

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM 2/3, CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND ON THURSDAY, 2 OCTOBER 2014 AT 2.00PM

Present:

Councillor J H Tildesley MBE - Chairperson

<u>Councillors</u>	<u>Councillors</u>	<u>Councillors</u>
C A Green	J R McCarthy	E Venables
P James	M Reeves	D B F White
R C Jones	C E Smith	R E Young

Officers:

G P Jones - Head of Democratic Services
R Ronan - Democratic Services Officer - Committees

69 CHAIRPERSON'S ANNOUNCEMENT

The Chairperson on behalf of Members passed on their best wishes for a speedy recovery to Councillor C J James.

70 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the following Members/Officers for the reasons listed

Councillor C E Smith - Work Commitments

71 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

RESOLVED: That the minutes of a meeting of the Democratic Services Committee held on the 15 May 2014 were approved as a true and accurate record.

72 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

73 SERVICE AND PERFORMANCE UPDATES

The Head of Democratic Services presented a report the purpose of which is to advise the Committee on the performance and updates in relation to the services provided to elected Members.

The table shown at paragraph 4.1.2 details the number of member referrals completed during the period 1 May 2014 to 31 August 2014. The Head of Democratic Services explained that the average five and ten day completion rates during this period were 53.91% and 78.10% respectively. This was an increase in the performance compared to the previous year and despite concerns that budget cuts and staff numbers within the Directorate would affect completion rates. The Head of Democratic Services advised that he was unsure however that this could be maintained in the long term.

A Member asked for clarification on this point as page 57 of the minutes noted that during the period of 1 May 2013 to 30 April 2014 96% of referrals had been completed.

The Head of Democratic Services advised that the figures reflected the fact that as the months progress the more complicated referrals that have not been closed remain as part of the statistics. Monitoring would continue and a report will come back to the Democratic Services Committee in February.

The Head of Democratic Services referred the Committee to paragraph 4.2.2 of the report and the pre-Council briefings that have been planned and scheduled. He explained that Corporate Management Board have indicated that these briefings would offer the most appropriate opportunity to provide elected Members with updates on the significant changes that are taking place within the Authority. The Democratic Services Committee were therefore requested to be flexible in respect of prioritising topics and the delivery dates of any pre-Council briefings.

The Head of Democratic Services requested that Members reviewed the pre-Council briefings listed in paragraphs 4.2.5 - 4.2.6 and proposed additional topics which they would like to be delivered between December 2014 and April 2015. To provide sufficient flexibility it is proposed that the Committee prioritise three topics with progress to be reviewed at its next meeting in February 2015.

A Member advised that he had been fortunate to visit the Bridgend Says End Bullying project and found it to be a very worthwhile and interesting initiative with proven successes. The Committee agreed that this topic should be prioritised and delivered as a pre-Council briefing in December.

The Committee suggested that Permanence Strategies for Looked After Children was something that should be considered by the Council as a whole not just by scrutiny especially as it was an area facing one of the biggest pressures. The Committee agreed to prioritise this topic for a pre-Council presentation in January 2015.

The Committee suggested that dementia and highways issues be scheduled as future pre-Council briefings. In respect of the topic 'Facilities at the Waterton Depot' it was asked that this be expanded to include the ongoing rationalisation of all the depots i.e. Fleet Maintenance Service and the South Wales Police.

A Member requested that the issue of Domestic Violence also be revisited sometime in 2015 as the previous training for Members was delivered in May 2013 and it was important that this topic be kept on the agenda.

The Head of Democratic Services explained that the Committee should consider how other topics initially requested to be delivered as pre-Council briefings can be provided to elected Members. This could be done in a number of ways, as a briefing note, a round robin event or as a single topic.

The Committee asked that Rotherham and its implications for Bridgend, Elective Home Education and Young Carers in the County Borough be incorporated into a Round Robin event.

The Head of Democratic Services explained that the budget workshop is currently scheduled to be provided only once and will be similar in structure to last year's session. He advised that paragraph 4.2.10 of the report lists the member development activities that have been requested.

