

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE - THURSDAY, 24 JUNE 2021

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE HELD REMOTELY - VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON THURSDAY, 24 JUNE 2021 AT 10:00

Present

Councillor E Venables – Chairperson

S Aspey
A Williams

DG Howells
RE Young

SG Smith

G Thomas

Apologies for Absence

RM James, B Sedgebeer, SR Vidal and MC Voisey

Officers:

Laura Griffiths
Michael Pitman

Principal Solicitor
Democratic Services Officer – Committees

197. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None

198. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the 25 March 2021 be approved as a true and accurate record.

199. ANNUAL REPORT

The Group Manager – Legal and Democratic Services presented the Annual Report for the period May 2020 to May 2021. The report outlined the work of the Committee during that period.

She explained that the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 requires each council to establish a Democratic Services Committee and the Measure required the committee to make a report at least annually to the Council.

The Group Manager – Legal and Democratic Services stated that Councillor E Venables was originally elected Chair of the Democratic Services Committee at the Annual Meeting of Council in May 2018 and had been re-elected annually ever since.

The Group Manager – Legal and Democratic Services summarised the following during the period of May 2020 – May 2021:

- Dates of the Democratic Services Committee Meetings
- Membership of the Democratic Services Committee
- Activities of the Democratic Services Committee
- Democratic Services Team

She outlined the current structure in the Democratic Services Team and added that since this report was published, approval had been given for a further Democratic Services Officer - Committees post within the structure together with a temporary Democratic Services Officer – Member and Mayoral Support for up to 12 months to support the mayoral team in light of the upcoming local government elections in 2022.

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A Member asked if it was felt that the Democratic Services team had the capacity going forward to deal with the workload.

The Group Manager – Legal and Democratic Services explained that the further Democratic Services Officer – Committees was very much welcomed and therefore the section was in a much better position to handle the work pressures moving forward.

A Member asked if the working arrangements were fit the future in terms of holding hybrid meetings as this had previously been discussed in other meetings. The Group Manager – Legal and Democratic Services confirmed that the ability for hybrid meetings was currently being explored by the Democratic Services Team and through the Heads of Democratic Services Network. She believed that this could be successfully facilitated moving forward. .

A Member mentioned that there was also a screen available in the committee rooms and asked if this could be used in conjunction with the Council Chamber as well as Members joining virtually from home. The Group Manager – Legal and Democratic Services confirmed that this was being explored as well as how the current system in the Council Chamber could be used to facilitate hybrid meetings. She advised that more information would follow on this in the coming months.

RESOLVED: That the Committee considered the content of the Annual Report and endorsed submission to full Council for approval.

200. DIVERSITY IN DEMOCRACY

The Group Manager – Legal and Democratic Services presented a report which advised the Committee of the WLGA Council 'Diversity in Democracy' report and Bridgend's draft Diversity in Democracy Action Plan and to consider what the Council can do to raise awareness and promotion of the role of Members, to reduce potential barriers to becoming an Elected Member with the aim of encouraging future candidates from diverse backgrounds to come forward for Election.

She explained that it was recognised that there was a lack of diverse representation in local authorities and that a more diverse democracy and elected representatives who were more reflective and understanding of their communities leads to better engagement with individuals and communities, in turn leading to greater levels of confidence and trust and better decision making informed by a wider range of perspectives and lived experiences.

The WLGA committed to making a change in local government diversity at the 2022 local elections as it was acknowledged that despite previous action and campaigns, progress had been slow and it is recognised that there remained a lack of diversity in councils. She provided data on this which was at section 3.2 of the report.

The Group Manager – Legal and Democratic Services explained that at a Special Meeting on 5th March the WLGA Council endorsed its 'Diversity in Democracy report' (attached as Appendix 1). The report was the culmination of the work of a cross-party working group and builds on the action plans and ambitions of both councils and partners. WLGA will take forward several actions nationally, as outlined within the report including:

- The launch of the "Be a Councillor" website (already in place);
- Representations made to political parties to take action and make progress;

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- Representation to Welsh Government and the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales that councillors should be entitled to 'resettlement grants' should they lose their seat at an election.

The Group Manager – Legal and Democratic Services highlighted the draft Diversity in Democracy Action Plan which would be updated accordingly ahead of the 2022 local elections. She outlined the potential actions and proposed steps to be taken going forward which were set out in Appendix 2 of the report.

A Member highlighted an error in relation to the recent diversity survey that was circulated to Members in that the option for the responses did not allow for 'Strongly Disagree', but rather duplicated the 'Strongly Agree' option. The Group Manager – Legal and Democratic Services advised that she would feed this back to the Communications Team accordingly.

RESOLVED: That the Committee considered the proposed actions outlined in the WLGA Special Report and the BCBC draft Action Plan and considered what the Council can do to raise awareness and promotion of the role of Members, to reduce potential barriers to becoming an Elected Member with the aim of encouraging future candidates from diverse backgrounds to come forward for Election.

201. MEMBER INDUCTION PROGRAMME 2022

The Group Manager – Legal and Democratic Services presented a report which advised the Committee of proposed topics and scheduling of the Elected Member Induction Programme following the Local Government Elections in 2022.

She advised that the Elected Member Learning and Development Strategy was considered by the Committee at its meeting on 25th March 2021 and the final Strategy will be presented to Council for approval in July. The Strategy identified 5 Phases of Learning and Development for Elected Members. Three of the phases covered core learning activities following election as a Councillor, these were highlighted in section 4 of the report.

The Group Manager – Legal and Democratic Services stated that the WLGA had prepared a Development Framework for Councillors in Wales 2021 which outlines the knowledge and behaviours expected by Councillors in Wales. Using this Framework, they had also compiled the "Framework Induction Curriculum for Candidates and New Members in Wales for the Local Elections 2022" as attached at Appendix 1. She added that to support the Induction Programme, an information pack will be provided to Members when they sign the Acceptance of Office. This will include useful information such as core policies and procedures, timetable of meetings and useful contact numbers.

The Group Manager – Legal and Democratic Services added that a Training Needs Analysis Questionnaire will be compiled and distributed during December 2022 – January 2023. All Members' responses will be analysed and, from this, the ongoing Programme will be developed and presented to the Committee.

The Committee was requested to identify any additional themes, topics, policies or activities which should be included in the Induction Programme. Following receipt of the Committee's direction, Corporate Directors would also be requested to identify any additional topics for inclusion.

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A Member stated that the support she was provided with after she was elected was lacking and it was pleasing to see that more emphasis had now been put on supporting newly elected Members. She added that as a new Councillor, she was not sure what was essential to attend and what was offered on a voluntary basis, particularly with training sessions.

The Group Manager – Legal and Democratic Services advised that since virtual training had been provided, Member attendance had increased considerably as they were able to access it more easily around their other commitments. This was something that would be considered in the future in relation to training.

A Member mentioned that many of the Councillors had previously and still struggle with the ICT equipment that they are using. He said that there was not any mention of training on this and suggested that checks were made when new Members are elected to establish if they have basic ICT skills needed to use the equipment. If not, training could be provided early on in their term.

The Group Manager – Legal and Democratic Services explained that when new Members receive their ICT equipment, they will receive information and support from the ICT department as part of their induction. The Member asked if a guide could be made available on the Councils website to allow Members to read over to gain a greater grasp of the issues.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

- Provided its views on the WLGA “Framework Induction Curriculum for Candidates and New Members in Wales for the Local Elections 2022”;
- Identified any additional activities, themes, key policies or other topics which should be included in the Induction Programme.

202. URGENT ITEMS

None

The meeting closed at 11:00