

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM 2/3, CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND ON THURSDAY, 12 SEPTEMBER 2013 AT 2.00PM

Present:-

Councillor J H Tildesley, MBE - Chairperson

<u>Councillors</u>	<u>Councillors</u>	<u>Councillors</u>
L Ellis	J R McCarthy	R Thomas
C A Green	M Reeves	D B F White
R C Jones	C E Smith	R E Young

Officers:-

G P Jones - Head of Democratic Services  
H Lazarus - ICT Support Manager  
R Harries - Scrutiny Manager  
R Ronan - Democratic Services Officer - Members

31 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor D K Edwards who was on holiday

32 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Democratic Services Committee held on 11 July 2013 be approved as a true and accurate record.

33 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

34 ANNOUNCEMENT

The Chairperson informed the Committee that we are the first local authority in Wales to receive a "Good Practice and Innovation Award" from the WLGA. This was in recognition of the excellent work undertaken by the Democratic Services Team in respect of the development of Elected Member Annual Reports. The Committee passed their congratulations to staff.

35 PROTOCOL FOR THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA BY ELECTED MEMBERS

The Head of Democratic Services presented a report to the Committee which requested that Members consider the draft protocol for the use of social media by elected Members. The protocol was attached at Appendix 1 of the report and, the Committee were asked to propose appropriate amendments and endorse its submission to Council for approval on 16 October 2013.

The Head of Democratic Services explained that Members have been keen to be provided with access to social media for some time and this protocol provided an opportunity for each ward Member to engage with their community, particularly their younger constituents.

He informed Members that social media is playing a significant role in the passage of information in the UK and the table shown at paragraph 3.2 of the report showed an

approximate comparison between traditional and social media users in the UK. Research indicated that 7 in 10 internet users in Wales have used social media in some form.

It was indicated that Bridgend County Borough Council was committed as part of their communications and engagement strategy to engage with the public in an effective way. Social media will allow Members to develop two-way, real-time communications with constituents.

The Head of Democratic Services explained that to protect the Authority it was proposed that Elected Members wishing to have access to social media from their official ICT equipment would be required to adhere to the points listed at paragraph 4.3 of the report. This included re-signing their ICT Code of Conduct using Net Consent and attending social media training if they have not already done so. To this end the WLGA are planning to repeat their previous training on a regional basis and Bridgend has offered the use of the Council Chamber to host one of these regional training sessions.

The Head of Democratic Services explained that the protocol had been drafted with reference to guidance produced by the WLGA and has been approved by our legal department who suggested amendments such as no use of social media during meetings.

The Head of Democratic Services invited the Committee's comments on the social media protocol. Members indicated that they were pleased that this was now being progressed and saw the protocol as a positive way forward. They believe that Facebook was an effective way to communicate but that Members should be mindful of the pitfalls. The Social Media Protocol was in their opinion a sensible document that Members should embrace.

A Member questioned how they would request access permissions for the social media sites that they wished to use and how access would be assessed.

The ICT Support Manager explained that a ticket should be logged with the ICT helpdesk and the Security Manager would look at each request to ensure that the site was deemed suitable. Sites that were not suitable were blogging sites and sites such as Word Press where there was an interactive element. These sites could pose a security risk and access would be denied.

Members asked whether there would be a political restriction on access. The ICT Support Manager responded that this would be assessed based on security and if it was deemed that there was a risk to the BCBC network.

A Member asked for clarification on the point under style and etiquette. If someone contacts you in Welsh you should make every effort to respond to that person through the medium of Welsh using a Welsh translator the message could become distorted. The Committee agreed that they have similar concerns. The Committee understood that we had an obligation as an authority towards the Welsh Language Act and this issue therefore needs to be addressed positively.

The Head of Democratic Services suggested that the wording be amended to read "where possible" a response should be made in the medium of Welsh. He also advised that Members are not obliged to answer all social media. The Committee requested that this issue be referred back to legal for advice.

A Member commented that they were pleased to see that the protocol was finally being adopted, as the breakdown of internet usage shown at paragraph 3.2 of the report illustrated that Facebook and Twitter were key forms of communication especially between Councillors and younger constituents. The Council already had a strong and well managed

Twitter account and embracing Facebook across all departments was in his opinion essential.

He was concerned that the administration and access should not become too bureaucratic or onerous and believed that Members should use common sense when responding on social media, just as they would if it was via a letter or e-mail. The Member asked why certain fact based blog sites such as Oggy Bloggy were blocked from BCBC ICT accounts and as 90% of his referrals came via Facebook were there plans to allow access to make sending these referrals less convoluted.

