

Democratic Renewal

**REPORT OF THE CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

APRIL 2008

Foreword

Actively engaging the people of Bridgend in the democratic processes of the Council is central to 'Democratic Renewal' but is not something the public considers the Council does well. Citizen's Panel Surveys undertaken in 2007 showed that almost half of respondents felt they were not well informed about local issues in their area whilst only 16% felt they had had the opportunity to participate in decisions about the running of Council services.

The aim of this investigation has been to identify ways of improving public participation, consultation and accountability processes; and ensuring that the public are aware of, and can be involved in, the decisions which affect their everyday lives.

Through conducting this investigation we have considered a range of issues relating to 'Democratic Renewal', and have attempted to see what this concept actually means to real people in their localities instead of thinking of 'the public' as an abstract concept. In doing so, a range of internal and external witnesses have been interviewed to ensure the establishment of a balanced and informed evidence base to inform conclusions.

Of particular interest were the results of a survey undertaken by Bridgend's Youth Council which sought to capture the views of a group of sixth formers regarding 'Citizenship'. Although 80% of respondents recognised that the Council has an effect on their lives, very few actually knew the name of their local Councillor. Indeed one young person responded that a 'ward' was 'somewhere where they keep beds in a hospital'.

Whilst this question may have been answered with tongue in cheek, it does show how the work of Councillors is considered as being dislocated from the people they are meant to represent. In undertaking this investigation the Group has tried hard to formulate recommendations which aim to energise local democracy so to inspire our Community Leaders of the future to take an active role in improving their localities.

It is hoped that the recommendations of this report will move the Authority closer to the point where meaningful public engagement underpins every aspect of the Council's work. In this way it is considered that public confidence may be built in the Council's attempt to improve the quality of life for the people of Bridgend.

Councillor M E J Nott

Chair of the Cross-Cutting Issues Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Index

	Page Nos
1. Membership of the Group	9
2. Democratic Renewal	10
3. Background	10
4. Terms of Reference	10
5. Aim of Investigation	11
6. Meetings Held	12
7. Findings and Recommendations	14
8. Summary of Recommendations	38
9. Invitees	45
10. Written Submissions	46
11. Documents	47

1. MEMBERSHIP OF THE TASK & FINISH GROUP



Councillor M E J Nott

Chair of the Cross-Cutting
Issues Overview & Scrutiny
Committee



Councillor L Davies



Councillor R Granville



Councillor M Quick



Councillor J Radford



Councillor S Smith

2. DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL

Democratic renewal attempts to create a new way of cooperation between government and citizens and to produce more engaged and interactive democracy. There is no standard definition of the term but it is generally used to cover a broad range of issues covering a number of themes including;

- i) *Public participation in the decision-making process*
- ii) *Raising electoral turnout levels*
- iii) *Transparency and accountability of decision-making*
- iv) *Support for Members in their constituency roles*

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 At its meeting on 5 June 2006, the Cross-Cutting Issues Overview & Scrutiny Committee decided to include the topic of 'Democratic Renewal' on its Forward Work Programme 2006/07.
- 3.2 A scoping report, Terms of Reference and a Project Plan relating to the issue were approved by the Committee on 10 July 2006.
- 3.3 Following this, five meetings of the Cross-Cutting Issues Overview and Scrutiny Committee took place where interview sessions were held with various invitees including Executive Members and Council Officers.
- 3.4 At its meeting on the 29 August 2007, the Committee determined that it was necessary to carry the investigation in a slightly different direction. The project plan was therefore redrafted and following the Committee's approval of this, it decided to conduct the remainder of the investigation through a Task and Finish Group, as this would allow for a smaller group of Members to carry out more focused and detailed examination of the topics through more frequent meetings.
- 3.5 The Task and Finish Group have since met on sixteen occasions and interviewed a number of invitees including Elected Members, Council Officers, Youth Council Members and external advisors.

4. TERMS OF REFERENCE

- i) ***Public participation in the decision-making process*** and how to encourage greater participation and engagement in local democratic processes, both in relation to the community as a whole as well as 'hard to reach' groups. This aspect of the investigation would include a consideration of the role of Full Council, the potential for public engagement in the Overview & Scrutiny process and political management arrangements as a whole.

- ii) ***Raising electoral turnout levels*** - electoral turnout levels have been falling across the United Kingdom for several decades, and in the 2004 Local Elections in Wales, Bridgend recorded the lowest turnout of the 22 Welsh Unitary Authorities. This aspect of the investigation would assess the effectiveness of current/past initiatives designed to improve voter turnout levels in Bridgend and identify potential areas for improvement.
- iii) ***Transparency and accountability of decision-making*** - this aspect of the investigation would attempt to assess the effectiveness of current accountability arrangements and identify areas for improvement including consideration of the Overview & Scrutiny function.
- iv) ***Support for Members in their constituency roles*** - this aspect of the investigation would consider the extent to which the Authority supports Members in their constituency roles. This would include an examination of initiatives such as the development of ward profiles, ward focus groups and area forums and assess the extent to which these and similar initiatives are currently utilised in Bridgend and their potential benefits in relation to democratic renewal in Bridgend.
- v) ***Success Criteria and Monitoring*** - the investigation would seek to assess the extent to which democratic renewal is linked to key policies, strategies and objectives and how the Authority monitors its success in meeting the challenges of the democratic renewal agenda. This would include an examination of documents such as the Corporate Improvement Plan, Community Strategy and the business plans of service areas working in support of the democratic renewal agenda to assess the extent to which the Authority approaches and monitors its performance.

5. AIM OF INVESTIGATION – ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

- 5.1 It was anticipated that a successful investigation would result in recommendations for improved accountability arrangements, enhanced public participation in decision-making and an increased turnout at elections in Bridgend. It was also anticipated that the investigation would identify improvements to the way in which Members are supported in their constituency roles.

6. MEETINGS HELD

Meeting 1 10 July 2006	Scoping Report, Suggested Terms of Reference, Methodology and Project Plan
Meeting 2 11 September 2006	Position Statement and Summary of Best Practice Literature
Meeting 3 16 October 2006	Public Participation in the Decision-Making Process
Meeting 4 20 November	Efficiency, Transparency & Accountability of Decision-Making <i>and</i> Success Criteria, Performance Monitoring and Links to Key Strategies
Meeting 5 18 December 2006	Overview & Scrutiny – Efficiency , Transparency and Accountability Arrangements
Meeting 6 29 January 2007	Public Participation and Access to Services
Meeting 8 29 August 2007	Status Update and Appointment of Task and Finish Group
Meeting 9 26 September 2007	Redrafted Project Plan
Meeting 10 1 October 2007	Scoping and Planning for Future Items
Meeting 11 24 October 2007	Electoral Turnout Levels – Current/Past Initiatives to Increase Voter Turnout
Meeting 12 31 October 2007	Electoral Turnout Levels – Educating Young People
Meeting 13 10 December 2007	Citizenship Education in Wales – Results of youth Council Survey
Meeting 14 11 December 2007	Meeting with Youth Council regarding Citizenship
Meeting 15 19 December 2007	Feedback and Outcomes of Meeting with Youth Council
Meeting 16 28 January 2008	Citizenship Education – New Personal and Social Education Framework and Local School Responses

Meeting 17 6 February 2008	The Effect of Constitutional Changes on Decision Making and Accountability <u>and</u> Support for Members in their Constituency Roles
Meeting 18 7 February 2008	Consultation and Public Participation: (i) Ways the Authority consults with the public (ii) Web-Casting (ii) Ways that Overview and Scrutiny consult with the public
Meeting 19 13 February 2008	Consideration of all evidence received and development of draft recommendations
Meeting 20 3 March 2008	Consideration of draft Final Report/recommendations
Meeting 21 1 April 2008	Approval of draft Final Report/recommendations
Committee Meeting	Submit Draft Final Report to Committee for Approval

- 6.1** For a list of all invitees who assisted with the Group's evidence gathering during the course of the investigation, please refer to section 8 of the report on page 40.

7 FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Public Participation in the Decision-Making Process

- 7.1.1 During the initial stages of the investigation, the Committee looked at how the Authority involved the public in the decision making process in Council, Cabinet and Committee meetings. In relation to members of the public speaking at and participating in meetings, it was suggested that better communication over the dates and agendas of meetings was needed with the press as well as the general public, and that meetings should be better advertised in newspapers, newsletters, the Bulletin and the web. In addition to this, concerns were put forward over the timings of meetings, in that the majority are held in the afternoons, and the effect that had on public attendance figures.
- 7.1.2 Concerns were raised over the timings of the release of agendas, in that the publication of papers three days in advance of the meeting, as required by the Constitution, did not provide much time for members of the public to read the information released. The Group were informed that English Local Authorities were required to issue agendas five working days in advance of meetings. It was also questioned whether the three day submission deadline for questions to Cabinet Members in Council provided enough time for questions to be submitted and responses to be prepared. Since these discussions were held, the deadline for questions has been extended to five days following the changes to the Constitution that were agreed by Council on 12 September 2007.
- 7.1.3 In relation to external meeting venues, the Committee discussed the need for the Local Authority to be more proactive in holding meetings in external venues, such as school buildings, hotels and Town Council facilities, as well as the possibility of setting targets for the Authority to hold meetings in different parts of the County Borough at least twice a year. It was highlighted that where this had been previously undertaken, there had been issues surrounding the suitability of some external venues for conducting meetings, for example the absence of microphones and insufficient space.

