

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

31 JANUARY 2013

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

REVIEW OF THE ANNUAL REPORT PROCESS

1. Purpose of Report.

- 1.1 To provide the Democratic Services Committee with an update of the pilot regarding the Annual Reports for elected members and to propose updates to the Annual Report process.

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 The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 requires every Local Authority in Wales to make arrangements for all of their elected members to make and publish an Annual Report about their activities.
- 3.2 Bridgend has been the leading authority in Wales regarding the development and introduction of Annual Reports. The template was adapted from the “Luton model” by the Training and Development Officer. The template was trialled for suitability by elected members who assisted in developing the format and guidance for the completion of the report.
- 3.3 The template, exemplar and guidance was presented to the Member Support Officer (MSO) Network, who praised Bridgend on the quality of the final model. The MSO are considering the template as an All-Wales model for Annual Reports, indeed some Councils e.g. Rhondda Cynon Taf, Swansea and the Vale of Glamorgan have already adopted it in principle.
- 3.4 The Measure requires that the arrangements for annual reports to be provided by all authorities by 2013. However, officers from Bridgend proposed that a pilot of the Annual Report process be undertaken in 2012. This would enable the 29 returning members at the 2012 Local Government Election to provide a manageable pilot group who would be able to test and prove the processes that had been developed. Political Group Leaders welcomed the proposals for the pilot which would provide the following benefits for Elected Members:
 - a record of activities (training undertaken /meetings attended / ward work)
 - a method of compiling “evidence” of work undertaken in their wards in preparation for the next election.

- prepared for possible future remuneration due to interest shown in the completion of Annual Reports by the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP)
- supports political groups to develop their members skills and knowledge
- provide an opportunity for Bridgend to take a leading role in Wales

3.5 Returning members were provided with training sessions in October and requested to draft their reports and submit them to Democratic Services to prepare them for publication by the end November 2012.

4. Current situation / proposal.

4.1 Members identified as part of the pilot were provided with the Annual Report template, guidance notes and an exemplar to assist them compiling their annual reports. The draft reports could be submitted to Democratic Services either as a formatted report or as an email using the section headings as a guide. Additional assistance was provided by Democratic Services if required.

4.2 On receipt of the draft reports Democratic Services added additional information such as the number of attendances at committee meetings and the number of referrals that had been made. Some members requested that these details not be included in the final draft of the report because the data did not accurately reflect the role of the councillors or the work they undertook.

4.3 The drafted reports were reviewed by officers to confirm that the content was suitable for publication and any amendments were referred back to the respective Councillor, for confirmation that they were in agreement with the changes that had been made.

4.4 Options for publication of the reports were considered.

1. Published on the BCBC website as a PDF document. This was considered the easiest option as no re-formatting was required to publish them. It would also allow the signature of the member and the date the report was completed to be included. However, this was very plain and formal which would not "entice" the public to read the report.
2. Printed and published in the BCBC Bulletin and on notice boards within the relevant ward. This was a costly option and would take up a significant space in the newspapers or in local notice boards. This option would appear very plain and would not encourage the report to be read.
3. Reformatting as a Web Page provided the opportunity for a visually more interesting report which followed the corporate style guidelines. This also provided a range of equalities facilities for use by the general public eg browse aloud etc. There were no immediate costs but there was some additional work required to get the formatting correct. In this format signatures could not be included but dates could be added if necessary.

It was decided to publish the Annual Report in line with this third option. The reports were re-formatted into web pages with links from the existing Elected Member's home page.

- 4.5 All elected members webpages were updated to show “Annual Report” as the first heading. The text stated “Councillor’s Annual Report for the Council Year May 2011 to April 2012” and linked to the completed Annual Reports of those members taking part in the pilot. To ensure that the new members were not adversely compared by the public for not having published an Annual Report, a line of text was inserted which stated that “There is no requirement for this Councillor to provide an Annual Report for the period covering May 2011 to April 2012”. For those members who were part of the pilot group but had not provided a report, no text or links were added to the webpage under the Annual Report heading.
- 4.6 Of the 29 Members that were identified as suitable to participate in the pilot, 18 members (62%) have submitted and had their reports published. One member has submitted a draft report which is currently being worked on prior to publication.
- 4.7 A number of issues were raised during the process. These included:
- The inclusion of a disclaimer to show that the content of the report was the independent view of the member and that those views did not necessarily represent the views of BCBC.
 - Data for the attendance of meetings and activities other than for formal committees was not available to Democratic Services. Members were requested to source their own data for these activities which proved very difficult. Further work was required by members to collect this data throughout the year.
 - When publishing the report onto the web, the structure appeared similar to that of the Members pages. Therefore the sections of the report were re-organised to show the Constituency Activity at the top of the report. Section headings were edited to make the report less formal and easier to read.
 - Political Groups expressed an interest in having greater involvement in the process prior to the publication of the reports. This was considered a group issue and Democratic Services would be guided by individual group leaders.
 - Annual Report web pages require translation into Welsh. This may increase costs in the future although this was thought to be cheaper than the hard copy publication option.
- 4.8 The Chairman of the Independent Remuneration Panel has been advised and welcomed the fact that annual reports have been piloted and published by members in Bridgend. The Head of Democratic Services has requested that a formal response be provided by the IRP regarding their views on Bridgend’s model of Annual Reports.
- 4.9 The Bridgend approach for the Annual Report process was presented to the MSO Network so that the lessons learned in Bridgend could be considered on an All-Wales basis. The MSO Network commented that,
- “The Bridgend approach was welcomed and considered excellent. Some authorities are already piloting the Bridgend approach, although all

authorities are complying with the statutory requirements members in some other Authorities are unwilling to participate.”

4.10 Taking into account the outcomes of the pilot, it is proposed that the process for the publication of Annual Reports be revised as follows:

- The structure of the template/ guidance/exemplar be updated to reflect the actual publication layout used in the pilot. (See Appendix 1)
- Political groups will be requested to actively promote the completion of Annual Reports by all of their members
- Training be undertaken in February 2013, primarily with new members (but with all members invited) to prepare for the publication of the Annual Report for 2012/13. During the training members will be advised:
 - to collect any data for attendance and activities other than those of formal committee meetings if they wish the information to be included in their reports.
 - of the following publication schedule/process :
 1. Annual reports for 2012/13 to be drafted by members, and issued to Democratic Services by 1 July 2013.
 2. Democratic Services will add any attendance and referrals data and review the content of the report by 31 July 2013.
 3. Reports will be finalised by the Democratic Services Team, with any suggested amendments being agreed with the individual member.
 4. Copies of the finalised Annual Reports to be reviewed by the Group Leaders (if necessary)
 5. Democratic Services to reformat the reports for publication on the BCBC Website
 6. Annual Reports translated into Welsh and published on the BCBC Website by 6 September 2013
- The existing webpage format will continue to be used although the finalised signed copies of each members Annual Report will be held for reference and to ensure accuracy.
- Democratic Services will:
 - liaise with Corporate Communications to advertise and promote the publication of the Annual Reports
 - advise the IRP of the publication of annual reports as part of the normal reporting process.

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 The publication of the Annual Reports on the BCBC website fulfils our requirement to make the documents available bi-lingually and to those with visual impairments.

7. Financial Implications

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

8. Recommendation.

8.1 The Democratic Services Committee is requested to:

- (1) note the outcomes of the pilot of the Annual Report process
- (2) approve the amendments to the Annual Report process and the proposed schedule of publication for Annual Reports for 2012/13.

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Background documents – None