

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

Minutes of a remote meeting held on 25th July, 2022.

The Committee agenda is available [here](#)

The Meeting recording is available [here](#)

Present: Councillor Dr. I.J. Johnson (Chair); Councillor S.J. Haines (Vice-Chair); Councillors G.D.D. Carroll, E. Goodjohn, S.M. Hanks, K.P. Mahoney, S.D. Perkes, J. Protheroe and N.C. Thomas.

Also present: Councillor A. Asbrey.

198 ANNOUNCEMENT –

Prior to the commencement of the business of the Committee, the Principal Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer read the following statement: “This meeting is being live streamed and will be archived for future viewing.”

199 MINUTES –

RESOLVED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 4th April, 2022 be approved as a correct record.

200 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

No declarations of interest were received.

201 MEMBER ICT UPDATE (OMICT) –

The Operational Manager for ICT presented the report providing a general update in relation to ICT provision to Elected and Co-opted Members. This included the Member hardware refresh programme which had been procured and distributed together with appropriate training for all Members.

Councillor Mahoney raised some ICT-based issues he had experienced when contacting Council Officers, particularly by telephone. To this point, the Operational Manager for ICT explained that Soft Phones had been installed in Council Officers’ laptops to facilitate hybrid working, and that this telephony system would not be operational when the relevant Officer’s laptop was powered off or not in use, during which time a call should divert to the Officer’s voicemail. He also explained that a recent public launch of a Cost of Living Crisis Payment initiative had generated a very high level of external incoming calls, and that working around this issue had impacted on telephony systems during this time.

Councillor Thomas enquired as to why old mobile phone numbers had not been able to be carried across to their new mobile phone devices. The Operational Manager advised that this would not have been possible due to the Vale of Glamorgan Council's corporate contract with O2, and the need to purchase additional sim cards from this provider.

Councillor Carroll commented that the Vale of Glamorgan Council's digital training platform, iDev, had not recorded some of his training as completed in the system. The Principal Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer informed the Committee that this issue had been identified and was currently being addressed and requested that any further issues be communicated to the Democratic Services team, who would liaise with the Organisation Development and Learning department in order to resolve the inaccuracies.

In response to a query from Councillor Hanks as to why some Members were displaying different titles on the participant list on the TEAMS software when in a meeting, the Principal Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer advised that this related to participants joining meetings using personal devices, and that amendments would need to be made by the participant themselves, in order to create a uniform display format for all.

RESOLVED –

- (1) T H A T the report be noted.
- (2) T H A T the Chief Executive's responses to the matters raised by Councillor Mahoney in regard to the contactability of senior officers and engagement be copied to the Members of the Committee.
- (3) T H A T the Operational Manager, ICT circulate to Members of the Committee an explanation of the reasons why the Council's telephony system had been adversely affected due to the launch of the crisis payments initiative and why ICT had not been advised of its commencement.
- (4) T H A T the response of the Operational Manager, ICT to matters raised by Councillor Thomas relating to the porting of old Councillor mobile phone numbers to new mobile phones issued as part of the Member ICT Refresh Strategy post election be circulated to the Committee.

Reasons for decisions

- (1) Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.
- (2-4) Having regard to the discussions at the meeting.

202 DISCHARGE OF THE DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE FUNCTIONS AND TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT (HDS) -

The Head of Democratic Services presented the report which apprised Members of the functions of the Democratic Services Committee and provided an update on the training and development activities undertaken by Members since the Local Government elections in May 2022.

The report provided an introduction to the Democratic Services Committee and details relating to its remit. The role of the Democratic Services team was also outlined in the report, covering the support the team provided and the resources available within the service area. The Statutory Guidance and support for fulfilling the role of Head of Democratic Services was also covered within the report.

The Head of Democratic Services highlighted that he was making no recommendations for additional resources for staff or accommodation at this time, although there were matters included in the report around ongoing discussions on resourcing needs.

Challenges faced by the service were highlighted – primarily as a result of the pandemic – for example, the need to train Members in the use of remote meetings software. The move to fully incorporate hybrid meetings into the Council's Committee schedule would launch from September 2022.

The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 and its material effect on the Vale of Glamorgan Council's Constitution was also covered in the report. The Head of Democratic Services advised that further draft guidance on the Act was expected to be received from the Welsh Assembly Government in Autumn 2022, and that the deadline for responses to consultation on such guidance from Welsh Local Authorities had closed on 22nd July, 2022.

The Member Induction Programme undertaken following the May 2022 elections was set out in the report. Members had been provided with new equipment during the Induction, and had been introduced to iDev - the Council's online learning resource. In referring to the essential elements of the induction programme the Head of Democratic Services advised that Members had been largely expected to have attended the majority of the mandatory sessions by 25th July, although some additional sessions were being organised to accommodate those who had not been able to attend on the dates identified.

A review of the Member Induction process, including a survey of Members' experiences, was due to take place in the near future, with details of this to be communicated to the Democratic Services Committee in November 2022. Both the Head of Democratic Services and the Chair of the Democratic Services Committee emphasised the importance of obtaining Councillors' feedback via the forthcoming Member Induction Survey.