Recommendation 1

- 1a) It is recommended that when Committee agendas contain items of particular public interest, such as 'Falling School Rolls', the use of external venues is considered to make the meetings more accessible and to encourage public attendance.**
- 1b) It is suggested that in order to ensure that meetings held in external venues are successful, proper consideration is given to the suitability of venues, to make sure that they are sufficiently equipped and fit for purpose.**

7.2 Efficiency, Transparency and Accountability of Decision Making

- 7.2.1 The Committee discussed the effectiveness of the Overview and Scrutiny function in terms of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees' role in challenging the Executive, and the incorporation of Overview and Scrutiny recommendations in Cabinet's decisions. The Committee heard that the current administration had taken on board many of the views and recommendations of Overview & Scrutiny, particularly in relation to budget proposals. A suggestion for future improvement was to increase the use of external expertise within the Overview and Scrutiny process, to enhance the challenge to the Executive by giving guidance on technical points within investigations.
- 7.2.2 In terms of challenging the Executive, Members were informed that as with every process, there were weaknesses associated with the amount of funding allocated to support the process, the level of training of Members and Officers, and the maturity of the process. However, the new arrangements put in place by the Local Government Act 2000 were considered to be effective, due to accountability arrangements put in place through the implementation of the Overview and Scrutiny function.
- 7.2.3 In considering the number of Overview and Scrutiny Committee Call-Ins, Members were advised that caution should be taken when using this data to measure the effectiveness of accountability arrangements, as effective pre-decision Scrutiny and consultation should negate the need to employ the Call-in procedure. Members were also advised that wide scale studies of the Overview & Scrutiny process had shown that the number of Call-Ins tended to be context specific to each Local Authority, depending on the political makeup of the Council and other related factors.
- 7.2.4 In relation to the increase in the number of Overview & Scrutiny meetings that were attended by Cabinet Members, it was agreed that this development was positive, as in the spirit of promoting transparent decision making it was important for Cabinet to explain its actions to Non-Executive Members.
- 7.2.5 On the subject of feedback forms from members of the public who have attended, or spoken at Planning and Development Committee meetings, the Committee were advised that unfortunately there was a low response rate compared to the number of people attending the meetings. Nevertheless, the Group felt that it was important to receive feedback in order to improve processes and engagement with the public.
- 7.2.6 It was highlighted that the link between the Monitoring Officer and the Overview and Scrutiny process was very important. This promotes the concept of probity and helps ensure the Local Authority acts appropriately and performs to the best of its ability.
- 7.2.7 It was also emphasised that it was important for the Executive to work in partnership with the Overview and Scrutiny Committees so that the Committees were involved in the decision-making process at all stages of policy review and development.

- 7.2.8 The Committee raised concerns that the effectiveness of Scrutiny depended to a large extent on the knowledge of Members, and believed that effective training of Members was important in ensuring that Members were able to ask pertinent questions. The Committee highlighted the need for further training for all those involved in the Overview & Scrutiny process to maximise effectiveness, and suggested that briefings be given by the different service areas to gain further information on the topics on the Committees' forward work programmes.

Recommendation 2

- 2a) The Committee recommends that in order to improve how the authority engages with the public, more effort should be made to seek feedback from members of the public following their participation in or observation of meetings.**
- 2b) It is suggested that a review of how feedback is collected and used across all Committees be carried out to determine how best to capture the public's perception of meetings held within the Council and how this data can be used to inform and improve services.**
- 2c) It is recommended that this review consider the comprehensive and consistent use of feedback forms after meetings, the possible creation of a generic form suitable for all Committees and how to ensure that forms are readily available to all those attending meetings, including making them available electronically.**
- 2d) The Committee also suggests that in order to use this feedback to inform and improve services, the review consider the creation of a feedback database, collating all the information from these feedback forms, which Members and Officers could have access to, therefore contributing to a culture of continuous improvement.**

7.3 Raising Electoral Turnout Levels

- 7.3.1 Following the Committee's decision to progress the investigation through a Task and Finish Group, the Group considered the topic of Electoral Turnout Levels and received evidence from the Director of Legal and Democratic Services / Election Registration Officer / Returning Officer on past and current initiatives to improve voter turnout.
- 7.3.2 It was reported that the main focus for the Local Authority had to be on making the electoral process simple and accessible for all voters. Accuracy of the Electoral Register was crucial to this, to ensure that potential voters were not disenfranchised. Work had been undertaken in 2005 and 2006 to increase the number of the electorate registered to vote. Those registered had increased from 61% in 2004 to 84% in 2005, and had risen to 96% in 2006 prior to the Assembly elections.

- 7.3.3 The Group were advised that for the 2007 Canvass, a new registration form had been designed, which was more user-friendly because it was easier to read and understand, particularly clarifying that this was the process by which an elector becomes entitled to vote, as opposed to the previous form which merely referred to the need to be included on the Electoral Register.
- 7.3.4 It was reported to the Group that postal voting for Bridgend CBC, for the 2007 Welsh Assembly Government election, had achieved a 74.48% turnout of those who had registered for postal votes in the Bridgend Constituency and a 74.06% turnout for postal votes in the Ogmore Constituency.
- 7.3.5 The Group were informed that although the overall turnout for the 2007 election was the lowest in Wales at 32.9%, particular care should be taken over interpreting this data given the history of the service, and also over making comparisons between different elections, for example comparing turnout in parliamentary elections with that of local elections, as voter turnout was affected by many different influences.
- 7.3.6 Further to the points outlined above, it was highlighted that the positive figure of 96% of adult constituents now on the register meant that the vast majority of Bridgend County Borough (BCB) citizens were now able to vote, and that the next step was to increase voter turnout by showing people how to vote and making the process as simple as possible.
- 7.3.7 The Group received evidence that work had been undertaken on absent voters, to ensure that they were informed of the importance of making sure that their details were correctly recorded and that they were not disenfranchised. On queries relating to Welsh speaking constituents, it was reported that all relevant forms existed in both Welsh and English and that Welsh speaking 'door knockers' could be sent out to homes to discuss forms if necessary.
- 7.3.8 The Group were also informed of the problems experienced with the scanning process used during the Assembly elections. The process was designed to prevent fraudulent voting, however many people had been excluded from the voting process because they were inserting the date of signature as opposed to their date of birth on their voting cards, thus voiding their votes. This was being addressed to avoid similar problems at future elections.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recognises that the voter turnout level can sometimes be misleading and does not always accurately reflect the actual number of people who cast a vote. Evidence gathered during the investigation highlighted that the figure can also be affected by problems with the voting process, such as those that occurred in the most recent elections with a number of votes being voided due to problems with postal voting forms.

The Committee therefore recommends that the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee continues to monitor electoral turnout levels, with

particular attention given to examining whether previous problems, such as those relating to absent voters and postal voting, are being addressed.

- 7.3.9 Evidence was also heard regarding the number of spoiled ballot papers, which suggests that there was a section of the community that wanted to vote, but did not feel that there was anything to vote for or against. It was reported to the Group that spoiled votes were counted and the figure read out alongside the election result by the Returning Officer, however the figure was not included in the voter turnout percentage.

Recommendation 4

In order to provide more accurate voter turnout figures, it is recommended that information on the number of spoiled ballot papers is made available alongside the official voter turnout data, to more accurately reflect the number of voters who exercised their right to vote.

- 7.3.10 In terms of the location of polling stations, Members were informed that Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) regulations required that all stations could be accessed by the elderly or disabled and that due to changes in the demographic profile of the population, locations had to be regularly reviewed. It was recognised that there were always difficulties in situating stations in locations that would be convenient to all users, and some residents could be aggrieved if an historic location ceased to be used, even if that location was simply no longer available or no longer viable, or if the location was not sensible in terms of the needs of the community as a whole. It was confirmed that the Polling Station Review would look further into the issues of polling station locations.