“Show Racism the Red Card” is an all Wales project and involves top football players going into schools to talk about racism. It has been suggested by the Equalities Committee that a joint session with elected Members be arranged so that they are made aware of the issues and approaches of the project and can decide if they wish to promote this initiative within their schools. He explained that there would be an estimated cost of £300 involved in providing this session however the exact details of the i.e. venue etc. have yet to be finalised.

Members agreed that this was an important initiative especially in light of some of the issues currently prominent in the media and they were keen for elected Members to engage in any training that raised the awareness and profile of equalities and diversity.

A Member noted that the Welsh Government would be publishing a report in the near future which looks at the diversity of elected Members and suggests ways in which Councils can attract candidates from a broader demographic.

The Head of Democratic Services explained that the Council’s diversity champion had met with officers and a diversity action plan would be presented to the next Cabinet Committee - Equalities. He advised however that there would be no funding from Welsh Government to implement any recommendations and the Equalities Committee have therefore been requested to identify possible funding. The report will then be presented to the Democratic Services Committee for consideration.

The Head of Democratic Services informed the Committee that Equalities and Diversity training was in the process of being rolled out to officers. It has been requested that a couple of elected Members attend the first session of this training to assess the content and report back to the Democratic Services Committee. The Committee agreed that Councillor Tildesley MBE and Councillor P James would attend.

The Head of Democratic Services referred Members to paragraph 4.3 of the report - Improving Attendance at Member Development events. He advised that attendance at development control training for the previous 12 months had been 62%, the required level of attendance was 75%. The attendance at pre-Council briefings was 63% and Member Development Events 34%. It was understood that elected Members have a number of roles and commitments which can often conflict with attending Member Development activities, however it was imperative that attendance at events was improved as at times the number of officers in attendance was equal to the number of elected Members. In order improve the levels of attendance at Member Development activities the Committee were requested to consider the four options listed at paragraph 4.3.2 of the report.

Members agreed that with work commitments it was not always easy for them to attend Member Development events especially if these were scheduled for the middle of the day. They would therefore support option one which is to review the timings at which activities are scheduled to better reflect the needs of all elected Members. This option should also include arranging sessions for later in the day and suggestions for alternative venues to allow those Members who work to attend more frequently.

The Committee also supported improving the process for informing elected Members of activities and raising awareness of the benefits and importance of attending these sessions. Attendance data would be provided to Group Leaders in order to promote maximum attendance and opportunities to develop joint Member Development events with neighbouring authorities should be considered.

The Committee were keen not to cancel scheduled training if numbers were low as they felt that this penalised Members who did attend regularly, it was suggested that any hand outs and slides were circulated to Members who were absent.

The Head of Democratic Services explained to Members that the first sessions of WLGA leadership academy have taken place in Bridgend. A cross party group of 13 elected Members attended and Bridgend were one of only a handful of Welsh Authorities to be provided with this opportunity. There are also six elected Members who have expressed an interest in participating in the national academy which commences in January 2015, with only three places available political groups have been requested to prioritise their attendance accordingly. A consolidation session will take place at the end of the modules so that attendees can give their feedback to the Leader and Chief Executive.

The Head of Democratic Services advised the Committee that last year over 96% of elected Members completed and published their annual reports, to date Democratic Services have received approximately 50% of the reports back. Support will continue to be provided by Democratic Services staff. The Committee asked if they could be provided with a breakdown of the number of hits on the previously published annual reports, the Head of Democratic Services agreed that he would contact ICT and circulate the figures to Committee Members.

PDR templates have been circulated to elected Members for completion as part of a peer review process, it is hoped that all will be completed by 30 September 2014. To date several completed PDR's have been received by the Head of Democratic Services.

A Member asked if the PDR process was of value in relation to the amount of bureaucracy involved. The Head of Democratic Services answered that PDR's enable us to identify Members training needs and feed back into the Member Development programme of events.

