



DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON WEDNESDAY 6TH FEBRUARY 2019 AT 5:00PM

PRESENT:

Councillor G. Kirby – Vice Chair

Councillors:

C. Andrews, D. Cushing, D.T. Davies, A. Hussey, Mrs M.E. Sargent, G. Simmonds, R. Whiting and W. Williams.

Together with:

C. Forbes-Thompson (Interim Head of Democratic Services), L. Lucas (Head of Customer and Digital Services), J. Jones (Corporate Information Governance Manager) and C. Evans (Interim Scrutiny Officer).

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors L. Jeremiah, C.P. Mann, G. Oliver 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

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the meeting held on the 26th November 2018 be agreed as a correct record and by a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Democratic Services Committee held on the 26th November 2018 (Minute No. 1 – 5) be approved and signed as a correct record.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

4. NOTICE OF MOTION – PARENTAL LEAVE COUNCILLORS.

The Democratic Services Committee were presented with a Notice of Motion, which was received from Councillor A. Leonard and is supported by Councillors P. Marsden, E. Stenner and L. Phipps. The Notice of Motion meets the criteria set out in the Council's Constitution and in accordance with the Council's Rules of Procedure, was referred for

consideration.

The Committee noted that the Notice of Motion asks that the Council calls on Welsh Government to reconsider current maternity, paternity and adoption leave entitlements for Councillors, as legislated within the Local Government Measure (Wales) 2011 (Part 2) and that the Council forward the draft Parental Leave Policy for Councillors (which was appended to the report) to Welsh Government for their consideration.

The purpose of Notice of Motion is to give Councillors a more equitable entitlement to parental leave after giving birth or adopting and to ensure that Councillors with children and other caring commitments are supported as appropriate.

The Committee thanked Cllr Stenner for presenting the Notice of Motion and discussion ensued.

Members considered the report and appendices and queried the current Policy in place. It was noted that the Family Absence Regulations allows for 26 weeks Maternity Leave and 2 weeks for Adoption Leave. Having consideration for the differences in entitlement the Committee were in favour of the Notice of Motion.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendation in the report be approved. By a show of hands this was approved by the majority present.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officers report, Democratic Services Committee recommend that the Notice of Motion be considered and approved by Council.

5. REVIEW MAIL SERVICE SUPPORT FOR AGENDA DISPATCH

The report provided Members with background information on an MTFP savings proposal to cease Mail Service Support for circulation of committee documents to Member's homes (Agenda Despatch), and sought the views of the Democratic Services Committee prior to the savings proposals being presented to Council on 21st February 2019 as part of the overall Council Savings proposals.

The Committee noted that whilst the Mail Service has traditionally supported distribution of hard copy committee documents to Elected Members via courier, this service has a cost of £5,000 per year in staff overtime and vehicle fuel. It was reported that there are clear environmental impacts due to travelling the length and breadth of the county borough, and MTFP savings achieved due to staff retirement has made the courier service more difficult to sustain whilst also delivering a Mail Service for the whole Council. Printing costs and staff preparation time are also incurred by Democratic Services, and income is generated by the Print Unit.

Members were asked to note that more cost-effective delivery options are now available that will complement the Council's drive towards environmentally friendly digital working, whilst making available alternatives for a minority of members to continue to work using paper on an exception basis.

The report proposed that all committee documents (open and exempt) be sent to members within statutory timescales via Modern.Gov, similar to arrangements in neighbouring local authorities. The IT equipment supplied by the Council can be utilised to securely access electronic versions of the committee documents. Modern Gov can be used on portable devices (e.g. laptops, tablets) to access papers during Council meetings, and also enables members to annotate papers as required. Members were reassured that support on queries and training can be provided by IT and Democratic Services.

The Committee noted that by implementing this change, benefits include increased security for constituents, the Council and the individual Member, as there is no need to securely store and transport printed papers, reducing risk of data breaches that could cause damage and distress to individuals and lead to substantial monetary penalties. The cost of disposing of confidential waste is removed and reduces the printing and fuel costs for delivery of papers across the borough, which benefits the environment.

The Committee thanked the Officer for the report and discussion ensued.

A Member raised concerns around the receipt of large Committee packs and explained that it is difficult to read heavy documents with a number of pages on a computer or portable device. Officers highlighted that the report offers an option to have papers delivered to local Council buildings within Members wards, such as Libraries or Area Housing Officers, as part of the Mail Service, which could be collected. In addition, it could be possible for papers to be collected from Penallta House when Councillors attend meetings in the buildings.

Discussions took place around the implications to staff undertaking the Courier. Officers explained that staff are being paid overtime, which is not contractual, however, discussions are underway with Trade Unions around this matter.

A Member raised concerns about the use of portable devices in Committees. Officers reassured Members that they would be fully supported through the transition, and were welcome to contact Democratic Services or IT for help and support at any point. In addition, it was suggested that "Digital Buddies" could be assigned to Members, as part of the training process, which would provide consistency of support to Members. The buddy would be contactable via telephone, email, FaceTime, Skype etc. to offer support where needed.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved. By a show of hands, and in noting there was 1 against and 1 abstention, the recommendations were agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officers report:

- (i) support for agenda despatch by Mail Service courier should cease on 31st March 2019 to achieve an MTFP saving in line with the direction of modern local government. The alternative options outlined in the report can be utilised instead to encourage electronic working, but the alternative options will also support continued working from paper where absolutely necessary;
- (ii) the Council's constitution be reviewed to determine whether a modification is required, similar to neighbouring local authorities, to enable agenda despatch.

The meeting closed at 5:37pm.

Approved as a correct record subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 3rd July 2019 they were signed by the Chair

CHAIR