



DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON WEDNESDAY 3RD JULY 2019 AT 5:00PM

PRESENT:

Councillor D. Cushing - Chair
Councillor G. Kirby - Vice-Chair

Councillors:

C. Andrews, P.J. Bevan, W. David, D.T. Davies, K. Etheridge, Mrs C. Forehead, A. Hussey, L. Jeremiah, Mrs M.E. Sargent, C. Thomas, R. Whiting and W. Williams.

Together with:

R. Tranter (Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer), C. Forbes-Thompson (Interim Head of Democratic Services) and A. Dredge (Committee Services Officer).

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C.P. Mann and Mrs G. D. Oliver.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Mrs C. Forbes-Thompson (Interim Head of Democratic Services) declared an interest at the commencement of the meeting in relation to Agenda Item 4 - Designation as Head of Democratic Services of the Deputy Monitoring Officer. Details of which are recorded with the respective item.

3. MINUTES - 6TH FEBRUARY 2019

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the meeting held on the 6th February 2019 be approved as a correct record. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

4. DESIGNATION AS HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES OF THE DEPUTY MONITORING OFFICER

Mrs C. Forbes-Thompson (Interim Head of Democratic Services) declared an interest in relation to this item due to her current role within the department and left the room when the report was presented.

The Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer presented the report which sought the Committee's approval to designate the Deputy Monitoring Officer as the Head of Democratic Services. He advised that the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 requires each local

authority to designate an Officer to the statutory post of Head of Democratic Services and provide that officer with sufficient support to discharge their responsibilities. The Democratic Services Committee has responsibility for designating the post following advice from the Interim Chief Executive. He explained that the interim arrangements have been in place for three years and it is now time for permanency. There are a number of reasons for the decision to designate the role to the Deputy Monitoring Officer. Council, at its meeting in April 2019, agreed the review of the scrutiny function, including to increase the number of Scrutiny Committee meetings which will impact further on the role of the Scrutiny Manager. It is also intended that the scrutiny function will undertake policy development work which will result in greater officer support to the scrutiny committees. Members noted that some council's across Wales have the Head of Democratic Services designated to the Deputy Monitoring Officer position.

A Member queried if the proposal would create a significant impact on the workload for the Deputy Monitoring Officer. It was explained that this role will have overall management responsibility for Democratic Services. The Interim Head of Democratic Services will return to the substantive post of Scrutiny Manager and Mrs E. Sullivan will be responsible for the other side of Democratic Services (Committee Services). It was also clarified that both members of staff affected by the report had been consulted and are in agreement with the change.

The Chair thanked the Officer for presenting the report and for responding to questions raised during the course of the debate.

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

RESOLVED that the Deputy Monitoring Officer be designated as the Head of Democratic Services.

5. ANNUAL REPORT FOR DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

The Interim Head of Democratic Services presented the annual report which includes details of the current and planned services and support provided to Elected Members. It also provides an overview of how the resources within the Democratic Services Team are being maximised in the provision of the support, and the conclusion is that adequate arrangements are currently in place. The report sets out how the statutory duties under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 have been met.

It was explained that Democratic Services has several different functions to support members; Committee services, Members training and development, Scrutiny, Cabinet support, Civic Office and all types of day to day procedural/administrative support for Members. A summary was provided in respect of the Committees arranged by the 4 Committee Services Officers during 2018/19. Following the Scrutiny Review an additional Scrutiny Committee has been introduced. As a result of this, a part time Committee Services Officer post has been created in order to support the additional Scrutiny Committee. This was agreed by Council in April 2019.

The Committee noted there had been 218 live views of the Webcast of full Council meetings during 2018/19. The Officer was delighted to inform Members that the Democratic Services Team has been successful in achieving the Wales Charter for Member Support and Development. It was confirmed that the work undertaken by the Scrutiny Committees will continue to be monitored by the Scrutiny Leadership Group (SLG). Reference was made to paragraph 5.10. in the report that sets out the Members' training attendance. Members' questioned if training sessions could be scheduled prior to the meetings held. It was explained that this will depend on the type and duration of the training, however flexibility will be exercised. A Member referred to low attendance at Scrutiny training and was advised that Officers are looking to develop training over the summer period and will look to provide short sharp training in moving forward. Members discussed the possibility of webcasting Scrutiny

Committee meetings. Officers will need to look at the existing equipment that is used in the Council Chamber and if this can be used in other rooms as the Chamber itself is not conducive for Scrutiny Committee meetings. A Member asked if e-voting is being proposed for Planning Committee meetings. At this stage this has not been considered and alternatives were provided in that Members can request a recorded vote on a particular item. There is also provision in the constitution where Members' can ask that their vote be recorded within the minutes. The Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer would support e-voting in Planning Committee as votes would be published following meetings. However, there may be an issue as to resources as 2 members of staff are currently required when webcasting/e-voting equipment is used during meetings.

The Committee thanked Mrs Forbes-Thompson for presenting the report and for her help and support provided to Members in her capacity as Interim Head of Democratic Services.

Following consideration and discussion of the report, it was moved and seconded that the recommendation to be approved. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report and the support provided to Elected Members during 2018/2019, be noted.

6. E- LEARNING - VERBAL UPDATE

The Interim Head of Democratic Services provided the Committee with an update regarding the e-learning training that was undertaken by Members in relation to Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence. This was a Welsh Government initiative and introduced as mandatory training for Members. She advised there had been problems accessing the Welsh Government website and consequently there were ongoing issues with completing the on-line modules. Other Local Authorities across Wales have expressed their concerns in this regard and this will be reported back to Welsh Government.

In moving forward, the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) has asked all 22 Councils across Wales to create one e learning module each which is suitable for use for all Members. The platform will be hosted by the NHS in-line with the All Wales Academy national e learning site. It is proposed that Caerphilly will present their module on Data Protection, FOI and GDPR and this was supported by the Committee.

The Chair thanked the Officer for the update.

7. ELECTED MEMBERS ANNUAL REPORTS - VERBAL UPDATE

The Interim Head of Democratic Services advised the Committee that there is a need to improve the percentage of Members' annual reports being completed by the 31st July 2019. The Committee discussed the difference in the amount of meetings that individual Members sit on and how this is reflected within their annual reports. It was explained that guidance will need to be obtained in moving forward in how the percentages can be considered to more accurately reflect the number of meetings each Members sit on and attend.

The Chair thanked the Officer for the update.

The meeting closed at 5:30pm.

Approved as a correct record subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 20th November 2019 they were signed by the Chair

CHAIR