

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE - THURSDAY, 12 MARCH 2020

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOMS 2/3, CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB ON THURSDAY, 12 MARCH 2020 AT 10:00

Present

Councillor E Venables – Chairperson

S Aspey
G Thomas

DG Howells

B Sedgebeer

SG Smith

Apologies for Absence

RM Granville, RM James and A Williams

Officers:

Michael Pitman
Andrew Rees

Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Democratic Services Manager

175. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

176. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the 17/10/2019 be approved as a true and accurate record.

177. LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND ELECTIONS (WALES) BILL

The Democratic Services Manager presented a report which outlined the key proposals in the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill.

He explained that the Bill was presented in November 2019 to the National Assembly for Wales and its aim was to reform and strengthen local government and improve electoral arrangements.

The key proposals of the bill were summarised as below and were further elaborated on in sections 4.2 to 4.9 of the report:

- Local Government Electoral Arrangements
- Disqualification criteria to stand as a Councillor
- Governance Arrangements
- Mergers
- Public Engagement
- Two Voting Systems
- Governance and Audit Committee
- Duty on principal councils to publish official addresses

The Democratic Services Manager explained that 4.4.1 of the Governance Arrangements section was already in place in English authorities and allowed them to invest in property transactions etc. He also added the Duty on principal councils to publish official addresses was already in place in Bridgend CBC.

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The Democratic Services Manager explained that the legislation was due to be enacted in the summer of 2020, however, it is unclear whether there will be phased stages depending on the position of local authorities at that time.

RESOLVED: That Members noted the report.

178. SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL FOR WALES 2020-2021

The Democratic Services Manager presented a report which advised the Committee of a draft supplementary report issued by the Panel relating to the reimbursement of Costs of Care which was subject to consultation.

He explained that the full draft supplementary report was listed at Appendix 1 of the report and this set out the minimum authorities should do and how this could be done with regard to Reimbursement of the Costs of Care.

The Democratic Services Manager informed Members of the financial implications of and stated that the budget set for the remuneration of Elected Members in 2020-2021 was £1,152,930 and that the additional cost of care would be met from within the existing budget.

A Member asked if claims were made, would they be confidential.

The Democratic Services Manager confirmed that claims would be confidential in terms of personal details. He added that the only publication would be the total cost of care as a statistic, rather than who claimed it.

Members asked if future Member induction packs could include some more information about claiming, so that Members understood it fully and could make full use of it if they needed.

A Member asked for clarification whether or not a grandparent could be considered a primary carer, as there were many Councillors who had grandchildren.

RESOLVED: That the Committee considered the set of principles for the Reimbursement of the Costs of Care and responded accordingly to the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales' Draft Supplementary Report.

179. PERSONAL SAFETY FOR COUNCILLORS

The Democratic Services Manager presented a report which provided guidance to Councillors on issues of Personal Safety and Lone Working.

He advised that Councillors should be mindful of the risks involved when carrying out their role which included;

- Visiting people in their homes
- Receiving callers to your homes
- Holding surgeries
- Travelling and;
- Communicating online.

He also stated that there was a useful guide relating to the personal safety of Councillors which was developed by Swansea Council and the Welsh Local Government

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Association with the aim to help Councillors carry out their role safely and effectively. This guide was at Appendix A of the report.

The Democratic Services Manager explained that the purpose of the guide was to set out what personal safety measures could be taken to prevent and deal with rare circumstances that a Councillor may find themselves in where they become anxious for their safety.

The Democratic Services Manager also stated the concerns of some Councillors whereby their home addresses were published on the Councils website. He explained that should a Councillor wish for their home address to be removed from the website, to contact the Head of Democratic Services and would then be arranged to be removed. He added that their email address and phone number should remain on the website to allow for members of the public to contact them.

A Member asked in relation to the Appendix it stated that emergency contact details should be provided to Democratic Services. He asked if the Democratic Services Manager could confirm what was done with these details.

The Democratic Services Manager explained that these were solely for the Democratic Services Teams record in case of emergencies and were not published.

The Committee asked whether it be established what contact details Members would like displayed on the website, as many Members may not be aware that their details were still published. Members who did not want specific details published could then email Democratic Services for them to deal with accordingly.

