

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
REPORT TO THE DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

31 JANUARY 2013

**REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE – LEGAL & REGULATORY
SERVICES & MONITORING OFFICER**

SERVICE AND PERFORMANCE UPDATES

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Democratic Services Committee of the additional information requested at the previous meeting of the committee and to advise of the performance of the services provided to elected members.

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Objectives/Other Corporate Priorities

2.1 The support provided by the Democratic Services team to elected members at all levels assists in the achievement of all corporate priorities.

3. Background

3.1 At the previous meeting of the Democratic Services Committee a number of queries were raised regarding the provision of support to elected members these queries were passed to the relevant departments and organisations for clarification and provision of information.

3.2 These queries included:

- Feedback from officers regarding the effectiveness of the Member Referrals System
- Consultation regarding the external organisations that have involvement in the Member Referrals process.
- The possible purchase by elected members of smart phones compatible with the BCBC ICT systems
- Progress of the rollout of ICT equipment to elected members
- Information regarding the HMRC Block Tax dispensations

4. Current situation / proposal

4.1 Member Referrals

4.2 Member Referrals – Consultation within BCBC Officers

4.2.1 The Democratic Services Committee requested that the views of officers be sought regarding the efficiency and effectiveness of the Member Referral System. Key officers and departments were consulted regarding the current system and responses have been collated into the following key points.

4.2.2 It was indicated that the Member Referral System provided an effective method for

Members to raise service queries within the Authority. There is a clear process which enables Members' enquiries to be registered with Democratic Services and then be passed to central points of contact within Directorates. This has assisted the effective monitoring and management of referrals. The use of Open Ticket Recording System (OTRS) has improved the process by allowing electronic responses to be made with clear referencing and audit trails. Those queries raised by members outside of the Member Referrals System have been identified by departments as being more difficult to manage and monitor.

4.2.3 The benefits of the Member Referrals System were identified as follows:

- Enabled:
 - service users/constituents with the opportunity to raise issues that they may not feel comfortable doing themselves.
 - trends/ areas of concern within services to be identified and addressed internally.
- Provided opportunities:
 - to receive feedback from residents within the Borough whether negative or positive.
 - for residents/communities to raise concerns, receive responses and resolve possible issues without the need to instigate a formal complaint to the Authority
 - to help to shape and improve service delivery by raising awareness of problems.
 - to raise awareness of common areas of concern within the community that the Authority may not have been aware of.
- Ensured:
 - due process and that all Members receive appropriate responses in a timely manner.
 - that constituents queries are raised and dealt with formally.
 - response times could be recorded and compared from the introduction of OTRS

4.2.4 The following suggestions were made to develop the Member Referral System and to enhance its effectiveness:

- Provide greater direction to members regarding:
 - the definition of what constitutes a Member Referral.
 - the limitations on service departments in providing a response or when appropriate to close referrals.
 - the need for accurate and detailed information so that the referral can be dealt with effectively.
 - having verbal discussions with officers to clarify issues and to assist in achieving an appropriate outcome to a referral.
 - the appropriate use of the referrals system when addressing queries from a third party. Issues have arisen when a query has been raised by an AM/MP to a Member in relation to a service user. These queries have implications in respect of confidentiality which need to be considered before any response can be provided.
- A review of the departmental contacts points, the timely allocation of

referrals to departments and consistent dissemination of information should be undertaken by Democratic Services with service departments.

- 4.2.5 The 10 Day target for the completion of referrals was considered appropriate for most but more complex issues often require further time to complete. It was indicated that Members were satisfied when officers discussed the reasons for additional time being needed to address the referral if the target time could not be met.
- 4.2.6 The overall reporting and monitoring of referrals was deemed as adequate but further work was required to ensure that referrals were closed when appropriate responses had been provided to members. The use of “pending” did not provide a true reflection that the departments had responded in a timely and accurate manner to the Elected Member.
- 4.2.7 In the future the Member Referrals System could be used to predict new trends, community concerns, hotspots etc. within specific parts of the County Borough. This could help the Authority to identify emerging issues and allow us to better respond, predict and plan. Where specific themes emerge, these could be addressed via a particular marketing/communications campaign which would aid citizens across the Borough and may reduce referral numbers.
- 4.2.8 The Member Referral System could be developed to add to the overall picture of our different customer access channels. The Customer Service Manager and the Corporate Communications Manager were currently looking to develop this process. Regular users (Clients) of the Member Referral System could be identified and channelled towards the Citizens Panel so their voice could be better heard.
- 4.3 Consultation with External organisations dealing with Member Referrals
- 4.3.1 External organisations that were regularly requested to assist in addressing member referrals were contacted to provide information in respect of how queries referred by Democratic Services and other organisations were handled and the expected response times to any queries that were raised. They were also provided with a description of the Member Referrals System for information.
- 4.3.2 It should be noted that external organisations do not have the same requirement to respond to member referrals as internal departments. We are their customers and their relevant policies for responding to customer queries apply. The following information details the responses provided by the external Organisations

