

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE - THURSDAY, 23 FEBRUARY 2023

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE HELD HYBRID IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND, CF31 4WB / REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON THURSDAY, 23 FEBRUARY 2023 AT 10:00

Present

Councillor T Thomas – Chairperson

P Ford	RM Granville	D T Harrison	M LHughes
RM James	I M Spiller	R J Smith	G Walter
E D Winstanley			

Apologies for Absence

S Aspey

Officers:

Rachel Keepins	Democratic Services Manager
Martin Morgans	Head of Performance and Partnership Services
Stephen Griffiths	Democratic Services Officer – Committees

11. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None

12. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of a meeting of the Democratic Services Committee held on the 20/10/2022 were approved as a true and accurate record.

13. UPDATE ON THE DIGITAL PLATFORM AND MEMBER PORTAL

The Head of Partnership Services provided Members with background and an update on the implementation of the digital platform and the Member portal.

The Chair thanked the officer for the report and for the excellent work that had gone into the development of the platform and portal.

He further pointed out that one of the advantages of the committee is that it includes members elected before 2022 and some new ones elected in 2022 and so it is possible to analyse the development of BCBC digital services over a prolonged period of time and from different perspectives.

The Chair pointed out that he dealt with a lot of referrals and a significant number of them were housing related. As such, he wondered if any consideration had been given to extending the referrals portal to external partners such as social housing providers.

The Head of Partnership Services responded by indicating that that was an interesting concept but that we do not have direct engagement with such organisations in terms of complaints procedures. As such, we were not able to manage the process.

He indicated though, that what they had done in terms of portal integration is interface with shared regulatory services. If an issue such as the need for pest (rodents) control is identified, we have the ability to facilitate first point of contact via the referral form.

Wider issues in respect of BCBCs relationship with external organisations like social housing providers needed to be addressed at a strategic level. It was important to point out that BCBC was looking for an open and transparent context but that it was not possible to manage issues explicitly because officers do not have the autonomy.

The Chair raised an issue about difficulties searching historic referrals. The Head of Partnership Services indicated that it was possible to research every aspect of a referral through Advanced Search and indicated there might be a need to develop some training and/ or a how to guide to assist members with the process.

It was noted that there had been two thousand outstanding referrals associated with councillors not re-elected in May 2022. It was necessary to delete some of those referrals from the system as they could not be passed to newly elected members because of GDPR issues. If the referrals were urgent, such as for social services for example, they were kept open and passed on to officers and were gradually worked through until they could be closed.

Members indicated that there were many positives with the referral system and praised the quality of service and support that Members have had and commented that it has been good to see the gradual development and improvement on a month-by-month basis. Members indicated that any queries or problems, had always received a speedy resolution from the Experience and Improvement team.

Members further indicated that the feedback from residents was that they liked using the 'Report It' system, feeling empowered by being able to go on and report their street light problem or other such issues. Members queried whether more could be done to promote the system such as a flyer in with the Council tax send out.

The Head of Partnerships welcomed the feedback and noted that it had been really important to provide the self-service system as it had widened the availability of services including pest control, fly tipping, applications for schools etc.

He explained that the case study set out in the report involving the waste disposal team highlighted what could be achieved. They were given technology that allowed them to move from a paper-based system to one utilising handheld technology. A citizen or a councillor could fill in a form that sent a transaction to the operatives' work device. The work is then scheduled, done, and reported as complete. This represented a whole holistic journey of business process review. The system works for councillors and also involves a process of making the back office more efficient.

The Head of Partnerships stated that there was clearly a desire on the part of citizens to transact with the Council from a digital perspective although it should be noted that BCBC does not want to exclude anyone. As such, other channels are maintained to enable other citizens to engage with us as well. There is no level of digital exclusion.

It was noted that response times in respect of some referrals had been extended and that this should indicate a maximum time to respond and not set the standard.

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Members raised issues about the use of telephones where calls go unanswered, or where they get cut-off mid-discussion.