The Head of Democratic Services explained to Committee that to date nine Town and Community Councils have completed the agreement for a website grant and four have submitted claims which have been paid. All Town and Community Councils have been advised to make appropriate claims before the 31 March 2015. The Committee asked if they could be provided with the list of Town and Community Councils who have submitted their claims.

The Head of Democratic Services updated the Committee on the Armed Forces Day event which was held on the 28 June, 2014. The event was considered a success and achieved the outcomes listed in paragraph 4.7.2. Feedback from the veterans support organisation was also very positive however the Head of Democratic Services advised the Committee that the Authority would be unable to provide the same level of support in future.

The Head of Democratic Services explained to Members that as part of the Agile Working Programme they are requested to note the location of staff within the Democratic Services Section. Contact details have not changed and the services they provide should not be affected.

The Head of Democratic Services advised Members that there are still only four elected Members who have expressed an interest in using social media via BCBC equipment. Without greater levels of usage the current Social Media Protocol is considered to be

sufficiently detailed and therefore it is proposed that no further elected Member activities relating to social media be pursued.

RESOLVED: That the Democratic Services noted the contents of the report, and;

- Prioritised the delivery of three topics for pre-Council briefings;
- Identified the method of providing information to all elected Members for those topics not prioritised as pre-Council briefings;
- Identified any additional member development topics for inclusion in the member development programme;
- Determined the member development topics to be delivered;
- Identified the preferred options for improving attendance at member development events.

74 MODERN.GOV UPDATE

The Head of Democratic Services presented a report to the Committee the purpose of which is to provide Members with an update on the progress made in respect of the Modern.gov committee administration system and to request its proposals in respect of how Members' related to information is provided on Bridgend County Borough Council's website.

He explained that the implementation of the system is progressing and Members have been receiving agendas and reports in the new format. The ICT Department are providing support and plans have been put in place to migrate the 40,000 plus Democratic Services documents currently held on stellent to EDRM before the end of October 2014.

The Committee received a short demonstration by the Head of Democratic Services which illustrated the elected Members, Committee and webpage functionality of the Modern.gov system.

Members asked that the option of a "find your Councillor" by post code function was looked into. They also asked that before the Members' Register of Interests was published a reminder be circulated so that all Members could ensure their details were up to date.

The Head of Democratic Services demonstrated how elected Members attendance at meetings would be displayed on the website and the available 'reasons for absence'. Members requested that the list of reasons for absence be amended if possible to include other council business and illness. They were concerned that if the minutes of meetings gave the reasons for absence this should be reflected in the attendance data. The Head of Democratic Services agreed to look into this with Modern.gov.

The Head of Democratic Services advised that the attendance at Member Development events was currently intended to be published on the intranet and only formal meeting attendance would be displayed on the external web pages. In future however this information could also be made public.

RESOLVED: That the Democratic Services Committee:

- Received a short demonstration of the Members, Committee and web page functionality of the Modern.gov system;

- Provided their views on the content and display of elected Members web pages;
- Provided direction for the ongoing development of the Modern.gov system prior to its implementation.

75 WORK PROGRAMME

The Head of Democratic Services presented a report to Members the purpose of which is to inform the Democratic Services Committee of the proposed items that will be considered at future meetings.

The proposed items for inclusion at the subsequent meeting of the Democratic Services Committee are shown at Appendix 1.

The Head of Democratic Services advised Members that the draft report of the Independent Remuneration Panel has just been published and the Committee requested that a report on its recommendations be added to the forward work programme.

The Head of Democratic Services informed the Committee that as part of the Estyn Inspection Members have been requested to take part in a survey on the information/data that is available to them. The Committee agreed for Members to undertake this survey.

RESOLVED: That the Democratic Services Committee considered:

- The proposed Work Programme;
- Any additional items for inclusion on the Work Programme
- Any changes required to the content and type of reports presented to the Committee.

The meeting closed at 4.15pm.