| External Organisation | Response time | Comments |
|------------------------------|---|-----------------|
| ABM University Health Board | Acknowledge concern within 2 days final reply within 30 days | |
| BAVO | 10 working days (Initial aim 5 working days) | |
| Valleys to Coast | 10 working days (If a third party is involved – offer an estimated response time) | |
| Environment Agency | General enquiries 10 working days with a reply in 4 working days | |

| External Organisation | Response time | Comments |
|------------------------------|---|---|
| Forestry Commission | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider and reply to the complaint within 20 working days. Technical nature enquiries up to 20 working days. Waste Exemption within 25 working days. | This does not imply action within 20 days |
| Network Rail | Send progress updates every 20 days. | |
| South Wales Police | Response will be sent within 10 days | Advised to send referrals to Local Police Inspectors to ensure a quicker response |
| Welsh Water | 10 working days | |
| Western Power | Respond the same day if call logged Mon - Fri | Monitoring system already established from 2 days – 31 days and over. |

4.3.4 The following statistics indicate level of referrals to outside organisations and their completion rates during the previous 6 months from 01 July 12 – 31 Dec 12.

| External Organisation | No. of Referrals Sent | Completed | Outstanding | % Completed |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| ABM University Health Board | 3 | 3 | 0 | 100.00% |
| BAVO | 0 | 0 | 0 | NA |
| Bridgend Care and Repair | 3 | 3 | 0 | 100.00% |
| British Telecom | 2 | 2 | 0 | 100.00% |
| Environment Agency | 5 | 5 | 0 | 100.00% |
| Forestry Commission | 0 | 0 | 0 | NA |
| Groundwork Bridgend | 0 | 0 | 0 | NA |
| Hafod Housing | 0 | 0 | 0 | NA |
| Network Rail | 3 | 2 | 1 | 66.67% |
| South Wales Police | 16 | 15 | 1 | 93.75% |
| Valleys to Coast | 100 | 86 | 14 | 86.00% |
| Wales and West Housing | 3 | 3 | 0 | 100.00% |
| Welsh Water | 3 | 3 | 0 | 100.00% |
| Western Power | 0 | 0 | 0 | NA |
| Total | 131 | 115 | 16 | 87.79% |

4.4 Service Performance – Member Referrals

4.4.1 The following table details the number of members referrals made to directorates/departments between 01 Sep 12 and 30 Nov 12 and the percentage of the total number of referrals that each Directorate/Department receives.

| | Sept | Oct | Nov | Totals | % of total referrals |
|----------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|----------------------|
| Children's | 14 | 8 | 10 | 32 | 5 |
| Communities | 174 | 122 | 126 | 422 | 66 |
| Wellbeing | 7 | 10 | 4 | 21 | 3 |
| Legal and Regulatory | 14 | 12 | 11 | 37 | 6 |
| Chief Executive | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Performance | 4 | 1 | 7 | 12 | 2 |
| ICT & Property | 4 | 9 | 10 | 23 | 4 |
| External (V2C etc) | 33 | 32 | 23 | 88 | 14 |
| Totals | 251 | 194 | 191 | 636 | 100 |

4.4.2 The following table shows the completion rates of Member Referrals raised between May 2012 – November 2012

| Month | Referred | Completed | Ongoing (Including Pending) | % Completed |
|------------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------------------|--------------|
| May | 258 | 255 | 3 | 98.84 |
| June | 286 | 276 | 10 | 96.50 |
| July | 313 | 306 | 7 | 97.76 |
| August | 206 | 199 | 7 | 96.60 |
| September | 251 | 248 | 3 | 98.80 |
| October | 194 | 183 | 11 | 94.33 |
| November | 191 | 181 | 10 | 94.76 |
| Totals | 1699 | 1648 | 51 | 96.10 |

4.5 ICT update

4.5.1 The ICT Service Unit have signed a contract with EE for the supply of smart phones and are currently trialling the HTC 8s/Windows8 model with the aim of issuing the selected model to Cabinet members in March 2013.