Advertising of Elections

- 7.3.11 The advertising of elections was explored, with evidence received on the direct promotional measures taken in the past year. These included:
- a. Advertising in a Cinema magazine;
 - b. Advertising on the Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) website;
 - c. A press release in the Glamorgan Gazette emphasising the importance of exercising the right to vote;
 - d. Advertising on local buses which, although taken out last year (2007), is still evident on many buses.
- 7.3.12 It was also reported that prior to the Assembly elections, 60,000 properties were leafleted with information provided by the Electoral Commission, which equated to every home within the County Borough, and posters were also displayed in public buildings owned by the Authority.

7.3.13 It was felt by the Group that the Bridgend County Borough Bulletin was not being used to its full potential in the advertising of elections, and the Group discussed its potential use in advance of an upcoming election to explain the voting process and answer questions such as how a postal vote works, or where constituents can vote.

Recommendation 5

5a) The Committee recommends that the Bridgend County Bulletin be used as a tool to advertise elections in advance of registration for the electoral register and in advance of an upcoming election.

5b) It is suggested that the Bulletin should be used to explain the voting process and frequently asked questions such as where constituents can vote and how postal voting works. More significantly, clarification should be provided for all potential voters that their details are held at the appropriate polling station and as such, the polling card is not required to vote, but is merely a useful tool to speed up the process.

Recommendation 6

It is recommended that alternative methods of advertising elections be explored, for example, it was suggested that publishing the diary of a first time voter, following a young person through the whole process from registering to vote, to researching candidates, right up until election day, would help to attract attention to the process and encourage voter turnout.

7.3.14 In looking into the advertising of elections, the Group were advised that in general, the majority of people were aware when a national election was approaching, regardless of whether elections were advertised locally or not, and that it was thus more important for politicians to take the next step in encouraging voter turnout by showing members of the public that their vote counts, and how the outcome of the election will impact upon their lives.

7.3.15 The points outlined above were further enforced by the Corporate Communications Manager who highlighted that she had recently sent out a questionnaire to Members asking them how they engaged with their constituents. The Group were informed that 44% of Members had responded, and the results showed that 12 members had identified bi-annual or annual newsletters as a method of communicating with the public that they employed, 6 Members had cited irregular 'surgeries', and others had referred to attendance at community meetings and generally getting to know local constituents.

7.3.16 The Corporate Communications Manager suggested that local Councillors could do more to promote themselves within the authority, and to make themselves and their policies better known. It was suggested that Members working to engage their constituents throughout their time in office would help

to improve voter turnout, and would be more effective than an annual or bi-annual appearance in a newsletter.

- 7.3.17 It was further proposed that there was a need for Members to reach out to a wider audience, and to be actively engaged in many different arenas - as opposed to in the same meetings which are attended by largely the same people. It was also suggested that Members should focus on the smaller local issues as well as on the matters of general importance in order to capture the attention of their constituents.
- 7.3.18 It was put to Members that to improve voter turnout it was necessary to do more than advertise an election. Members had to be pro-active and be visible to all in the community throughout their term of office. To encourage voter turnout constituents needed to be interested in the issues discussed within candidates' campaign literature, and for this to happen, Members would need to canvass regularly during their term of office on issues which were relevant to all sectors of the community, in order to show local citizens that there is a decision to be made on local issues and that their vote enables them to have a voice on the decision.
- 7.3.19 The Leader advised the Group of an interview she had given on Bridge FM relating to the need for people to exercise their rights at the ballot box and how important this was in encouraging local democracy. It was highlighted to the Group that politicians needed to win respect and gain favour and trust from their constituents in order to counteract negative portrayal in the media.

Recommendation 7

- 7a) During the course of the investigation, the Task and Finish Group received evidence that highlighted the role of Members in increasing electoral turnout. The Committee therefore recommends that Councillors need to actively pursue methods of improving voter turnout at elections throughout their terms of office, rather than predominantly in the period approaching an election.**
- 7b) It is recommended that Members should continuously engage with their constituents on all issues affecting their community, to ensure that they are accurately reflecting the views of their constituents when acting within their role as Ward Member.**
- 7c) It is recommended that, as part of the training that Members receive immediately following an election to explain their role and responsibilities as a local Member, attention should be given to providing training specific to their role in contributing to the Democratic Renewal agenda.**

- 7.3.20 During the Group's discussions, the issue of electronic voting was raised, with emphasis placed on the fact that this initiative could help to engage the younger element of society and thus improve voter turnout.

- 7.3.21 The Director of Legal and Democratic Services / Election Registration Officer / Returning Officer informed the of the plan to send birthday cards to potential young voters on their 18th birthdays from the Authority, reminding them that they were now entitled to exercise their right to vote.
- 7.3.22 In addition, the Group were also advised by the Director of Legal and Democratic Services / Election Registration Officer / Returning Officer of the plan to carry out electoral roadshows, visiting local schools and colleges to access young people in the 17-25 age bracket.

Recommendation 8

It is recommended that the possibility of providing online or telephone registration on the electoral roll is explored as a potential means of making the process simpler, particularly in relation to amending the information held.

Recommendation 9

In order to increase the number of people registered on the electoral roll, it is recommended that registration forms are made available in libraries, community centres and all other customer contact centres as well as schools and colleges. It is believed that this will encourage a wider group of people to register which will lead to an increase in the overall electoral turnout levels.

- 7.3.23 The Group were keen to stress that whilst increasing voter turnout was always a key priority of the Authority, it must be recognised that a high voter turnout was meaningless if the voters were unable to justify or provide reasoning for the way in which they had voted. Therefore, emphasis should be placed on achieving a high voter turnout as a result of a well informed public.

Education

- 7.3.24 During their discussions over how to improve voter turnout, the Group identified the importance of educating young people in the election process and in the democratic process as a whole. It was agreed that it was vital that young people were aware of the role of the Council, the role of Members and Officers, and the make-up of the Council in order to allow Councillors and the Local Authority to engage this section of society. It was therefore decided that further evidence was needed on the provision of education for young people on democratic processes and citizenship.

7.4 Citizenship Education

- 7.4.1 As part of their evidence gathering, the Group received information from the Personal and Social Education Advisor from ESIS, in relation to how citizenship education was carried out in Wales.

- 7.4.2 Through consideration of this information, as well as the European Commission's report on Citizenship Education at School in Europe, which provides evidence of citizenship education in Wales, England and Northern Ireland, the Group highlighted the fact that unlike in England, where citizenship education was statutory and assessed, in Wales, citizenship education was not mandatory and was taught under Personal and Social Education (PSE). Under PSE in Wales, guidance was provided for schools, from which they could select elements to design their own programme.
- 7.4.3 Concern was initially expressed over the fact that there was no requirement or provision for citizenship education post-16 in Wales, whereas in England and Northern Ireland, schools had guidance documents. However, during the process of the investigation, a new PSE framework for Wales was issued which provided new guidance for post-16 education.
- 7.4.4 During their consideration of this topic, the Group met with the Youth Participation Worker and the Youth Council, attending one of the Youth Council's own meetings as invitees. Evidence received from both the Youth Participation Worker and members of the Youth Council reaffirmed the Group's view that there was a shortfall in the provision of citizenship education in Wales and Bridgend, and a lack of responsibility for delivery of this type of education as it was not statutory.
- 7.4.5 The following points summarise the issues raised during discussions with the Youth Council and the Youth Participation Worker:
- a. Members of the Youth Council all had different perspectives of what citizenship education was, citing day-to-day issues such as opening bank accounts, registering to receive benefits and obtaining a passport as topics they thought it would cover. Issues such as democratic processes, elections and voting processes did not feature highly on the list of possible topics when the young people were questioned.
 - b. Youth Council Cabinet Members (who had discussed the topic prior to meeting with the Group) were not aware that they would be unable to vote if they were not included on the electoral register.
 - c. 'A' Level politics classes educated pupils on political ideologies and on political history, but not on local democracy or the workings of local councils.
 - d. Much of PSE was taken up with talks from Police and Sexual Health issues.
 - e. It was felt that teachers were under pressure to cover the current curriculum without having to cover additional items such as talks on democratic processes.
 - f. It was questioned whether teachers were educated enough on local democracy or Council structures, and thus in a position to teach the subject themselves.

