet Members written statement be developed. A new protocol will be developed to provide that the statement is shared ahead of the relevant meeting with scrutiny committee members and placed on the Members Portal, in advance of the scrutiny meeting. The protocol will give advice on the type of information to be included in the statement.
- (xiv) Good practice for pre-meetings be shared amongst Scrutiny Leadership Group

including peer observations.

- (xv) The possibility of joint scrutiny committees be explored and the minutes of joint committees and other information about relevant outside bodies be published on the Members Portal.
- (xvi) A dedicated performance management meeting be held for each scrutiny committee once per annum.
- (xvii) The protocol for External Audit, Inspection and Regulatory Bodies interface with scrutiny be presented to Council for consideration and adoption once it is completed.
- (xxiii) The terms of reference and membership of the Scrutiny Leadership Group be reviewed to take into account any changes required as a result of the scrutiny review.
- (xix) A self-evaluation of scrutiny arrangements be carried out within 12 months of changes being agreed.
- (xx) The Monitoring Officer be authorised to amend the constitution in line with the above recommendations.

6. UPDATE MEMBER TRAINING AND SUPPORT PROGRAMME

The report provided Members with an update on the Member Training and Support Programme to further strengthen the Council's corporate governance through the implementation of a range of Members' training and support sessions.

On the 22nd April 2014 Council agreed a detailed programme of Members support and development training opportunities. The report updated Members on the progress of the training and support programme arrangements, the Requested Training Programme based on the outcome of the Training Needs Analysis (previously reported to Democratic Services Committee) and the introduction of the new Senior Councillor Development Programme.

The Committee thanked the Officer for the report and discussed the training programme. Members sought further information on attendance at the training sessions and the follow up processes. The Officer highlighted that for mandatory training, failure to attend would result in a referral to the Standards Committee, however, no referrals have been made to date. Attendance at the recommended or requested training is recorded but not presented to a Committee.

Members noted that Legal Officers are providing additional support at Scrutiny Committees and have all received relevant in-house training from the Scrutiny Research Officer.

The Democratic Services Committee noted the report.

7. MEMBER ATTENDANCE RECORDING

The report provided Members with the outcome of the trial of recording member's full attendance at meetings and attendance at pre-meetings.

At the Democratic Services Committee meeting on 27th May 2015, members requested that Democratic Services Officers record when members arrive late to meetings or leave meetings early and attendance at pre-meetings.

Following a trial conducted at a variety of Committees, it was noted that there were no substantial figures to report and the process of recording and keeping track of Members attendance during meetings was difficult and as a result, it was proposed that Officers at pre-meetings would continue to record attendance at pre-meetings and Members arriving late or wishing to leave early from meetings would request that this be recorded in the minutes.

Members discussed the report and it was suggested that Members that have not provided apologies would be noted as absent within the meetings.

Following discussion on the content of the report, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved. By show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that, for the reasons contained in the report:-

- (i) From September 2015, Members' attendance at pre-meetings be recorded and presented to each Committee with the other Member attendance data every quarter.
- (ii) Members arriving late or wishing to leave early from meetings state publicly through the Chair and that this is recorded formally in the minutes.
- (iii) All Members be reminded to give apologies if they cannot attend meetings.

8. PRINTING COSTS FOR MEMBERS

The report provided the Democratic Services Committee with the results of a recent survey of members on the current method of distribution of committee papers and agendas and whether changes can be made to address/ reduce printing costs.

The budget heading for members printing was reduced as part of the 2014/15 budget proposals; however a reduction in the overall cost of printing has not been achieved. A questionnaire was circulated for Members' views on the subject and to gauge how best to address the issues of reducing printing costs.

Of the 70 members contacted, only 39 completed and returned the questionnaire (54%), 3 members provided comments but did not return the questionnaire. It was noted that 20 Members stated that they would consider reading papers online rather than have printed copies; 14 Members stated they would be prepared to bring their laptop/tablet to a meeting instead of having paper copies of reports and 31 Members would be prepared to retain/ re-use copies of agendas that go to several committees.

The Committee discussed the report and outcome of the questionnaire and the general comments received were mixed. A Member raised concerns that they no longer receive copies of papers for all Committees and as a result, is not always aware of the various decisions being made in other Committees. Officers highlighted that, alongside the Members Portal, a number of options are to be trialled and a Focus Group will be introduced to consider any suggestions and alternative ideas, in order to reduce the cost of printing. The Committee were invited to express their interests in taking part in the Focus Group and to make any enquiries about additional papers with the Interim Head of Democratic Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer.

Following discussion on the content of the report, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved. By show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that, for the reasons contained in the report:-

- (i) From September 2015, the 14 Members who have indicated in the questionnaires that they would be prepared to receive agenda packs online

and bring their ipad/laptop to meetings be removed from the printing list as a pilot for 6 months.

- (ii) A focus group of Members be established to consider Members' IT issues. This group will work with officers to make recommendations for improvements based on the additional comments given in response to the questionnaires and will report back their findings to the Democratic Services Committee.
- (iii) A further report be presented to Democratic Services in 6 months time and until then the current system will continue (other than for the 14 Members mentioned above) so that only Members who have membership of a Committee or working group will receive printed copies of agenda packs.
- (iv) The weekly emails to all Members will continue and will include the timetable of meetings and a link to the Council's intranet where copies of agendas and reports are published electronically.
- (v) Any requests for further copies of agenda packs or reports will be made to the Interim Head of Democratic Services so that the number of requests can be monitored.

The meeting closed at 18:32 pm.

Approved as a correct record subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 18th November 2015 there were signed by the Chair.

CHAIRMAN