

Meeting of:	DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE
Date of Meeting:	26 OCTOBER 2023
Report Title:	DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE COUNCILLOR PORTAL WORKING GROUP UPDATE
Report Owner / Corporate Director:	HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES
Responsible Officer:	RACHEL KEEPINS DEMOCRATIC SERVICES MANAGER AND HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES
Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:	There is no effect upon the policy framework and procedure rules in respect of this report.
Executive Summary:	<p>This report provides an update on the work of the Democratic Services Committee Councillor Portal Working Group.</p> <p>The Group have held three meetings since its commencement and considered and discussed a series of issues and aspects associated with the use of the Councillor portal with the view to finding resolutions to improve the overall Member referral process.</p> <p>At the latest meeting the Group also made recommendations for the Committee’s consideration.</p>

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to present the Committee with an update on the work of the Democratic Services Committee Councillor Portal Working Group for the Committee to note including recommendations from the most recent meeting.

2. Background

- 2.1 At their meeting in February 2023 the Committee received a report detailing an ‘Update on the Digital Platform and Member Portal’. The Committee concluded this item requesting that ‘the Democratic Services Manager and the Head of Partnerships to establish a working group to take forward the development of the Member Portal’.

- 2.2 The Working Group has now been established comprising of 4 Members of the Committee along with Group Leaders, with support from the Democratic Services Manager, and has met on 3 separate occasions in May, July and September 2023.
- 2.3 As a result of these meetings, a series of issues and actions has been created which has been added to the Authority's Experience and Improvement team's own action log for the Councillor Portal. These are monitored at each meeting of the Group along with several being chosen for detailed discussion and exploration.
- 2.4 Some examples of actions that have been taken forward resulting from the work of the Group include a series of training sessions for Members held to provide latest updates and some tips and hints for Members in using the portal. Engagement has also taken place with Town and Community Councils and various aspects have been raised with the software provider for reviewing with a view to improving the Portal for Members to use.

3. Current situation / proposal

- 3.1 One of the main concerns that Members of the Group have raised is the time taken for responses to some referrals with some Members highlighting that there are still referrals outstanding after 12 months. The Group highlighted that whilst there may be an escalation process in place, there is no monitoring of this by service areas.
- 3.2 Whilst Service Level Agreements (SLAs) for response rates is scheduled to be considered at a future meeting of the Group with Officers, Members raised the fact that the development of dashboards within the Portal would assist and enable effective monitoring of referrals by both Officers and Members. The Group at its most recent meeting therefore agreed that this needed to be prioritised and recommended the following:

Recommendation 1

The Group highlighted that the portal escalation process was not working efficiently and therefore recommend that the development of the Portal Dashboards be prioritised for completion as soon as possible in order for effective monitoring of referral response rates to be undertaken by Senior managers.

- 3.3 In addition to this, the Group made the following recommendation in relation to the response rates to referrals for the Communities Directorate:

Recommendation 2

The Group continued to express concerns regarding the response rates to referrals and 'report it' requests from the Communities Directorate specifically, and reiterated the point that they do not have dedicated staff to take responsibility for member referrals as other Directorates do. Given the sheer quantity of referrals that the Communities Directorate receive, their public facing nature and the resulting reputational risk to the Authority and Members this represents in relation to responding effectively and efficiently to public concerns, it is recommended that dedicated staff be provided to the Communities Directorate to undertake this role. Furthermore, due to current budget pressures within the Communities Directorate and the risk mentioned

above, it is recommended that this be funded centrally and not from within the Communities budget.

Future meetings

- 3.4 The Group are next scheduled to meet in November where they will be discussing various aspects with Service Area Representatives from across Directorates. As well as SLAs, they wish to explore actions relating to re-directing referrals, ownership of referrals, containing responses within the portal and split referrals where there is a need for Officers to gather information from a separate department within the Authority, or from a partner organisation.
- 3.5 The Members of the Group have also stated that they welcome any comments or queries from other Members of the Committee regarding the Councillor Portal and would be happy to explore these as part of their work.

4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)

- 4.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh Language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services and functions. This is an information report, therefore it is not necessary to carry out an Equality Impact assessment in the production of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

5. Well-being of Future Generations Implications and Connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives

- 5.1 The well-being goals identified in the Act were considered in the preparation of this report. It is considered that there is no significant or unacceptable impact upon the achievement of well-being goals/objectives as a result of this report.

6. Climate Change Implications

- 6.1 There are no Climate Change implications as a result of this report.

7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications

- 7.1 There are no Safeguarding or Corporate Parent implications as a result of this report.

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1 The budget monitoring quarter 2 revenue forecast considered by Cabinet on the 17 October 2023, presented an overall projected overspend position for 2023-24 of £10.932 million. Furthermore, the Medium-Term Financial Strategy presented to Council in March 2023 highlighted a £14.5 million funding gap in the coming 3 years.

8.2 Given the current financial position there will be limited, if any, budget pressures funded in 2024-25, therefore the recommendations will be difficult to implement if funding is required.

9. Recommendations

9.1 It is recommended that the Committee:

- a) Note the update provided in this report on the work of the Democratic Services Councillor Portal Working Group;
- b) Consider the recommendations from the Working Group at 3.2 and 3.3 of this report and the financial implications therein.

Background documents

None