- g. It was raised that no-one was currently employed by the Authority as a non-political expert on local politics, democratic processes and Council structures, who was able to disseminate this knowledge to schools. The need for a peripatetic teacher to cover these topics in Bridgend was suggested.
- h. It was expressed that young people over the age of 16 would potentially be more interested in citizenship education than those under 16, as the issues it would cover, such as their right to vote and the voting process, would be more relevant to their lives. There was therefore an essential need for citizenship education post-16, to ensure that young people in this age group had the knowledge to engage with the democratic process effectively, particularly in relation to elections.
- i. The Youth Participation Worker highlighted that it was essential to understand the difference between politics and democracy, and that citizenship education should focus on informing young people about democratic processes and structures rather than politics. It was suggested that, following appropriate and informed citizenship instruction, young people would have the knowledge and motivation to seek out the specifics of politics for themselves.
- j. Members suggested that a pilot scheme could be carried out, choosing one school to give a training session on the Council and what it does, as well as on general democratic processes. Feedback could then be provided by the students, to communicate their views on the training session, suggest ways of improving it, and ways that it could be adapted to engage with more young people.
- k. The Youth Participation Worker supported this idea, suggesting that a similar session to one that had been given to Youth Council Members could be delivered. This training was available on the National Open College Network website, entitled 'OCN Level 1 in County Borough Councils: An Introduction to County Borough Councils'. The module provides a deep insight into what the Council does and relates this to how it affects young people's everyday lives. Through discussions this was highlighted as key to educating young people, focusing on how topics related to local democracy are relevant to their lives, encouraging them to take an interest both now and in the future and then encouraging them to make their views known via the ballot box.
- l. Further discussions in relation to the proposed roadshows took place (see paragraph 7.3.22), and it was suggested that the Youth Council and the Youth Participation Worker should be involved. It was felt the roadshows would benefit from their input and assistance in how to relate to young people and engage with them appropriately and effectively.
- m. The Youth Council Members felt that if the Council wanted to engage more with young people, Councillors had an important role to play in regularly visiting schools, identifying themselves and showing support for young people. It was suggested that local Councillors, under the supervision of a teacher, could arrange to attend a school to engage in a question and

answer session or a debate in a non-political role. It was also stated that this did not have to be limited to schools, with suggestions that Councillors could also attend youth clubs and general youth events, developing the 'public face' of Bridgend County Borough Council.

Recommendation 10

The Committee expresses support of the proposed electoral roadshows and recommend that these take place, led by the Electoral Services Department, along with the Authority's Youth Services, and the Youth Council in particular as they would have a greater knowledge and understanding of how to interact with, and grasp the attention of, young people. It is further recommended that it would be more valuable if the roadshows were carried out in advance of the Authority's election canvassing, in the hope that the roadshows would remind and encourage young people to register to vote.

- 7.4.6 Following their meeting with the Youth Council, the Group received positive feedback from the Youth Participation Worker, stating that as a result of their meeting, the Youth Council had requested that other Councillors attend their meetings to discuss certain issues with them. The Group suggested that the Youth Council be contacted following the completion of the investigation to report on their findings and recommendations.

Youth Council Survey – Citizenship Education

- 7.4.7 As a result of the Group's interaction with the Youth Participation Worker and the Youth Council, the Youth Council Cabinet Members volunteered to conduct a survey of sixth form students in a local school in the County Borough, to gain a brief insight into the views of young people in relation to BCBC and their experiences of citizenship education.
- 7.4.8 In considering the results of these questionnaires, the Group concluded that there was an obvious need for schools to place greater emphasis on citizenship education, and highlighted that the lack of statutory education on this subject meant that young people were not being informed of basic democratic processes, and the provision of citizenship education was not consistent across the County Borough.
- 7.4.9 The evidence also suggested that young people's understanding of the Council's functions was limited to services they saw on a day to day basis, such as waste collection and roadworks.
- 7.4.10 The Group expressed concerns over the fact that many of the responses were from 18 year olds who were eligible to vote, and some 17 year olds who would soon be eligible to vote, and yet very few of the respondents were aware of who their local Councillor was.
- 7.4.11 This evidence supported the view that had been previously expressed in other areas of the investigation, that it was essential for all Councillors to play a role

in engaging with young people throughout the County Borough, and endorsed the idea of carrying out the pilot scheme, as outlined at paragraph 7.4.5, point j. It was highlighted that it was this knowledge gained at a young age through citizenship education that would inform their opinions of the local Council and their participation with the democratic process in the future.

Recommendation 11

Evidence received from the Youth Council and the school survey carried out by the Youth Council, indicated that many young people were not aware of what 'Citizenship' was, what the Council was or its role, apart from 'collect rubbish', 'roadworks', and 'pick up litter'. The Committee therefore recommends that the proposed pilot scheme detailed at paragraph 7.4.5.j., relating to a training session on the Council's role, and how the work of the Council affects aspects of young people's everyday lives, be carried out. The results of this should then be analysed with a view to determining the best way of engaging with all schools in the County Borough.

Schools' Perspectives

- 7.4.12 As part of their evidence gathering, the Group also wrote to the headteachers of all secondary schools in the County Borough to obtain their views on the provision of citizenship education, the problems associated with its delivery and their suggestions for improvement.
- 7.4.13 Out of the nine comprehensive schools in the County Borough, the Group received five responses, as well as a response from the Pupil Referral Unit.
- 7.4.14 It was apparent from these responses that there was no uniformity in the way in which citizenship education was being taught, with many of the negative comments relating to time constraints and limited resources.
- 7.4.15 In conjunction with their consideration of the schools' responses, the Group also received the new Personal and Social Education Framework which was published in January 2008 as part of the revised curriculum for Wales. Whilst it was still a guide, the new framework contained a section specifically related to Active Citizenship, and was supported by a Welsh Assembly Government website which provided case studies, as well as details of supporting organisations such as the Council for Education in World Citizenship, (CEWC), which provided free support and teaching on Citizenship to schools. The new framework also provided guidance for PSE in the post-16 curriculum, which incorporated aspects such as democratic processes, and electoral procedures and processes. In addition, part of the framework and the website dealt with 'Political Literacy', which it states:

...is about helping young people become politically aware and effective. It is about giving them the ability to interpret issues and events politically and as such is a complex mix of skills, values and knowledge.

This involves:

- *knowing how decisions are made in society – locally, nationally and internationally*
- *being familiar with a range of basic political concepts*
- *recognising one's right to participate in the democratic process*
- *differentiating between the policies of the main political parties*
- *developing a personal set of political values and having the skills and confidence to apply them in practice.'*

7.4.16 It was understood that whilst the implementation of the PSE framework was scheduled for August 2008, the PSE Advisor would be visiting all schools in the County Borough to raise awareness of the framework, and drawing attention to the web resource accompanying it.

7.4.17 The Group agreed that the new PSE Framework was a positive development, however, due to the fact that the framework was not scheduled to be implemented until August 2008, the Group decided to respond to the schools to thank them for their input, and positively endorse the new framework. The Group also highlighted that whilst it was important to encourage schools to embrace the new framework, Members themselves needed to become more involved in the school environment, particularly those acting as school governors, and offer support to schools in the implementation of the framework. It was suggested that Members could offer to meet with school representatives to discuss any issues relating to citizenship education.

7.4.18 Many of the issues raised by the schools in relation to citizenship education focused upon the shortage of relevant, meaningful, and interactive resources as well as very little external support. Whilst it seemed that many of these issues would hopefully be met by the new framework and support website, the Group agreed that it was essential to undertake further evidence gathering with schools following the framework's implementation, to establish whether there had been any significant changes to their experiences and perceptions of citizenship education as a result of the implementation of framework.

Recommendation 12

Evidence received during the course of the investigation raised concerns in relation to the shortfall in the provision of citizenship education for young people, and highlighted the problems facing schools in delivering this part of the curriculum, particularly in terms of the availability of resources, the knowledge base of teachers in this subject area and the competing pressures within the school timetable.

It is therefore recommended that Cabinet explore the possibility of employing a peripatetic teacher in Bridgend, with knowledge and expertise in politics, democratic processes and Council structures, to assist with the teaching of these topics. Such an initiative would reduce the pressures and strains on teachers and schools, and ensure

that all young people of each age group receive the same level of instruction.

Conclusions on Electoral Turnout

- 7.4.19 Throughout their evidence gathering on the subject of voter turnout, the Group agreed that Councillors had a responsibility to engage with their constituents within the County Borough on an ongoing basis throughout the whole of their term, not just prior to elections. It was felt that Members had an active part to play in the support and education of young people, in order that they gain the basic knowledge on democratic processes to carry forward into their future, to enable them make an informed choice at the ballot box, and to contribute to society in general.
- 7.4.20 In addition to this, during the Group's exploration into the subject of electoral turnout and its relationship with citizenship education, Members were advised of a participation strategy that was being created by the County Borough's Children and Young Peoples Partnership, in line with the Children Act 2004, which requires each local authority and its partners to prepare a three-year strategic Children and Young People's Plan. The Assembly Government Guidance states that a local participation strategy will '*ensure that children and young people have maximum opportunity to contribute, to have their voices heard and their views taken into account in decision making on all issues that affect their lives*'. Members were advised that Bridgend's Participation Strategy was due to be completed by April 2008, and highlighted many of the issues raised by this investigation in relation to the necessary engagement of the Authority with young people. Officers were optimistic that some of the information gathered during this investigation could assist them, and be incorporated into the Participation Strategy.