4.4.2 Members will not be able to buy personal phones using the business contract due to the overhead costs of procurement, administration and support. However, members are advised that the EE (Orange) shop in Bridgend Town Centre does offer 25% discount to BCBC staff and members providing proof of employment, such as a payslip.

4.4.3 The roll out of ICT equipment for members is nearing completion. Members have been provided with the following equipment:

| | | |
|--|----------|-----------|
| 11 inch laptops | - | 8 |
| 15 inch Laptops | - | 29 |
| Cloud on own PC or Laptop | - | 11 |
| No ICT support required | - | 1 |
| Vacancy | - | 1 |
| Cabinet Members (new equipment on order) | - | 4 |
| Totals | - | 54 |

4.4.4 The following table shows the number and type of queries made by members to the ICT Service Desk between 8 May 12 and 31 Dec 12. The total figure equates to 2 calls per day to the ICT Service Desk from members.

| | |
|--------------------------|------------|
| Password Reset/Challenge | 96 |
| Cloud | 52 |
| Installations | 36 |
| Outlook | 22 |
| General Incidents | 138 |
| Total | 344 |

4.5 Member Development Survey

4.5.1 The Democratic Services Team produced a survey that sought members' preferences in respect of member development activities. The survey requested that members identified:

- The most appropriate days/times for member development activities to be held
- The number of member development topics that should be provided for members each month
- The number of times each session should be offered to elected members
- Timing and duration of Pre-Council Briefings

4.5.2 Of the 53 members that were surveyed 37 responses were received (70%). The outcomes of the survey are as follows:

- Preferred time of day.
Members were asked to rank their preferred time slots for training (1= most preferred to 4 = least preferred)

| | | 10.00-13.00 | 12.00-15.00 | 14.00 - 17.00 | 16.00 - 19.00 |
|----|---------|-------------|-------------|---------------|---------------|
| Q1 | Total 1 | 21 | 1 | 9 | 7 |
| | Total 2 | 3 | 14 | 9 | 4 |
| | Total 3 | 3 | 15 | 8 | 3 |
| | Total 4 | 9 | 1 | 3 | 17 |

The most preferred time was 10.00-13.00 (57% of members that responded). Some members preferred early afternoon sessions but this was almost evenly divided with the early evening session

- Preferred days
Members were requested to identify their 2 preferred days for undertaking member development activities.

| | | |
|----|-----|-----------|
| Q2 | Mon | 19 |
| | Tue | 20 |
| | Wed | 13 |
| | Thu | 15 |
| | Fri | 3 |

Monday and Tuesday were the preferred days to undertake member development sessions with Friday being the least preferred day to undertake development activities.

- Preferred number of training topics per month
Members were requested to identify how many development topics should be covered each month

| | | |
|----|----------|----|
| Q3 | 1 Topic | 24 |
| | 2 Topics | 9 |
| | 3 Topics | 1 |
| | Other | 0 |

One topic per month was the overwhelming preference of members (65% of member that responded)

- Number of training sessions that should be provided for each topic.
Members were asked to identify the number of times each training activity should be made available.

| | | |
|----|------------|----|
| Q4 | 1 session | 8 |
| | 2 sessions | 18 |
| | 3 sessions | 9 |
| | Other | 0 |

Members indicated that the majority would prefer each monthly topic to be delivered on 2 occasions

- Preferences for Pre-Council Briefings
Members were asked to identify their preference for pre Council Briefing start times and duration.

| | | | | | |
|----|---------|--------|--------|--------|-------|
| | | 2.00pm | 2.15pm | 2.30pm | Other |
| Q5 | Total 1 | 21 | 8 | 3 | 0 |
| | Total 2 | 2 | 11 | 4 | 0 |
| | Total 3 | 4 | 1 | 12 | 0 |
| | Total 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

4.5.3 In response to the outcomes of the survey it is proposed:

- that members be provided with one member development topic each month.
- that the monthly topic will be delivered on 2 occasions - the second occasion being a repeat of the first.
- that one of the sessions will be held on a Monday or Tuesday with the other session being held on a Wednesday or Thursday
- one of the monthly development sessions will start at 10.00am with the other having a starting time rotating between 2.00pm and 4.00pm
- that the pre-council briefings continue to be held at 2.00pm and be of approximately 45 minutes duration.

