

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE - THURSDAY, 21 OCTOBER 2021

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE HELD
REMOTELY - VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON THURSDAY, 21 OCTOBER 2021 AT 10:00

Present

Councillor E Venables – Chairperson

S Aspey
SR Vidal

B Sedgebeer
MC Voisey

SG Smith
A Williams

G Thomas
RE Young

Apologies for Absence

DG Howells and RM James

Officers:

Mark Galvin
Michael Pitman

Interim Democratic Services Manager
Democratic Services Officer – Committees

203. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None

204. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the 24/06/2021 be approved as a true and accurate record

205. MEMBER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

The Interim Democratic Services Manager presented a report, which advised the Committee on the delivery of the Council's Member Training and Development Programme and related activities. The Committee was also requested to identify topics for inclusion on the Member Development Programme.

The Interim Democratic Services Manager advised that increasing attention has been given to Elected Member Development. The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 directed that local authorities placed more emphasis on Member Development. Members were encouraged to identify their own development needs and participate fully in learning and development activities, he added.

The Interim Democratic Services Manager highlighted the Member Training and Development Sessions that had been convened since the meeting of the Democratic Services Committee held on 25 March 2021 which were listed at 4.1.1 of the report. He also gave details of the Member briefing sessions as well the Development Control Committee training sessions held since this date. These were outlined at 4.2 and 4.3 of the report, respectively.

The Interim Democratic Services Manager provided a schedule of the proposed subjects to be considered for Members by way of Member Briefing sessions and Member training and Development sessions which were highlighted at sections 4 through to 6 of the report.

The Interim Democratic Services Manager advised that the Council had devised a range of e-learning courses for Members to support their learning and development needs. The provision of e-learning courses gives Members the opportunity to undertake their

learning and development remotely at a convenient time at their own pace. The following E Learning courses were available:

- Corporate Induction
- UK GDPR
- Display Screen Equipment
- Fire Safety Awareness
- ICT Code of Conduct
- Safeguarding Children and Adults
- Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence

A Member asked if a training session could be provided on the 2030 Carbon Neutral Strategy as he believed not all Members may be as well informed as others on this important topic. The Interim Democratic Services Manager explained that this was a topic that had been confirmed and would be scheduled in the immediate future. He explained that this was not going to be arranged by Democratic Services but rather through the Communities Directorate and an external provider.

A Member asked what could be done to promote Members attending the training sessions that are held. He stated that many of the sessions have the same Members attending each one.

The Interim Democratic Services Manager stressed that through political group meetings were the most beneficial way to promote the training sessions as this would come directly from group leaders to their Members, He added that he would also contact the independent Members to stress the importance of the sessions. He further added that the sessions were not mandatory and so Members could only be encouraged to take part in the training and reminded of the benefits of them.

The Interim Democratic Services Manager added that placing the sessions before a Committee meeting may boost attendance. However, many Members had criticised this approach as the screen time was increased considerably for that particular day and they felt that this was difficult then due to issues such as excessive eye strain and the continued ability to concentrate on the meeting sessions.

RESOLVED: That Members Noted the content of the report.

206. **POTENTIAL CANDIDATE EVENT**

The Interim Democratic Services Manager presented a report which sought the views of the committee regarding provisional plans to provide a 'Potential Candidate' event, for anyone considering standing as a Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) Councillor at the Local Government Elections in 2022.

He explained that Local Democracy Week was held every year in October with the purpose of:

- strengthening links between elected representatives and their communities
- increase participation in the democratic process
- involvement of citizens in community affairs
- increase their knowledge of local democratic institutions and processes

He added that with the Local Government Elections in May 2022, this year's Local Democracy Week (11-17 October 2021) would be an appropriate time to begin preparations for the elections and to actively involve the electorate in the democratic process. Following on from this, it was proposed that two candidate sessions be held on

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the 18th and 25th November, the purpose of which was to outline information about the role of the councillor and the functions of the Council and to provide information regarding how an individual becomes a candidate at the election and the processes for being elected. The topics would be split into two parts as shown at 4.1 of the report. Further information regarding the sessions were at 4.3 of the report.

The Interim Democratic Services Manager added that a video would also be provided to potential candidates which would follow the day in the life of a councillor. The sessions would be promoted on the Councils website as well as in news bulletins and by Members and through Town and Community Councils.

He explained that to date, there had been 3 people interested in attending the first session and 6 people in the second session.

A Member stated that many other local authorities had provided videos similar to that mentioned above and was sceptical that local authorities should be provide these videos. He believed this to be an unnecessary cost and that the videos could be financially supported by the WLGAs instead.

The Interim Democratic Services Manager believed that the cost for the photographer was approximately £800 for a video involving three Members. He stated that the purpose of the videos was in place of what had been done in previous years whereby Council staff and Members gave the briefing to potential candidates in person in the Council Suite at the Civic Offices. With Covid-19 affecting the ability to meet in person in this way meant that other avenues had to be explored. He added that he could feed back the Members concerns on cost to the Group Manager – Legal and Democratic Services.

A Member explained that he would have taken part in the promotion of the day in the life of a councillor if it were a question-and-answer session, but did not support the cost of £100 per head and believed that this was not a necessity.

The Chairperson asked how long the sessions would last.

The Interim Democratic Services Manager stated that it was scheduled for 2 hours, but he envisaged the sessions lasting no more than 90 minutes.

The Chairperson asked if the sessions were being recorded and placed on the Councils website for the public to view. The Interim Democratic Services Manager believed that they were not being recorded but did not see an issue with doing so. The Chairperson believed that putting it on the website may entice more people who had thought of the idea, but were unable to make the potential candidate sessions, and that it would prompt them to get in contact with BCBC for further information.