RESOLVED: That Members noted the contents of the report and the guide relating to the Personal Safety of Councillors and that the Personal Safety for Councillors be emailed to all Councillors.

180. MEMBER REFERRALS

The Democratic Services Manager presented a report which updated the Democratic Services Committee on the performance of Member Referrals.

He explained that a referral was a complaint, request or query which a Councillor had received from a constituent which the Democratic Services team then forward to the relevant department or external organisation for attention. He added that this process was carried out so that each part of the referral process was logged and ensured that a response is received by an agreed deadline.

The Democratic Services Manager presented a table to Members which outlined the number referrals made between 1st March 2019 and 29th February 2020 per directorate and the timescales in which they were completed within. This table was at 4.1.2 of the report.

A Member asked if there was a way of providing feedback to the responses given on a referral as she had received responses on a number of occasions that were not appropriate. A Member agreed that some department's responses were not as good as others. The Democratic Services Manager stated that a review of the referrals system was in progress and the review would explore any opportunities to improve the current system. He added that an online referral form was in the process of being developed by ICT.

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A Member stated that there was a system similar to the referral system that was already used by MPs in Wales. She asked if this was something that could be looked in to.

The Democratic Services Manager explained that the Project Board had attended a demonstration of a casework system, however the system was cost prohibitive

A Member commented on the response times of a number of the referrals stating that only around 60% of the referrals were responded to within the 20 days. He added that there needed to be a sense of urgency placed on completing more referrals within that 20 day period.

A Member added that she would prefer to see the 10 day time frame be extended to 15 days, as that was what RCT Council had in place and believed the longer time would allow for a more thorough response, rather than a potentially rushed one.

The Democratic Services Manager stated that the time scales could be reviewed in the future if needed.

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

181. MEMBER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

The Democratic Services Manager presented a report which its purpose was to provide an update on the delivery of the Councils Member Development Training and Development Programme and related activities. He added that the purpose was to also request any topics for inclusion on the programme.

The Democratic Services Manager presented the Member Training and Development Sessions, Pre Council Briefing Sessions and Development Control Committee Training Sessions that had been held since the last Democratic Services Committee on 17th October 2019. These were listed in the table at 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3 of the report.

The Democratic Services Manager explained the future scheduled pre council briefings which were as follows:

- 9 March 2020: Universal Credit
- 11 March 2020: Community Asset Transfer
- 8 April 2020: Changes to New Curriculum
- 17 June 2020: Bridgend Association of Voluntary Organisations
- 16 September 2020: Post 16 and Learner Travel

The Democratic Services Manager explained the future scheduled Development Control Committee Training Sessions which had been scheduled as follows:

- 9 April 2020: Wellbeing & Future Generations Act 2016 and Planning Policy Wales 10 – A Direction of Travel

The Democratic Services Manager explained the future Proposed Member Training and Development sessions which were scheduled as follows:

- 22 April 2020: Scrutiny Questioning Skills
- 22 April 2020: Scrutiny Chairing Skills
- Using Bridgemaps - TBC

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The Democratic Services Manager explained that the Corporate Director of Social Services had requested a training session be scheduled on Safeguarding, the date was still to be confirmed.

The Democratic Services Manager explained that the committee was advised at a previous meeting of the development of National E Learning modules. Work was continuing on this and the expected delivery time for this was September 2020.

He explained that since the start of the current term, a number of E-learning courses had been provided. The following E-learning had been completed by members:

- Corporate Induction **(11 Members)**
- General Data Protection Regulations **(4)**
- Display Screen Equipment **(3)**
- Fire Safety Awareness **(4)**
- ICT Code of Conduct **(9)**
- Safeguarding Children and Adults **(14)**
- Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence **(3)**

He added that in order to encourage Members to make greater use of the available E Learning Modules, two drop in sessions were arranged to be facilitated by the Learning and Development Team to support Members. These sessions were scheduled between the 17 March and 1 April 2020 in the IT Suite, Ravens Court, and were able to be attended any time between 9:30am and 3:00pm.

A Member asked if these were available to access elsewhere other than the Council offices. The Democratic Services Manager confirmed that these could be accessed from their own home if they wished.