4.6 Member Development Programme

4.6.1 Pre council Briefings

4.6.2 The following Pre Council briefings have been arranged as requested by members:

29 Jan 13 Adoption Service
06 Mar 13 Communities First (TBC)
03 Apr 13 Police Commissioner

4.6.3 We have requested that the Environment Agency provide a briefing to members but as they have already provided a session for the Development Control Committee, they have advised that they are willing to return and repeat the presentation at a pre council briefing session once the requests from other Local Authorities have been completed.

4.6.4 Member Development Activities

4.6.5 The following Member Development topics have been provisionally planned but dates are awaiting confirmation:

- February - Annual reports
- March - Planning for Non DC Committee Members (TBC)
- April - Social Services Bill (TBC)
- May - Personal Development Reviews (TBC)
- June - Understanding equalities and diversity (TBC)
- July - Media Training for Members(TBC)

4.6.6 Members requested that be a member development session be provided on the topic of "Connecting with Your Communities". It is considered that an external provider would be the most appropriate option for the delivery of this event. Initial discussions have been held with a provider that was involved in recent WLGA induction event and the details and the cost implications of the event are being considered.

4.6.7 The following training sessions for the Development Control Committee have been agreed. These sessions are primarily for members of the Development Control Committee but there is an open invitation for all members if they wish to attend.

| Topic | Facilitator | Date | Time |
|---|---|-------------|-------------|
| "The Planning Inspectorate's Perspective" | Planning Inspectorate | 7 Feb 13 | 12.15pm |
| "Economic development" | Ray Pearce - Regeneration Team | 4 April 13 | 12.15pm |
| "Biodiversity" | Countryside Council for Wales | | |
| "Archaeology" | Glamorgan & Gwent Archaeological Trust | | |
| "Conservation and listed buildings" | Claire Hamm - BCBC Regeneration Team | | |

| | | | |
|---|---|--|--|
| "Building control functions" | Brian Wallace - BCBC Building Control Team | | |
| "Highway safety" | Nigel Moore - BCBC Highways Department | | |
| "Results of Green Neighbourhood Network" | AECOM Consultants | | |
| "Use of the Planning Portal" | Planning Portal | | |

4.6.8 The following member development events have been requested to be undertaken in the next few months and members are requested to prioritise the delivery of events or propose other topics that may be more appropriate:

| Topic | Requested by |
|---|--|
| Personal Development Reviews | - Requirement for Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 |
| Social Services Bill | - Cllr D White / Health & Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee |
| Community Cohesion | - Community Safety Partnership / Welsh Government |
| Dyn Project /Domestic Abuse | - Cllr D White / Community Safety and Governance Overview and Scrutiny Committee |
| Supporting People Programme | - Community Renewal and Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee / Head of Regeneration and Development |
| Dementia Awareness Training | - Health & Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee |
| Risk Management (How the Council Manages its Risks) | - Audit Committee |
| Performance Management | - Corporate Improvement Manager |

4.6.9 A number of regional events have been proposed and are being considered by the WLGA and several other Local Authorities. These events include:

| Topic | Description |
|-------------------|--|
| Public Engagement | - This proposed event aims to provide elected members with an overview of the principles and practice of public engagement as set out in section 62 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011. Bridgend is a lead Authority with this event and confirmation is awaited from the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) in respect to costs, dates and venues. |

- Dealing with Conflict - This proposed event aims to provide elected members with tools and skills to enable them to deal with a variety of conflict that they may become involved with as an elected member. Bridgend is a lead Authority with this event and confirmation is awaited from external providers in respect to costs, dates and venues.
- Social Media - The WLGA intend to provide social media training for members. The workshop will include
- What is Social Media?
 - The different types of social media including Facebook, LinkedIn, twitter
 - Tweeting and blogging, who to follow and what to say.
 - The Code of Conduct, Defamation and Data protection.
- This event may be undertaken locally depending on demand. Each workshop will last approximately 2.5 hours with a maximum of 20 participants per session. This is a free event.

4.6.10 Discussions are also on-going with the WLGA to undertake evaluation of the member induction programme. This will consist of a representative of the WLGA facilitating either one or a series of focus group meetings with elected members in Bridgend, where all aspects of the induction can be independently assessed. Details will be made available to members when dates are confirmed.

4.7 WAO Improvement Study - Update

4.7.1 The Committee will recall from information presented to it at its last meeting that the Wales Audit Office (WAO) is currently in the process of carrying out a pan-Wales Improvement Study aimed at improving standards of scrutiny within Councils by means of a self-evaluation exercise and facilitated peer learning review. The timescales for the study span from October 12 to 31 April 13.