The Head of Democratic Services explained that BCBC would block access to blogs via surf control and suggested that the Member contact the ICT Helpdesk, to remove the block if the site was deemed safe. Referrals could also be submitted from Facebook as long as the Member identified themselves in the subject line of the email. Any department could have a social media presence provided that a suitable a business case was submitted to set up an account. Various BCBC departments including the tourism were already operating a Facebook presence. The Scrutiny Manager informed the Committee that Scrutiny had recently received a report on social media and the Council's Facebook presence was largely dependent on resources. A Member advised that they would be very interested in receiving a report on the effectiveness of our Twitter account as their perception was that it was very well used and answered a lot of queries before they became issues.

The Head of Democratic Services advised that he would consult with key officers regarding the draft protocol in order to address the issue of responding in Welsh, prior to its submission to Council. It was agreed that this item would not be re-submitted for consideration but that he would advised Members of the outcome by e-mail.

- RESOLVED:** (1) The Committee considered the draft protocol for the use of social media by elected Members.
- (2) The Committee considered and proposed appropriate amendments to the protocol and endorsed its submission to Council for approval at its meeting on 16 October 2013

## 36 **SERVICE AND PERFORMANCE UPDATES**

The Head of Democratic Services presented a report to the Committee the purpose of which is to update Members on the additional information requested at their previous meeting and to advise of the performance and updates in relation to the Services provided to elected Members.

### 1. **Member Referrals**

The Head of Democratic Services advised Members that the table shown at paragraph 4.1.2 of the report detailed the number of referrals made to Directorates/Departments between 1 June and 31 August 2013. Communities Directorate received the largest percentage of referrals with the majority of these being for Street Scene. It was noted however that the number of referrals made to external organisations were slowly increasing and were now the second largest percentage at 10.85%.

The table shown at paragraph 4.1.3 showed the completion rates of member referrals during the same period. The completion rate for August was considerably lower, which was probably due to staff holidays.

The Head of Democratic Services informed Members that he is still working with ICT to enhance the content and production of reports and thanked them for all the work that they had put in to date.

He explained that unfortunately there had not been time to undertake an assessment of the type of referrals that had taken longer than the 10 day target for completion, It was planned however to move forward with this and report the findings back to a subsequent meeting of the Committee.

The Head of Democratic Services advised Members that he had recently met with representatives from V2C and that the dedicated point of contact that had been established in relation to outstanding responses was working well to reduce the time to complete referrals for this organisation.

He informed the Committee that as shown in the table at paragraph 4.1.6, the majority of referrals are now being completed within 20 days and the response time was slightly better for external organisations that for internal Directorates / Departments.

Members commented that in view of the fact that the majority of referrals were made to Street Scene their response rate of 80% was impressive. The Committee felt that the Member Referral system was an excellent way to deal with constituents queries and thanked the staff involved.

## **2. Member Development Programme**

The Head of Democratic Services provided the Committee with an update on future scheduled member development activities and advised Members that further topics of Freedom of Information and Eviction from Homes have been requested.

The Committee agreed that Freedom of Information would be suitable for a pre-Council briefing as this was a growing area and one that often concerned information about Councillors.

The Head of Democratic Services agreed that this would be added to the schedule and he would look into the request regarding Eviction from Homes and update Members at their next meeting.

The training planned in regard to School Performance had currently stalled due to a possible duplication of training provided for school governors. Discussions were on-going as to who would be providing this training. The Head of Democratic Services explained that he was seeking clarification but the training may have to be rescheduled to a later date.

Members felt that it was important that this was resolved quickly as it had been a criticism in the recent Estyn report that Members were not given access to data and training. Members were expected to drive this issue and be accountable for the follow up report, therefore it was imperative that this engagement happened.

The Head of Democratic Services advised that Budget Workshops have been planned for October and will take place in Raven's Court, a reminder regarding these sessions and car parking will be sent to all Members. A Member commented that he would urge all Members to attend these sessions as they were very interesting and worthwhile.

The Head of Democratic Services explained that Equalities and Diversity training via the WLGA was being offered, initially to the Equalities Champion and Members of

the Equalities Committee. The training was aimed at raising awareness within the Authority and would then be rolled out to other Members.

All Members are welcome to attend Development Control Training sessions as detailed at paragraph 4.3.1 however it should be noted that a buffet lunch would no longer be provided.

A Member asked if Mental Health Awareness could be added as a possible future session as they were increasingly encountering young constituents who were experiencing mental health problems.

The Head of Democratic Services informed the Committee that the Wales Audit Office are hosting an event in Cardiff on 28 November 2013. This is an all-day event and will include briefings and workshops on a range of topics. Bridgend County Borough Council has initially been allocated ten places and it has been agreed that the Chief Executive, Cabinet Member for Resources, Scrutiny Chairs, the Head of Democratic Services and Scrutiny Officers will be attending. Transport will be arranged and additional places may be available after the initial allocation has been completed.

