

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE - THURSDAY, 14 MARCH 2019

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOMS 2/3, CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB ON THURSDAY, 14 MARCH 2019 AT 16:00

Present

Councillor E Venables – Chairperson

RM Granville
A Williams

B Sedgebeer

SG Smith

G Thomas

Apologies for Absence

DG Howells, RM James and KL Rowlands, Andrew Rees

Officers:

Laura Griffiths
Michael Pitman

Principal Solicitor
Business & Administrative Apprentice

154. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None

155. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of 25/10/2018 be approved as a true and accurate record.

156. DESIGNATION OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report which advised of the process followed in the appointment of the Head of Democratic Services.

The Interim Head of Democratic Services reported that Section 8 (1) of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 requires the Authority to designate one of its officers to discharge the democratic services functions in Section 9 of the Measure and sought designation for the position as the Council's Head of Democratic Services.

She explained that on the 25th October 2018 the committee approved the appointment of the statutory role to the Principal Solicitor on an interim basis in order to satisfy the statutory requirements. The authority had recently undertaken an appointment process for a Democratic Services Manager which was carried out by the Monitoring Officer and the Group Manager Legal and Democratic Services.

The recruitment has been completed and an offer of employment made.

RESOLVED: That the Democratic Services Committee designated the Authority's Democratic Services Manager as the statutory Head of Democratic Services for the purposes of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 to discharge the democratic services functions of the Council with immediate effect.

157. WLGA SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDANCE FOR COUNCILLORS

The Group Manager Legal & Democratic Services presented a report which provided the committee with a copy of guidance produced by the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) regarding social media guidance for Councillors.

She informed the Committee that although the Members' Code of Conduct does not specifically include any obligations in relation to social media, the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales has seen an increase in the number of complaints made regarding comments that have been placed by Elected Members throughout Wales on social media platforms. She added that the guidance was recently circulated to Members.

She explained that personal use of social media falls outside the ambit of the Code, however if a Member mentions public issues or Council activity on social media then those comments are likely to be perceived as having been made in an official capacity.

She advised Members on the use of social media in council meetings and that there was no legal reason to not use social media at meetings, however common sense does need to apply. Excessive use may create a negative perception to the public giving the impression that you may not be concentrating on the business at hand. For this reason it is sensible not to use it during a debate.

The Chair requested clarification on the guidance in relation to the use of the Welsh Language as outlined at paragraph 33. The Group Manager Legal & Democratic Services commented that she would clarify this with WLGA and report back to the Committee as this element of the guidance was ambiguous.

RESOLVED: That the Democratic Services Committee noted the WLGA guidance.

158. **TIMINGS OF MEETINGS SURVEYS**

The Group Manager Legal & Democratic Services presented a report which informed the Committee of the outcomes of the timings of meetings surveys recently undertaken in respect of certain Council Committees, including the Democratic Services Committee. It was proposed that similar surveys be carried out to establish future timings of the Council's four Overview and Scrutiny Committees as part of the Programme of Meetings 2019/2020.

She informed the Committee of the requirement to undertake a timings of meetings survey in accordance with section 6 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011.

She explained that at a meeting of Council on 26 July 2017, Members considered a report for information purposes, on the outcomes of a timings of meetings survey undertaken for Council and Council Committees (on a Committee by Committee basis), in order to obtain their preferences for starting times of meetings from 1 September 2017 onward. Such a survey was required to be carried out at least once in any term of office for all Committee meetings (that comprise the Council).

Since that period, and upon either the request of a number of Members of Committees or due to changes to the membership of that particular body, further timing of meetings surveys were recently undertaken for Audit Committee, Development Control Committee, the Town and Community Council Forum and the Democratic Services Committee. Following responses that were received, the timings of these meetings remained unchanged with the exception of Democratic Services Committee which has changed to 10:00am and will be reflected to future dates of the Committee in the Programme of Meetings 2019/2020.

Members expressed their concerns with the new timing of Democratic Services meetings as many of them were unable to or missed the deadline for responding to the timings of the meeting survey. Members of the Committee commented that the proposed time of 10:00am was too difficult for some of them to attend especially for those working in part/full time employment.

A Member suggested the potential of an evening meeting to accommodate Members who are unable to make earlier meetings.

The Group Manager Legal & Democratic Services explained that this was a wider issue that would involve consultation with the Group Leader and the Trade Unions as it would involve changes to officers terms and conditions.

She explained that as part of a scrutiny review, consideration will however be given to evening scrutiny meetings being held in different community areas of the County Borough in the future to give more flexibility with regard to increasing awareness and engagement of scrutiny with the public.

RESOLVED: That the timings of meetings surveys recently undertaken in respect of certain Council Committees be noted but a new survey for timings of meetings be undertaken for the Democratic Services Committee and that similar surveys will be carried out to establish future timings of the Council's four Overview and Scrutiny Committees as part of the Programme of Meetings 2019/2020.

159. **MEMBER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME**

The Group Manager Legal & Democratic Services presented a report which provided the Democratic Services Committee with an update on the delivery of the Council's Member Training and Development Programme and related activity.

She detailed to Members the Member Training and Development Sessions that have been provided since April 2018 and the Pre-Council Briefing Sessions and Development Control Committee Sessions that had been provided since 17th October 2018.

She advised Members that the Development Committee Training sessions are available for all Members of the Council to attend, not just Members of the Development Control Committee.

The Group Manager referred the Committee to the current schedule for future training sessions detailed in the report at paragraph 4.4.

A Member expressed his thanks to the officers who provide the Development Control Committee Training sessions and said that the content has always been useful, informative and well delivered.

The Group Manager Legal & Democratic Services advised Members on the current situation regarding E-Learning modules. She explained that there have been a total of 20 Members who have accessed the E-learning modules since the start of the electoral term. She asked Members their views on how they could make greater use of E-Learning Facilities.

A Member requested that a reminder be sent out to everyone explaining the importance of E-learning modules. The Group Manager Legal & Democratic Services confirmed that this would be actioned.

A number of Members expressed their difficulty with accessing the E Learning Modules or completing them. They requested that additional help and guidance from officers or ICT would be beneficial to ensure that Members are able to complete the E Learning Modules. The Group Manager Legal & Democratic Services said that this could be looked into to address the issues that Members are having.

Members confirmed they were in agreement with the current scheduled topics for Pre Council Briefings, Development Control Committee Training as well as the E-Learning modules that are currently available.

RESOLVED: That the Democratic Services Committee noted the contents of the report.

160. WEBCASTING OF COUNCIL, CABINET AND COMMITTEE MEETINGS

The Group Manager Legal & Democratic Services presented a report which provided the Committee with an update on arrangements for the webcasting of Council, Cabinet and Committee meetings.

She explained the current webcasting arrangements, outlined the meetings that had been webcast to date and provided statistics which detailed the number of views received for each of the meetings, including live, on demand and total views.

A Member expressed his concerns with the total views and asked if anything can be done to further increase the engagement from the public.

The Group Manager Legal & Democratic Services explained that for the last few meetings, the Communications team had publicised webcasts on the Council's social media platforms in advance of the meeting. The Democratic Services team will also continue to look for more ways to further engage with the public.

A Member queried how much webcasting costs per view and the total. The Group Manager Legal & Democratic Services stated that she would provide the Committee with this information.

RESOLVED: That the Democratic Services Committee:

1. Noted the update on arrangements for the webcasting of Council, Cabinet and Committee meetings;
2. Noted the list of meetings that are proposed to be webcast.

161. URGENT ITEMS

None

The meeting closed at 17:00