4.7.2 To date Bridgend has completed its initial draft self-evaluation of the scrutiny process which identified what we do well, where we consider we need to improve, and what we would like to learn from those authorities that we will be engaging with as part of the study.

4.7.3 In assisting WAO progress the study, Bridgend hosted a regional learning exchange event for Cardiff, Vale of Glamorgan, Swansea and Neath Port Talbot Councils whereby both Executive and Non-Executive Councillors and Scrutiny Officers were able to discuss their initial self-evaluation exercises and exchange ideas and good practice. It is worth noting that the event was rated very positively by those that participated.

4.7.4 The next steps for the study relate to Bridgend's Learning Exchange team (comprising the Scrutiny Chairs and Cabinet Member for Resources) visiting Neath Port Talbot Council to observe two scrutiny committee meetings with a view to providing constructive feedback facilitated by the WAO.

4.7.5 In addition, Cardiff's Learning Exchange Team will observe two scrutiny committee meetings in Bridgend in February in order to provide constructive feedback from an alternative perspective aimed at improving the function's effectiveness. WAO aim to underpin the strengthening of relationships between councils by means of structured focus groups between participating authorities.

4.7.6 The study will conclude by means of a further regional event due to be held sometime in late March / early April where Councils will be able to share their experiences of peer review and discuss how they intend to modify their initial self-evaluation exercises as a consequence.

4.8 Scrutiny Development Fund - Project Update

4.8.1 At its previous meeting the Committee was informed of Welsh Government's announcement last July of a third tranche of the Scrutiny Development Fund aimed at strengthening capacity for public service scrutiny with particular emphasis on the development of joint scrutiny arrangements.

4.8.2 In considering how Bridgend might access the Fund in a way that meets the Fund's criteria whilst making a direct contribution to the Council's strategic objectives, Scrutiny Officers have been working on a draft proposal to undertake a joint scrutiny project with Swansea and Neath Port Talbot Councils aimed at assessing and addressing the likely impact of Welfare Reform.

4.8.3 The draft proposal aims to access funds to support a regional inquiry into the identification of initiatives that would stimulate the development of community resilience. It would seek to work in partnership with the Western Bay Councils to explore themes such as co-production, engagement, social accountability and good governance utilising the unique representative perspective of elected members.

4.8.4 The focus of the study will examine how citizens and the public sector can work together in new, creative and collaborative ways in the design, delivery and assessment of services. Whilst the joint bid aims to commission research in this area, such a bid also seeks to engage elected members as co-researchers in the study in recognition of the value and utility provided by the many formal and informal social networks councillors are linked into.

4.8.5 Discussions have taken place between Bridgend and Swansea's scrutiny units with a view to producing an outline proposal that may form the basis of a bid to the Scrutiny Development Fund. Discussions have also taken place with Welsh Government officials who are supportive of early plans to progress this innovative regional approach.

4.9 HMRC Tax Dispensation

4.9.1 The Independent Remuneration Panel report dated December 2011 included an expectation Local Authorities that block tax negotiations be held with HMRC in respect of elected members.

4.9.2 The Transactional Team Manager has been able to agree block tax dispensations from HMRC in respect of travel and subsistence. The Committee is advised that tax and benefit advice should be provided from independent, regulated and qualified tax advisors. These would have to be procured externally as this authority does not employ any qualified tax advisors. The Independent Remuneration Panel will be visiting this Authority in May. This would provide an opportunity to clarify with the Panel the expected level of support that should be provided by the Authority in respect of tax advice for Elected Members. Further investigation will be undertaken in the interim period to inform and assist the discussions with the IRP on this matter.

5. Effect upon Policy Framework & Procedure Rules

5.1 There is no effect on the Policy Framework and Procedure Rules.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

6.1 There are no equalities implications in respect of this report.

7. Financial Implications

7.1 All activities described in this report will be met from existing budget provisions.

8. Recommendations

8.1 That the Democratic Services Committee:

1. notes the content of the report and that Democratic Services will continue to work with Directorates/Departments to improve the Member Referrals process.
2. approves the proposals regarding the outcomes of the Member Development survey as shown in paragraph 4.5.3.
3. notes the member development activities that have been planned and prioritise those activities that have been requested to be undertaken

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25 Jan 2013

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Background documents – None