The Head of Partnerships indicated that it was our desire as an organisation to not be a telephone switchboard. He indicated that they wanted to deliver a resolution to any issue at the first point of contact and suggested taking some of the queries arising from the experiences of members offline so they could be discussed in more detail and be resolved.

Building on the example of the working group that was held to consider the new Model Constitution, it was proposed that a new working group be established to take forward work on the Member Portal. This was welcomed by Members and a number volunteered to sit on this group.

RESOLVED:

1. To recommend that a flyer be included with the Council Tax send out that promotes the digital platform (My Account), especially the 'Report It' function.
2. For the Democratic Services Manager and the Head of Partnerships to establish a working group to take forward the development of the Member Portal. It was recommended that the membership of the working group consist of volunteers from the Democratic Services Committee as well as Group Leaders. The following Members put themselves forward to sit on this working group: Cllr Tim Thomas, Cllr Martin Hughes, Cllr Graham Walter, and Cllr Ian Spiller.
3. The Committee requested that they have sight of the seventeen recommendations resulting from the review of the previous member referral system undertaken in 2019.
4. The Committee further requested that the DSM ask all Members to email regarding any portal related training needs so that these can be organised.

14. REVISED CORPORATE REPORT TEMPLATE

The Democratic Services Manager (DSM) introduced a report that set out a proposed revised corporate template for reports that are presented to Council, Cabinet, and their committees.

RESOLVED:

1. That the template be updated to incorporate the Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language implications, links to Climate Change and Safeguarding as well as an Executive Summary so that the reader and decision maker can quickly acquaint themselves with the content of the report.
2. That the proposed template also includes the following changes:
 - The combining of the 'Connection to the Corporate Well-being objectives' with the 'Well-being of Future Generations' implications.'
 - The relocation of the 'Effect on Policy Framework and Procedure Rules' to the top of the report.
 - The relocation of the 'Report Owner/Corporate Director' and 'Responsible Officer' details to the top of the report.

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That the revised template is used for all reports presented to Committees from 18 May 2023 following the Annual Meeting of Council.

15. DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Democratic Services Manager (DSM) presented a proposed Forward Work Programme (FWP) for the Democratic Services Committee for consideration and further development.

The DSM explained that reports such as the Independent Remuneration Panel Wales Draft Annual Report and the Committee's own Annual Report will be regular items for the Committee to consider each year. Similarly with Member Development updates. It was a matter for Members to consider whether there were any other items they wished to add to their FWP considering the role and remit of the Committee, acknowledging that it was flexible and could be amended throughout the year.

The Chair highlighted the need for guidance to Members on good practice for attending remote meetings.

Members queried whether the Constitution is reviewed annually or every term.

The DSM indicated that the Constitution was not usually subject to an annual review. It was reviewed in 2022 because the new model came out across Wales, and as a result the Constitution was changed as a whole. Changes and clarifications are made on occasion though, where needed. Discussions were already planned with Group Leaders about some potential changes.

The Chair indicated that he would wish to allow the Constitution time to bed in, but Members were free to write to him if they felt it should be re-visited.

Members indicated that they would welcome a review and suggested there were items that should have been included in the Constitution and needed to be locked at, especially in respect of the duration of meetings, for example. It was noted that other Local Authorities have clauses which address the issue. He thought the October meeting would be an opportune moment to carry out a review.

Members also raised concern about the implications of any new UK government proposals relating to Electoral Reform (e.g., photo ID for voting) and whether those needed to be considered by the committee in due course.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Democratic Services Committee will introduce a Forward Work Programme to guide its deliberations.
2. In addition to the items outlined in Appendix A of the report, members agreed to add the following items:
 - That consideration be given to introducing a Good Practice Protocol for Attending Meetings Remotely.
 - To consider whether the Committee could receive an annual report (at its October meeting) on the workings of the Constitution; and,
 - That consideration be given to the implications of any new UK government proposals such as Electoral Reform to determine how the Authority is responding to this.

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16. **URGENT ITEMS**

None