The Head of Democratic Services explained that the draft Scrutiny Development Fund (SDF) bid for the provision of a Joint Education Scrutiny Co-ordinator post is being considered by the Finance Department. It is hoped that Bridgend County Borough will lead and host the support for this 18 month project and once financial approval is received the formal submission of the bid can commence.

He advised Members that a temporary Scrutiny Officer has been recruited to the Scrutiny Team however there are significant budget targets to be met by the department in the coming months which could impact on our ability to meet targets and continue to provide a service at the current level.

The WLGA Charter Submission has not progressed as much as desired due to staffing capacity, however there is no formal deadline. Personal Development Reviews (PDRs) have been undertaken by around 30 Members with outstanding PDRs being scheduled.

The Head of Democratic Services informed Members that the Good Practice and Innovation Award will be presented during Council in October. Bridgend has been successful in achieving the award because we have made a significant contribution to the ability of Councils across Wales to introduce annual reports before any official guidance was available. The Chairperson and the Head of Democratic Services have been requested to attend the Member Development Joint Network and present an update in respect of this award.

A total of 30 draft Annual Reports for 2012-13 have been reviewed to date and key data has been added. It is the intention that these reports will be published on the website by 30 September to meet the requirements of the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP). The Head of Democratic Services informed Members that remuneration information would be circulated in the next few days to group leaders as this is also required to be published and reported to the IRP by 30 September 2013.

The Head of Democratic Services explained that as part of the on-going development of ICT facilities and support for Elected Members a cross party working group has been established.

This group will meet regularly supported by the Head of Technology, Property and Customer Services and will assist in the development of ICT options provided to elected Members. The first meeting took place in August and was very positive. Any outcomes from these meetings will be presented to the Democratic Services Committee for consideration and comments and then onto Council. There will be a pre-Council briefing on the 18 September to introduce the new dedicated ICT engineers.

The Head of Democratic Services informed Members that he attended a Member Development Joint Network on 11 September. At the meeting Officers were updated on the outcomes of the survey of candidates that was carried out prior to the 2012 local elections in order to ascertain the diversity and made up of candidates. The general profile of candidates remained mature white males age 60+. The Welsh Government was concerned with this continued lack of diversity and would be producing a consultation document, Members suggestions are welcome and need to be reported back to the Welsh Government by January 2014.

The Committee agreed that the age profile was a concern but it was difficult for younger people in employment to have the flexibility needed to become an elected member. Employers were not open to releasing staff to attend meetings etc. A Member noted that the ethnic minority was probably for Bridgend reflective of the local demographic and although the gender balance did not change significantly it did improve slightly after the last election. It was agreed that the Head of Demographic Services would circulate the survey to Committee Members.

The Independent Remuneration Panel has been given extra powers to undertake reviews to undertake reviews of Chief Executives pay for all Local Authorities National Parks in Wales.

The Head of Democratic Services advised the Committee that there was an intention to set up a working group for Chairpersons of Democratic Services Committees to discuss the work and remit of the Committee an initial meeting was planned and further meetings would be scheduled dependent on the outcomes.

The WLGA have agreed to undertake regional commissioning in order to co-ordinate training for elected Members.

A Member asked if this would include senior officers pay. The Head of Democratic Services responded that it would not.

**RESOLVED:** (1) That the Democratic Services Committee considers the member development opportunities shown in paragraphs 4.2 - - 4.3.1 and identified any regional or national topics for inclusion in the Member Development Programme that would benefit all Members prioritised pre-Council briefings and member development activities that have not yet been scheduled.

(2) That the Democratic Services Committee noted the report.

**37 MEMBER ROLE DESCRIPTION – ROTA VISITING OF SOCIAL CARE AND NURSING ESTABLISHMENTS**

The Head of Democratic Services presented a report to the Committee requesting that they consider the role description for elected Members undertaking rota visiting of social care and nursing establishments, managed by both the Council and the independent sector. The role description was attached at Appendix 1.

#### DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE - 12 SEPTEMBER 2013

Members were requested to agree any amendments that may be required and recommend the adoption of the agreed role description to Council on 16 October 2013.

RESOLVED: That the Democratic Services Committee agreed that the draft role description for the rota visiting of Social Care and Nursing Establishments be recommended to Council for adoption on 16 October 2013.

#### 38 WORK PROGRAMME

The Head of Democratic Services presented a report to the Committee which informed them of the proposed items that will be considered at its subsequent meetings.

He explained that the proposed updates to the terms of reference for the Democratic Services Committee would be considered by the Committee at its meeting on 6 November 2013.

The Head of Democratic Services advised Members that also at this meeting he would be asking them to consider the implementation of a Committee Administration system. This was intended to improve the efficiency of the Democratic Services Team and assist in the Welsh translation of on-line content. It was hoped that the system would be implemented by the end of March 2014.

RESOLVED: That the Democratic Service Committee considered the proposed Work Programme appended to the report.

The meeting closed at 3.55pm