A Member welcomed the training sessions as she was not clear which modules were needing to be completed. She also requested that a follow up phone call be made to members to confirm that they could access the E Learning Modules and assist them if they needed.

A Member stated that there are often a number of junk emails appearing in the mailbox which overwhelms the genuine emails. He asked if there was a way of getting rid of such emails.

The Democratic Services Manager explained that any emails that come in to their mailboxes, they could forward to the IT department and mark them as 'spam'. This would allow over time to receive less of them.

A Member asked if all Members could be asked if they had any Member Development Sessions to add so that valuable training sessions were not being missed.

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

182. WEBCASTING OF COUNCIL, CABINET AND COMMITTEE MEETINGS

The Democratic Services Manager presented a report which updated the committee on the arrangements for the webcasting of Council, Cabinet and Committee meetings and provided views on which meetings should be webcast.

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The Democratic Services Manager outlined the webcasting statistics for the years 2018/19 and 2019/20 which showed the Live Views, On Demand Views and Total Views of each meeting that was webcast. The tables for the respective years were listed below:

Webcasting of meetings 2018/19

	Date	Meeting Name	Live Views	On Demand Views	Total Views
1	30-Aug-18	Development Control Committee	38	51	89
2	17-Sep-18	Subject Overview & Scrutiny Committee 3	11	131	142
3	16-Oct-18	Subject Overview & Scrutiny Committee 1	0	42	42
4	18-Oct-18	Subject Overview & Scrutiny Committee 2	22	47	69
5	18-Dec-18	Cabinet	27	31	58
6	03-Jan-19	Development Control Committee	10	28	38
7	14-Feb-19	Development Control Committee	70	72	142
8	25-Feb-19	Subject Overview & Scrutiny Committee 3	6	10	16
9	18-Mar-19	Subject Overview & Scrutiny Committee 3	10	32	42
10	19-Mar-19	Development Control Committee	55	120	175
Average Views			25	56	81
Total Views			249	564	813

Webcasting of meetings 2019/20

	Date	Meeting Name	Live Views	On Demand Views	Total Views
1	29-Apr-19	Subject Overview & Scrutiny Committee 1	3	49	52
2	09-May-19	Development Control Committee	6	29	35
3	04-Jun-19	Subject Overview & Scrutiny Committee 1	42	64	106
4	03-Jul-19	Subject Overview & Scrutiny Committee 2	4	31	35
5	05-Sep-19	Subject Overview & Scrutiny Committee 3	15	52	67
6	13-Nov-19	Special Cabinet	133	360	493
7	05-Dec-19	Development Control Committee	3	18	21
8	16-Jan-20	Development Control Committee	17	23	40
9	27-Feb-20	Development Control Committee	9	8	17
Average Views			26	70	96
Total Views			232	634	866

The Democratic Services Manager explained that various forward work plans and committee work programmes had been reviewed with the view to establish what meetings were proposed to be webcast over the next three months. He added that in developing proposals, consideration was given to items that were considered of significant interest to the public. The following meetings were proposed to be webcast:

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- Combined Meeting of Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 and 2 – 19 March 2020 (Learner Travel and Post 16 Education)
- Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3 – 23 March 2020 (Working Towards Plastic Free Bridgend)
- Development Control Committee – 9 April 2020
- Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3 – 27 April 2020 (Waste Management / Waste and Recycling Centres)

A Member explained that there was a predicament at the last meeting of Council whereby a Skype presentation from an invitee was scheduled. He explained that the Council Chamber was unusable for this arrangement and the meeting had to be moved to the Committee Rooms which caused delays and confusion. He asked that consideration be given to developing a system whereby remote attendance by invitees and Councillors was made possible. He added that in light of new government legislation this should be a priority.

A Member agreed with the above comments and stated that Welsh Government needed to be contributing towards the funding of this as Local Authorities all over Wales would struggle with the costs associated with this.

RESOLVED: That the Democratic Services Committee:

- Noted the update on arrangements for webcasting of Council, Cabinet and Committee meetings as detailed in section 4 of the report
- Commented on the list of meetings that were proposed to be webcast as detailed in section 4.4.4 of the report and provided its views on what future meetings should be webcast.

183. URGENT ITEMS

None.

The meeting closed at 11:28