Recommendation 13

- 13a) The Committee agree that the role of Members is vital in assisting young people to develop the skills and knowledge to become an active citizen, and their expertise on council and democratic processes could provide teachers with additional resources for this particular subject matter. It is recommended that Members be encouraged to get involved with young people within the school environment, supporting and endorsing the new Personal and Social Education Framework and the Participation Strategy, through offering their assistance in the implementation of those new initiatives.**
- 13b) In order to achieve this, it is suggested that Members could arrange to visit schools, colleges and other youth organisations on a systematic basis to partake in question and answer sessions on the democratic process, such as the role of Councillors, the Council as a whole and on more specific issues affecting young people.**

13c) It is further recommended that training is undertaken with all Members to reaffirm their role in relation to engaging with young people, and in their new role in promoting the Participation Strategy.

Recommendation 14

The Committee recommends that following the implementation of the new Personal and Social Education Framework in August 2008, the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee, whose remit contains Education, undertakes the role of monitoring this framework. It is suggested that similar questions to those asked of the schools during the course of this investigation could be re-sent to schools following the implementation of the framework, in order to determine its impact.

Recommendation 15

The Committee recognises the parallels between the Democratic Renewal Agenda and the Participation Strategy, particularly in relation to the involvement and engagement of young people in decision making processes across Wales. It is therefore suggested that the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee monitors the implementation of the Participation Strategy alongside its monitoring of recommendations resulting from the Democratic Renewal investigation, as the two areas are intrinsically linked.

7.5 The Effect of Constitutional Changes on Decision Making and Accountability

- 7.5.1 During the initial stages of the investigation, Members were advised by the Assistant Director – Legal and Democratic Services that work was starting on redrafting aspects of the constitution. It was therefore decided as part of the redrafted project plan for the investigation, that the Group should receive information on how these new changes would affect aspects of decision making and accountability processes within the authority. Particular interest was expressed in relation to Overview & Scrutiny's role of policy review and development, in light of the fact that Policy Fora had been abolished, with the exception of the Cross-Cutting Policy Forum which acts as the steering group for the Local Development Plan.
- 7.5.2 The Group received information from the Director of Legal and Democratic Services on how the reviewed provisions of the Constitution would directly impact upon the decision making and accountability process.

Policy Review and Development

- 7.5.3 It was reported by the Director of Legal and Democratic Services that the Overview & Scrutiny function would fulfil the role that was previously assigned to the policy forums in relation to policy review and development.

- 7.5.4 The point was raised that policy review and development was a relatively large task that Overview & Scrutiny needed to become more involved with, and therefore a systematic procedure needed to be put in place to accommodate this role. It was suggested that Overview & Scrutiny Committees should start by considering policies that already existed, to determine whether they were still fit for purpose or in need of review, as well as considering whether there were any gaps where policy needed to be developed. This work would be in addition to the consideration of those policies already being reviewed by the Directorate. It was also advised that an essential part of Overview and Scrutiny's role of policy review and development was ensuring policies met with the Council's corporate priorities.

Recommendation 16

16a) In light of the recent constitutional changes, which included the abolition of the Policy Fora, it is recommended that the Overview and Scrutiny function of the Authority formally assumes the role that was previously tasked to the Policy Fora.

16b) It is recommended that Overview and Scrutiny's involvement in policy review and development, as outlined in the Constitution, should consider the corporate priorities of the Authority and the current policies in place to meet these, with the aim to identify policies which were no longer applicable, fit for purpose or where there were gaps in policy.

The County Borough Debate

- 7.5.5 The Group discussed the new provision in the Constitution for full Council to debate a given topic on a quarterly basis. The topic for debate was to be agreed between group leaders in advance, or, failing agreement, determined by a vote. It was reported that this provision would enable the Council to stage an open debate on an issue relevant to the performance of the Authority at the time, without any decision-making being involved. The Group were advised that a debate would take place on 27 February 2008 and would look into some of the work of the Democratic Renewal investigation, specifically in relation to electoral turnout, under the title 'Members' Role in Increasing Electoral Turnout'.

Questions from Members of the Public

- 7.5.6 Details were provided to the Group in relation to the provision for members of the public to ask questions of Members of the Executive at ordinary meetings of Council. Certain stipulations were discussed such as the five days notice required for the question, and the fact that no person may submit more than one question, and no more than one question may be asked on behalf of one organisation.

- 7.5.7 However, it was reported to the Group that there had been a lack of response by members of the public to this provision, despite a press release promoting the new changes. The Group discussed whether this could be because members of the public were passing their questions to their local Members to ask on their behalf, or whether this was simply due to lack of awareness over the provision.
- 7.5.8 As had been previously discussed in relation to other parts of the investigation, Members questioned whether better use of advertising, and using alternative venues for meetings, could increase public attendance at, and participation in, meetings.. Members discussed whether such initiatives could create the same interest in meetings such as Council or Cabinet which was apparent in Planning and Development meetings.

Recommendation 17

17a) It is recommended that ways to improve the advertising of public meetings should be explored, particularly in relation to information on how the public can be involved, and ways to increase awareness of the provision for members of the public to ask questions in Council meetings.

17b) Whilst acknowledging that the revision to the Council agenda in relation to public speaking received media coverage at the time of the changes to the Constitution, continuous awareness of the allowance for public questions to Executive Members needs to be maintained in order to inform the public of this process. To support this, it is therefore recommended that a 'tear out' question form be provided in the Bulletin for questions to Council in order to promote and facilitate the process.

7.6 Support for Members in their Constituency Roles

- 7.6.1 In considering the support provided for members in their constituency roles, the Group requested information on the current support provided to Members, and whether there were any areas where Members were not receiving the necessary support to carry out their roles effectively. This information was provided by the Member Services Unit.

Member Referrals

- 7.6.2 In relation to member referrals, the Head of Member Services advised the Group that there had been approximately 14,000 referrals since the 2004 elections.
- 7.6.3 The procedure currently in place for member referrals stipulated that Member Services kept a record of the referrals made by each Member, so that they could follow them up and keep track of them, ensuring timely responses.

- 7.6.4 The Group were advised that although the system was not compulsory, it was useful to both Members and the Authority in understanding those issues which were most important to the electorate. It also assisted newly elected Members in ensuring that matters were referred to the correct Directorates as well as helping them to understand the structure of the Authority and accountability for functions.
- 7.6.5 The Group discussed the possibility of establishing an electronic referral system which Members could use to log the referral automatically and transfer the information to Member Services, in light of the fact that some Members might use their own email addresses to correspond with constituents, and thus not inform Member Services of all referrals. The Group proposed an online referral form for Members to use, which could be filled in by Members and passed, via paper or email, directly to Member Services. This would speed up the process and ensure that a record of each referral was held by Member Services.

Recommendation 18

In relation to Member referrals, it is recommended that an online referral form be produced for Members to complete electronically, in order to speed up the referral process and improve the accuracy of the records held.

Training

- 7.6.6 On the subject of training, the Group's discussion focused around training for new Members in particular, highlighting that it was important not to assume that those elected had direct experience of Local Government.
- 7.6.7 The Group therefore sought the advice of the Director of Legal and Democratic Services on how they could ensure that all Members received the training necessary to carry out their roles within their relevant Committees. It was suggested that, if Members did not undertake basic training for the Committees for which they were selected, they should not be allowed to sit on those Committees. The Group were advised that any decision to introduce mandatory training would have to be taken by Council.
- 7.6.8 Further discussion raised the suggestion that training methods could be revised with additional approaches such as online resources or 'take home' literature. The view of the Group was that providing various options would allow Members to undertake training in a way which suited them, and therefore could potentially increase participation levels.
- 7.6.9 During further deliberation on the subject of training, individual Members of the Group recounted past experiences of training when they were new Members during which they had at times felt intimidated by experienced Members also attending the training sessions, and sometimes taking the focus away from the training of new Members. Whilst emphasising that experienced Members would benefit from refresher training sessions, the Group felt that training

should be provided which focussed on the participation of new Members, allowing them to freely contribute to the session.

- 7.6.10 The Group noted that there were considerable time constraints for training following an election, particularly with the training of new Members, and each political group had a responsibility to support its Members. It was suggested that each political group should have in place Member Performance Development Plans and carry out Member appraisals, to ensure that all Members were gaining the support and training that they required. However, it was understood that this was a political group issue and therefore could not be progressed by Officers of the Council.

Recommendation 19

It is recommended that in order to ensure that all Members receive the necessary training to support them in carrying out their roles on various Committees, it should be put to Council for agreement that all Members be required to carry out the relevant training as a prerequisite for sitting on the associated Committee.

Recommendation 20

It is further recommended that training methods for Members be revised with additional approaches considered such as online resources or 'take home' literature, to enable Members to construct a training programme specifically designed to suit them and to give them greater access to relevant training information.