The Chairperson asked how many attendees were at the sessions held in 2017, before the elections that year. The Interim Democratic Services Manager stated that there were around 20 attendees at each of those sessions.

RESOLVED: That the Democratic Services Committee considered the proposals and provided input for the prospective candidate event(s) planned to take place in November 2021.

207. **MEMBER INDUCTION PROGRAMME 2022**

The Interim Democratic Services Manager presented a report which outlined the proposed Member Induction Programme for 2022 for the consideration by the Committee.

He explained that Member training and development is required by the Local Government Act 2000, Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 and the Council's Elected Member Learning and Development Strategy which was approved by Council in July 2021. He added that following the Local Government Elections in 2022 there will be a number of new and returning Elected Members. An Induction Programme was an important development opportunity as it enabled Members to quickly become familiar with how the Council works, including rules and procedures under which it operates, the complexities of the Elected Member role, as well as helping them to integrate quickly into the Council following their election.

The Interim Democratic Services Manager alerted Members to the 3 phases at section 4 of the report which had been discussed at the last Committee meeting.

Attached at Appendix 1 of the report was the full proposed Member Induction Programme for 2022. It should be noted that the draft programme, by its very nature and timescale, contained some dates/times and draft content which were indicative to an extent and therefore, could be subject to some modifications.

He added that following the election process, and to support the member induction programme an information pack would also be provided when they sign the Acceptance of Office. This will include useful information such as core policies and procedures, timetable of meetings and useful Council and its partners contact numbers. It was proposed that the Programme also include events where Members will be able to meet officers to find out more about the Council's services as well as other new, and returning Members.

A Member asked if greater emphasis could be placed on the budget setting process, the Council's finances and why the Council holds reserve funds. He believed that there was not enough knowledge among existing Members on the above and that new Members joining would also benefit from having a better understanding on this. He added that in addition to this, Member briefing sessions would also be a good avenue to pursue.

The Chairperson mention that the financial sustainability topic was not scheduled until June 2022. She asked if this was suitable timing or if it should be delivered earlier than this.

The Interim Democratic Services Manager explained that the front end of the induction programme was essential and somewhat time bound. He explained that once Committee membership was set at the annual meeting of Council, there was a requirement to ensure Members were correctly trained before sitting on Committees, particularly the likes of Licensing, Development Control, Governance and Audit Committees and the Appeals Panel. He added that the induction programme was in draft format and subject to change, so there may be changes made to ensure topics were arranged in a more appropriate order, including being supplemented with other training and development sessions, if and when this was deemed necessary.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee considered the report and provided its views as expressed above, on the draft Member Induction Programme for 2022.

208. **INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL FOR WALES DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23**

The Interim Democratic Services Manager presented a report which asked the Committee to provide its views in respect of the draft Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales report. Any response would be submitted to the IRPW and the Welsh Local Government Association by the deadline of 26 November 2021, he advised.

He explained that the draft report proposed some changes to the current remuneration prescribed for Elected Members at Principal (County Borough) and Town and Community Council levels. He highlighted the key elements of the draft report as listed at 4.2 onwards of the report.

The Interim Democratic Services Manager highlighted the key factors underpinning the Panel's determination which were listed at 3.21 of the draft report. He added that the draft report also covered changes and or requirements regarding Supporting the work of local authority elected members, Specific or additional senior salaries, Job Sharing Arrangements, Assistants to the Executive as well as local government pension scheme (LGPS) provision.

He highlighted the points made at 3.2 of the draft report regarding Member security in light of the recent tragic death of Sir David Amess MP. This was something that had been highlighted to himself and the Group Manager – Legal and Democratic Services and was being looked at more closely following the tragedy, i.e. for the continued safety of Members undertaking their roles and responsibilities.

A Member believed that comments should not be made on the sum of money that the Independent Remuneration Panel have proposed for Members, as this was an organisation separate from local government and therefore was impartial.

A Member stated that the considerations by the IRP should have been linked to the boundary change review. He explained that many large areas have multi-Member wards and that some Members in these Wards were more active than others. This had caused the workload of many of the more active Members to increase drastically while less active Members take on less of that work for the same remuneration. He added that if he were re-elected in the next elections and due to the boundary change, his workload could triple while the remuneration was the same as smaller wards.

The Chairperson agreed that it was a difficult situation for Members to be in, ie multi-member wards as well as wards of different sizes. The Chairperson commented on determination 10 and 11 of the IRP draft report stating that in the past with regards to Members' internet, phone and other electronics, Members have stated that it was not necessary for these to be provided as they believed it was common to have this infrastructure in place. She asked what Members views on this was now, as the demand for remote working has increased. She raised this as it had been noticed many Councillors were regularly having connection issues during or before a meeting.

The Interim Democratic Services Manager believed that this was something BCBC would be looking into as would all local authorities going forward with continued remote and hybrid working being likely for the long term future. He added that work was being undertaken in the Council Chamber and Committee Rooms to facilitate meetings in a hybrid manner. Work on the Council Chamber was scheduled to start sometime in the new year and the Committee rooms in December of this year. He added that risk assessment forms were being developed for Members to complete, whereby they needed to pass certain health and safety criteria, in order to attend a meeting in the

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Council Offices. If they were unable to pass the criteria, they would continue to attend the meeting remotely.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

- a. Noted the content of the report;
- b. Provided response in respect of the IRPW Draft Annual Report 2022-23;
- c. Approved that any response of the Committee be submitted to the IRPW and the WLGA by the deadline of 26 November 2021.

209. **URGENT ITEMS**

None

The meeting closed at 11:00am