7.7 Consultation and Public Participation

- 7.7.1 Consultation was first discussed during the initial stages of the investigation under the topic of 'Success Criteria, Performance Monitoring and Links to Key Strategies'.
- 7.7.2 Under this topic, the Committee considered consultation and the gathering of qualitative and quantitative information. Members were informed that much of the data gathered by the Authority as part of consultation exercises was quantitative, however, the Authority had made improvements in terms of feeding back the outcomes of consultation exercises to stakeholders. It was highlighted that further work was planned to look at whether, after feedback had been received, participants felt that the process had been worthwhile.
- 7.7.3 Throughout the investigation, certain parallels were identified between work previously undertaken by the Committee as part of their 'Communication with the Public' investigation, and sections of the work now being undertaken as part of the Democratic Renewal investigation, particularly in relation to the Customer Care Strategy, which aimed at improving access to services and social inclusion.

- 7.7.4 A report was submitted to the Committee at its meeting on 29 January 2007 entitled “Democratic Renewal: Equalities, Public Participation and Access to Services” which outlined relevant extracts from the findings and recommendations of the Committee from its investigation into Communication with the Public, and highlighted the links with the Democratic Renewal agenda, and the development of the Customer Care Strategy.
- 7.7.5 Evidence was received in relation to the consultation undertaken in developing the Customer Care Strategy. The Committee were informed that the Policy and Performance Management Unit had organised an event with the Bridgend Local Health Board and Bro Morgannwg NHS Trust in November 2006 with the intention of involving disabled people in formulating a Disability Equality Scheme. Access to services and information had been a key theme to come out of this event and had been subsequently addressed in the draft scheme.
- 7.7.6 It was later agreed by the Committee that issues relating to access to services, complaints and the proposed Civic-Centre remodelling, which had been highlighted through the ‘Communication with the Public’ investigation, could be taken up by the Committee under their monitoring role of the Customer Care Strategy and the new Complaints procedure. All other recommendations of the ‘Communication with the Public’ investigation would continue to be monitored by the Committee, apart from those regarding consultation, which were assigned to the Task and Finish Group as part of their consideration of consultation methods employed by the Authority.

Methods by which the Authority Consults with the Public

- 7.7.7 The evidence received highlighted the importance of consultation in the work of the local authority. In relation to the impact of the results of consultation exercises, the Group emphasised the need for the culture and political climate of the local authority to be such that the evidence gathered through consultation is listened to, and appropriate action taken.
- 7.7.8 Included in the information provided to the Group were the new ‘Bridgend County Borough Council Consultation Strategy’ and the ‘Best Practice Guide to Consultation at Bridgend County Borough Council’. It was reported to the Group that these documents had not yet been finalised, and thus the Group were invited to provide any comments or suggestions for improvement.
- 7.7.9 The Group also considered the recommendations made on consultation as part of the Communication with the Public investigation. It was ascertained that many of the recommendations had been incorporated into either the Consultation Strategy or the Best Practice Guide.
- 7.7.10 As part of their research the Group considered aspects of a similar investigation carried out by Cardiff County Council’s Policy Review and Performance Scrutiny Committee on the subject of Electoral Turnout in March 2004. Cardiff’s report mentioned that Cardiff County Council undertook an annual citizens’ survey (involving 6000 people from all sectors of society) to establish general levels of satisfaction with Council services. The Group agreed that it might be beneficial for BCBC to undertake a similar survey.

Recommendation 21

The Committee recommends that future work is undertaken to look at the way in which the results of consultation exercises are acted upon, and to ensure that the evidence given through consultation is listened to, and appropriate action is taken as a result.

Recommendation 22

The Committee recommends that the draft 'Consultation Strategy' be implemented and enforced across the Authority with particular significance placed on ensuring that all consultation activity is coordinated through the corporate centre.

Recommendation 23

Whilst acknowledging the benefit of the Citizens' Panel Surveys, the Committee recognises that those who form part of the Citizens Panel can be perceived as already engaging with the democratic process, as they have actively volunteered to be on the panel and take part in the surveys.

It is therefore recommended that in addition to Citizen Panel surveys, the Local Authority also consider following the example from Cardiff County Council, who conduct an annual citizens' survey involving 6000 people from all sectors of society, to establish general levels of satisfaction with Council services. This would allow the Authority to access those 'hard to reach' members of the community, and provide the Authority with a regular, overall and comparative view of Council services.

Web-Casting

- 7.7.11 The subject of web-casting and its possible use in the local authority for broadcasting meetings on the internet, was first discussed in the initial stages of the Committee's investigation, under the topic of 'Public Participation in the Decision-Making Process'. During these discussions, the Cabinet Member – Resources, in his capacity as Champion for Communication, pointed out that setting up web-casting would involve a cost, but that it was inevitable that the technology of web-casting would be used by the Council to interact with the public in the future with the development of cheaper and faster communication.
- 7.7.12 The Task and Finish Group re-visited the topic of web-casting later in the investigation, inviting the E-Government and GIS programme Manager to discuss the issue in more detail.
- 7.7.13 In introducing the evidence, the E-Government and GIS Manager informed the Group that 80% of access to the BCBC website was related to recruitment,

tourism or leisure and that following this, the fourth most accessed web-pages related to planning and development.

- 7.7.14 The Group were advised of the different ways in which web-casting could be used within the Authority, including having fixed cameras in locations such as the Council Chamber to film and record meetings. These could then be broadcasted 'live', with a minor delay for confidential editing, or could be stored as a record of the meeting, forming an archive for subsequent access.
- 7.7.15 Another suggested approach was to use a mobile facility which could be used to film local events and campaigns, or to interview residents as part of consultation processes.
- 7.7.16 Estimates of costs were provided with the example of the London Borough of Croydon, where they had a fixed system set up for the Council Chamber at an approximate cost of £20,000 a year for lease, plus the cost for staff and support contracts. A further example was given of the London Borough of Lewisham where they used a web-casting equipment in the form of a portable suitcase which could be transported for use in different places, and cost approximately £5,000.
- 7.7.17 The Group were advised that the levels of usage for web-casting in these authorities were said to be good, however this evidence had come from the suppliers. In contrast to this, there was evidence to suggest that some Councils had started web-casting schemes which had later ceased due to lack of viewing.
- 7.7.18 Through their discussions, the Group recognised that the question of editorial rights would need to be considered before web-casting was introduced, as well as the question of whether it was cost effective, however, opinions suggested that it was inevitable at some stage in the future as the public were becoming more sophisticated in their use of communication technology.
- 7.7.19 The point was also raised that web-casting could be a positive idea as it could promote an inclusive culture, potentially increasing public participation in the democratic process, and showing the decision making process more clearly, as sometimes it was not clear from the minutes of meetings how decisions had been arrived at. It could also encourage Members to be better prepared when attending a meeting.
- 7.7.20 Evidence submitted to the Group suggested that whilst use of web-casting may be issue dependant, and its success limited at present, the possibility of web-casting should continue to be monitored for future use. In addition, the Group suggested that in the interest of reducing cost, the possibility of upgrading the facilities already in place in the Council Chamber for the purpose of web-casting should be considered.

Recommendation 24

Evidence presented during the investigation suggests that further work needs to be undertaken on the possibility of the Authority investing in

web-casting facilities in the future.

The Group were made aware of various methods that could be taken with web-casting, and it became evident that with the development of cheaper and faster communication, and with the public becoming more sophisticated with technology, web-casting would be inevitable in the future.

It is therefore recommended that in view of promoting an inclusive culture, and increasing public participation in the democratic process, the possibility of web-casting continue to be monitored, with consideration given to determining the possibility of upgrading the facilities already in place in the Council Chamber for the purpose of web-casting.

Ways that Overview and Scrutiny Consult With and Involve the Public

- 7.7.21 As part of the Group's consideration of consultation methods, it received evidence relating to public participation and consultation within the Overview and Scrutiny function of the Authority.
- 7.7.22 Evidence received from the Overview and Scrutiny Unit illustrated how both public participation and consultation was of great significance to the Overview and Scrutiny function. Examples of when consultation had been carried out were provided, including when the partners of the Local Authority had been consulted with as part of the Overview and Scrutiny forward work programmes. Emphasis was placed on the future possibilities for consultation with partners, such as the planned work related to the Health, Social Care and Well-Being Strategy.
- 7.7.23 The Group suggested that in order to improve citizen engagement, public representatives external to the Authority should be more involved with the Overview and Scrutiny Committees. In addition to having the opportunity to invite these representatives to attend the meeting, the Group discussed the possibility of co-opting members with expertise on particular areas to Overview and Scrutiny Committees, just as the Education, Leisure and Community Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee have co-opted Members from various teachers associations and unions.
- 7.7.24 The Group were also advised that with the recent transfer of the Overview and Scrutiny function to Corporate Development and, there was an opportunity to enhance the work of Overview and Scrutiny in relation to consultation and partnership working. Improved relationships and communication with the Consultation and Communication Officers were expected to assist with the development of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees.
- 7.7.25 As had been previously discussed, the prospect of using public venues for Overview & Scrutiny meetings was suggested as a possible way to enhance public engagement. The Group were referred back to when the Overview and Scrutiny Committees conducted meetings in alternative venues throughout the County Borough during consideration of the budget in 2005/2006. Although it

was felt that the success of this engagement had been limited, the Group agreed that this was a step in the right direction which should not be dismissed, and should be considered in future, particularly if the subject is relevant to a particular area.

- 7.7.26 The Group agreed that to improve future engagement with the public and to raise public awareness of the Overview and Scrutiny function, the County Bulletin needed to be used more as a tool for communicating and consulting with the public on topics included in the Overview and Scrutiny forward work programmes.

Recommendation 25

It is recommended that in order to improve citizen engagement, the Overview and Scrutiny Committees consider co-opting members who are public representatives with expertise on specific areas relevant to the remit of the Committee.

Recommendation 26

It is recommended that work is undertaken between the Overview and Scrutiny Unit and the Communications Team to consider ways of publicising the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees, particularly examining the use of the County Bulletin, in order to raise public awareness of the Overview and Scrutiny function.

Recommendation 27

It is recommended that, following their consideration of this final report of the Democratic Renewal investigation, Cabinet refers the report to Council for consideration at its second ordinary meeting following the elections in May 2008, in order to increase awareness of, and promote, the democratic renewal agenda within the newly elected Council.

Recommendation 28

It is recommended that an action plan be produced to address the issues raised within the recommendations above, indicating the proposed actions, responsible Directorate, Lead Officer and proposed timescale for each of them. It is suggested that this action plan be presented to Council for its consideration alongside the Cross-Cutting Issues Overview and Scrutiny final report of on Democratic Renewal.

7. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1

- 1a) It is recommended that when Committee agendas contain items of particular public interest, such as 'Falling School Rolls', the use of external venues is considered to make the meetings more accessible and to encourage public attendance.**
- 1b) It is suggested that in order to ensure that meetings held in external venues are successful, proper consideration is given to the suitability of venues, to make sure that they are sufficiently equipped and fit for purpose.**

Recommendation 2

- 2a) The Committee recommends that in order to improve how the authority engages with the public, more effort should be made to seek feedback from members of the public following their participation in or observation of meetings.**
- 2b) It is suggested that a review of how feedback is collected and used across all Committees be carried out to determine how best to capture the public's perception of meetings held within the Council and how this data can be used to inform and improve services.**
- 2c) It is recommended that this review consider the comprehensive and consistent use of feedback forms after meetings, the possible creation of a generic form suitable for all Committees and how to ensure that forms are readily available to all those attending meetings, including making them available electronically.**
- 2d) The Committee also suggests that in order to use this feedback to inform and improve services, the review consider the creation of a feedback database, collating all the information from these feedback forms, which Members and Officers could have access to, therefore contributing to a culture of continuous improvement.**

Recommendation 3

The Committee recognises that the voter turnout level can sometimes be misleading and does not always accurately reflect the actual number of people who cast a vote. Evidence gathered during the investigation highlighted that the figure can also be affected by problems with the voting process, such as those that occurred in the most recent elections with a number of votes being voided due to problems with postal voting forms.

The Committee therefore recommends that the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee continues to monitor electoral turnout levels, with

particular attention given to examining whether previous problems, such as those relating to absent voters and postal voting, are being addressed.

Recommendation 4

In order to provide more accurate voter turnout figures, it is recommended that information on the number of spoiled ballot papers is made available alongside the official voter turnout data, to more accurately reflect the number of voters who exercised their right to vote.

Recommendation 5

5a) The Committee recommends that the Bridgend County Bulletin be used as a tool to advertise elections in advance of registration for the electoral register and in advance of an upcoming election.

5b) It is suggested that the Bulletin should be used to explain the voting process and frequently asked questions such as where constituents can vote and how postal voting works. More significantly, clarification should be provided for all potential voters that their details are held at the appropriate polling station and as such, the polling card is not required to vote, but is merely a useful tool to speed up the process.

Recommendation 6

It is recommended that alternative methods of advertising elections be explored, for example, it was suggested that publishing the diary of a first time voter, following a young person through the whole process from registering to vote, to researching candidates, right up until election day, would help to attract attention to the process and encourage voter turnout.

Recommendation 7

7a) During the course of the investigation, the Task and Finish Group received evidence that highlighted the role of Members in increasing electoral turnout. The Committee therefore recommends that Councillors need to actively pursue methods of improving voter turnout at elections throughout their terms of office, rather than predominantly in the period approaching an election.

7b) It is recommended that Members should continuously engage with their constituents on all issues affecting their community, to ensure that they are accurately reflecting the views of their constituents when acting within their role as Ward Member.

7c) It is recommended that, as part of the training that Members receive immediately following an election to explain their role and responsibilities as a local Member, attention should be given to

providing training specific to their role in contributing to the Democratic Renewal agenda.

Recommendation 8

It is recommended that the possibility of providing online or telephone registration on the electoral roll is explored as a potential means of making the process simpler, particularly in relation to amending the information held.

Recommendation 9

In order to increase the number of people registered on the electoral roll, it is recommended that registration forms are made available in libraries, community centres and all other customer contact centres as well as schools and colleges. It is believed that this will encourage a wider group of people to register which will lead to an increase in the overall electoral turnout levels.

Recommendation 10

The Committee expresses support of the proposed electoral roadshows and recommend that these take place, led by the Electoral Services Department, along with the Authority's Youth Services, and the Youth Council in particular as they would have a greater knowledge and understanding of how to interact with, and grasp the attention of, young people. It is further recommended that it would be more valuable if the roadshows were carried out in advance of the Authority's election canvassing, in the hope that the roadshows would remind and encourage young people to register to vote.

Recommendation 11

Evidence received from the Youth Council and the school survey carried out by the Youth Council, indicated that many young people were not aware of what 'Citizenship' was, what the Council was or its role, apart from 'collect rubbish', 'roadworks', and 'pick up litter'. The Committee therefore recommends that the proposed pilot scheme detailed at paragraph 7.4.5.j., relating to a training session on the Council's role, and how the work of the Council affects aspects of young people's everyday lives, be carried out. The results of this should then be analysed with a view to determining the best way of engaging with all schools in the County Borough.

Recommendation 12

Evidence received during the course of the investigation raised concerns in relation to the shortfall in the provision of citizenship education for young people, and highlighted the problems facing schools in delivering this part of the curriculum, particularly in terms of the availability of resources, the knowledge base of teachers in this subject area and the competing pressures within the school timetable.

It is therefore recommended that Cabinet explore the possibility of employing a peripatetic teacher in Bridgend, with knowledge and expertise in politics, democratic processes and Council structures, to assist with the teaching of these topics. Such an initiative would reduce the pressures and strains on teachers and schools, and ensure that all young people of each age group receive the same level of instruction.

Recommendation 13

13a) The Committee agree that the role of Members is vital in assisting young people to develop the skills and knowledge to become an active citizen, and their expertise on council and democratic processes could provide teachers with additional resources for this particular subject matter. It is recommended that Members be encouraged to get involved with young people within the school environment, supporting and endorsing the new Personal and Social Education Framework and the Participation Strategy, through offering their assistance in the implementation of those new initiatives.

13b) In order to achieve this, it is suggested that Members could arrange to visit schools, colleges and other youth organisations on a systematic basis to partake in question and answer sessions on the democratic process, such as the role of Councillors, the Council as a whole and on more specific issues affecting young people.

13c) It is further recommended that training is undertaken with all Members to reaffirm their role in relation to engaging with young people, and in their new role in promoting the Participation Strategy.

Recommendation 14

The Committee recommends that following the implementation of the new Personal and Social Education Framework in August 2008, the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee, whose remit contains Education, undertakes the role of monitoring this framework. It is suggested that similar questions to those asked of the schools during the course of this investigation could be re-sent to schools following the implementation of the framework, in order to determine its impact.

Recommendation 15

The Committee recognises the parallels between the Democratic Renewal Agenda and the Participation Strategy, particularly in relation to the involvement and engagement of young people in decision making processes across Wales. It is therefore suggested that the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee monitors the implementation of the Participation Strategy alongside its monitoring of

recommendations resulting from the Democratic Renewal investigation, as the two areas are intrinsically linked.

Recommendation 16

16a) In light of the recent constitutional changes, which included the abolition of the Policy Fora, it is recommended that the Overview and Scrutiny function of the Authority formally assumes the role that was previously tasked to the Policy Fora.

16b) It is recommended that Overview and Scrutiny's involvement in policy review and development, as outlined in the Constitution, should consider the corporate priorities of the Authority and the current policies in place to meet these, with the aim to identify policies which were no longer applicable, fit for purpose or where there were gaps in policy.

Recommendation 17

17a) It is recommended that ways to improve the advertising of public meetings should be explored, particularly in relation to information on how the public can be involved, and ways to increase awareness of the provision for members of the public to ask questions in Council meetings.

17b) Whilst acknowledging that the revision to the Council agenda in relation to public speaking received media coverage at the time of the changes to the Constitution, continuous awareness of the allowance for public questions to Executive Members needs to be maintained in order to inform the public of this process. To support this, it is therefore recommended that a 'tear out' question form be provided in the Bulletin for questions to Council in order to promote and facilitate the process.

Recommendation 18

In relation to Member referrals, it is recommended that an online referral form be produced for Members to complete electronically, in order to speed up the referral process and improve the accuracy of the records held.

Recommendation 19

It is recommended that in order to ensure that all Members receive the necessary training to support them in carrying out their roles on various Committees, it should be put to Council for agreement that all Members be required to carry out the relevant training as a prerequisite for sitting on the associated Committee.

Recommendation 20

It is further recommended that training methods for Members be revised with additional approaches considered such as online resources or 'take home' literature, to enable Members to construct a training programme specifically designed to suit them and to give them greater access to relevant training information.

Recommendation 21

The Committee recommends that future work is undertaken to look at the way in which the results of consultation exercises are acted upon, and to ensure that the evidence given through consultation is listened to, and appropriate action is taken as a result.

Recommendation 22

The Committee recommends that the draft 'Consultation Strategy' be implemented and enforced across the Authority with particular significance placed on ensuring that all consultation activity is coordinated through the corporate centre.

Recommendation 23

Whilst acknowledging the benefit of the Citizens' Panel Surveys, the Committee recognises that those who form part of the Citizens Panel can be perceived as already engaging with the democratic process, as they have actively volunteered to be on the panel and take part in the surveys.

It is therefore recommended that in addition to Citizen Panel surveys, the Local Authority also consider following the example from Cardiff County Council, who conduct an annual citizens' survey involving 6000 people from all sectors of society, to establish general levels of satisfaction with Council services. This would allow the Authority to access those 'hard to reach' members of the community, and provide the Authority with a regular, overall and comparative view of Council services.

Recommendation 24

Evidence presented during the investigation suggests that further work needs to be undertaken on the possibility of the Authority investing in web-casting facilities in the future.

The Group were made aware of various methods that could be taken with web-casting, and it became evident that with the development of cheaper and faster communication, and with the public becoming more sophisticated with technology, web-casting would be inevitable in the future.

It is therefore recommended that in view of promoting an inclusive culture, and increasing public participation in the democratic process, the possibility of web-casting continue to be monitored, with consideration given to determining the possibility of upgrading the facilities already in place in the Council Chamber for the purpose of web-casting.

Recommendation 25

It is recommended that in order to improve citizen engagement, the Overview and Scrutiny Committees consider co-opting members who are public representatives with expertise on specific areas relevant to the remit of the Committee.

Recommendation 26

It is recommended that work is undertaken between the Overview and Scrutiny Unit and the Communications Team to consider ways of publicising the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees, particularly examining the use of the County Bulletin, in order to raise public awareness of the Overview and Scrutiny function.

Recommendation 27

It is recommended that, following their consideration of this final report of the Democratic Renewal investigation, Cabinet refers the report to Council for consideration at its second ordinary meeting following the elections in May 2008, in order to increase awareness of, and promote, the democratic renewal agenda within the newly elected Council.

Recommendation 28

It is recommended that an action plan be produced to address the issues raised within the recommendations above, indicating the proposed actions, responsible Directorate, Lead Officer and proposed timescale for each of them. It is suggested that this action plan be presented to Council for its consideration alongside the Cross-Cutting Issues Overview and Scrutiny final report of on Democratic Renewal.

8. INVITEES

The following were interviewed over the course of the investigation either individually or as part of a group:

Bridgend County Borough Councillors

- Cllr C Green, Leader
- Cllr P Hacking, Deputy Leader
- Cllr B Burns, Cabinet Member – Resources/Champion for Communication
- Cllr D Sage, Chair of Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Cllr A Davies, Chair of Education, Leisure and Community Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Cllr C Teesdale, Chair of Environmental and Planning Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Officers of Bridgend County Borough Council

- P A Jolley, Director of Legal and Democratic Services/ Monitoring Officer/ Returning Officer
- M Hooker, Assistant Director – Planning
- R Nancarrow, Head of Policy and Performance Management
- T Garthwaite, Executive Director – Community
- H Anthony, Executive Director – Learning
- D Sutherland, Head of IS and ICT
- L Smith, Corporate Equalities Co-ordinator
- H Williams, Head of Business Efficiency and Effectiveness
- C Lillie, Corporate Communications manager
- M Hughes, Youth Participation Worker
- A McMillan, Head of Member Services
- D Macgregor, Assistant Chief Executive, Corporate Development and Partnerships
- R Simmonds, E-Government and GIS Programme Manager
- E Wrighton, Scrutiny Officer
- S Kelly, Policy and Performance Officer

External Invitees

- S Allerston, PSE Advisor - ESIS
- Youth Council Members

The Committee would like to thank all the invitees for their valuable contribution to this investigation.

9. **WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS**

The following written submissions were received:

- Report of the Director of Legal and Democratic Services/Election Registration Officer/Returning Officer – Electoral Turnout Levels
- Briefing document on Citizenship Education in Wales – PSE Adviser
- Summary results from Youth Council carried out survey of local school
- School responses to Citizenship Education inquiry letter
- Web-casting Briefing Note - E-Government and GIS Programme Manager
- Report of the Director of Legal and Democratic Services – Changes to the Constitution
- Report of the Director of Legal and Democratic Services - Support Offered by Member Services to Members in their Constituency Role
- Consultation and Public Participation within the Overview and Scrutiny Function of the Authority – Scrutiny Unit
- Bridgend County Borough Council Consultation Strategy – Corporate Development and Partnerships
- Best Practice Guide to Consultation at Bridgend County Borough Council – Corporate Development and Partnerships
- Response to Consultation Recommendations of the ‘Communication with the Public’ investigation – Corporate Development and Partnerships

10. DOCUMENTS

- Bridgend County Borough Council Constitution
- Bridgend County Borough Council Consultation Strategy. June 2007
- Bridgend County Borough Council, *Directorate of Legal and Democratic Services Business Plan 2007-10*
- Bridgend County Borough, Citizens' Panel: Quarter 1 2007 – Summary Report 'Citizen Involvement'
- Bridgend County Borough, Citizens' Panel: Quarter 1 2007 – Summary Report 'Service Satisfaction'
- Bridgend County Borough, Citizens' Panel: Quarter 1 2006 – Summary Report 'Overview and Scrutiny'
- Bridgend Children and Young People's Partnership, *Draft Strategy for the Participation of Children and Young People within Bridgend County Borough*
- Welsh Assembly Government, *Local Participation Strategy Guidance*. July 2007
- CEWC –Cymru, 'Active Citizenship for Wales and the World'. www.cewc-cymru.org.uk
- Electoral Reform Society, *Young People*. www.electoral-reform.org.uk/article.php?id=42
- County Council of the City and County of Cardiff, *Report of the Policy Review and Performance Scrutiny Committee: Voter Turnout*. March 2004
- Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council, Scrutiny Review Group, Democratic Renewal Scrutiny Panel, *Electoral Registration and Turnout in Local Government*. October 2006
- Best Practice Guide to Consultation at Bridgend County Borough Council. August 2007
- Bridgend County Borough Council, Cross-Cutting Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Investigation into 'Communication with the Public'. April 2006
- Welsh Assembly Government, *Personal and Social Education Framework for 17 to 19-year-olds in Wales*. January 2008
- Welsh Assembly Government, *Personal and Social Education*. www.wales.gov.uk/personalandsocialeducation

- Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales (ACCAC), *Personal and Social Education Framework Key Stages 1 to 4 in Wales*. 2000.
- Eurydice, The Information Network on Education in Europe, *Citizenship Education at School in Europe – United Kingdom (England, Wales, Northern Ireland)*. European Commission 2004/2005
- National Foundation for Educational Research, *Citizenship Education*. www.nfer.ac.uk/research-areas/citizenship/
- Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, *Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) and Citizenship*. www.qca.org.uk/qca_7315.aspx
- Local Government Association, *'first' Local Democracy Week: young people*. September 2007
- Local Democracy Campaign. July 2007. www.localdemocracy.org.uk
- teachernet. *'Citizenship'*. www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/subjects/citizenship/what/