The Member Development Strategy was also covered in the report and this was a refreshed Strategy that had been endorsed by the Welsh Local Government

Association (WLGA). Linked to this were Personal Development Reviews (PDRs) – a process which was available to all Members of the Council although they were required to be undertaken by Members in receipt of Senior Salaries, with the exception of the Leader of the Council. PDRs for those Members would be undertaken in approximately twelve months' time to address any development needs they may have. All Members were also encouraged to consider their personal development needs. The PDR process was being implemented to facilitate this, and to formalise subsequent training plans for individuals.

To conclude the presentation, the Head of Democratic Services highlighted the updated Member Role Descriptions information contained in the Council's Constitution, which had been recently refreshed by the WLGA with a pan-Wales approach, and encouraged Councillors to consider this information for an insight into what their regular responsibilities and demands in their role could be.

Councillor Ewan Goodjohn noted that there were a number of Members for whom important training modules were outstanding, and queried what provisions were being made for additional sessions to be carried out in time for the resuming of Council meetings in September. To this point, the Head of Democratic Services acknowledged the importance of the training modules, and advised there would be a focus on Members completing outstanding essential modules and also that one-to-one sessions could be arranged with Members if needed.

Councillor Haines commented that he felt the Member training could be streamlined and improved, suggesting that it could be a work programme subject for the Committee. Councillor Carroll, while acknowledging the importance of training for new Councillors and training relevant to each Committee, also felt that staggering training throughout Councillors' terms of office could be considered in the future, rather than having the majority of a diverse range of training topics delivered to Councillors at the start of their term. In contrast, Councillor Perkes commented that the Member Induction programme was similar to any new workplace induction in terms of time-frames and also pointed out that many training sessions were still available online for Councillors to access.

The Head of Democratic Services confirmed that there were recordings of training sessions available to Councillors online. He advised that, while he appreciated that Councillors had competing pressures and priorities, and that there was a lot of training covered at the start of the new term of office, which it may be possible to stagger over a longer period of time, the induction process had been designed in line with Welsh Government's expected standards, and was comparable to those in other Local Authorities.

RESOLVED -

(1) T H A T reports and recommendations (if any) in respect of any proposed changes to the number and grades of staff required to discharge Democratic Services functions, and that any proposed changes would need to be reported to Council for approval be noted.

- (2) T H A T the Member Development Strategy attached at Appendix 1 to the report be noted.
- (3) T H A T the training and development activities undertaken by Members since May 2022 to date be noted and that a further report be submitted to the next meeting of this Committee on attendance rates at the various induction sessions.
- (4) T H A T in accordance with the requirements of “the Measure” all (54) elected Members be afforded the opportunity to undergo annual Personal Development Reviews (PDRs).
- (5) T H A T the Committee receive an update report on the PDRs process highlighting the development needs identified and to inform a future development programme.

Reasons for decisions

- (1) To keep under review resources to discharge the Democratic Services function.
- (2) To raise awareness of the contents for the Strategy.
- (3) In acknowledgement of the extensive Member Induction Programme undertaken post Local Government elections.
- (4) To support future training needs of Members.
- (5) To present a Training Needs Analysis.

203 APPOINTMENT OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES SUB-COMMITTEE: FAMILY ABSENCE FOR ELECTED MEMBERS (HDS) -

The report apprised Members of the requirements of the Family Absence for Members of Local Authorities (Wales) Regulations 2013 as amended by the Family Absence for Members of Local Authorities (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2021. The Regulations had been amended in 2021 to increase the adoption absence period for Local Authority Members from 2 weeks to 26 weeks, and to allow the Authority to deal with various types of Family Absence. The Regulations also stipulated the need for a sub-committee to deal with matters regarding any appeals against the refusal to grant family absence requests. The terms of reference of the sub-committee and how it should be constituted to deal with any complaints against request refusals were outlined in the report at paragraph 2.7.

The Chair advised that the requirements were to appoint a sub-committee with three members, one of each being from the three largest political groups within the Council.

RESOLVED –

(1) T H A T the Democratic Services Sub-Committee, with the following membership and Terms of Reference, be appointed:

- Membership: Councillors E. Goodjohn, S.J. Haines and Dr. I.J. Johnson;
- Terms of Reference:
To hear and determine any complaints from Members regarding a refusal by the Head of Democratic Services to grant family absence under the Family Absence for Elected Members of Local Authorities (Wales) Regulations 2013 as amended by the Family Absence for Members of Local Authorities (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2021.

(2) T H A T the provisions of the Family Absence for Members of Local Authorities (Wales) Regulations 2013 as amended by the Family Absence for Members of Local Authorities (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2021 and the statutory obligations imposed on the Council be noted.

Reason for decisions

(1&2) To ensure the Council meets the requirements of the Family Absence for Members of Local Authorities (Wales) Regulations 2013 as amended by the Family Absence for Members of Local Authorities (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2021.

204 ANNUAL REPORT OF HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES (HDS) –

The report provided a summary of the wide range of duties undertaken within the service area throughout the year, ongoing developments, and plans for the future. The report also set out how the service area for Democratic Services was set up. The Head of Democratic Services explained that his statutory roles also included the Proper Officer to the Ministry of Justice and overseeing the Council's Registrations Service of births, deaths and marriages, but that the report covered Democratic Services only.

The Head of Democratic Services explained that while he was not recommending additional staffing resources currently, there were pressures on the team due to the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, and in particular the provisions for the production and management of hybrid meetings, and a new public participations strategy including facilitating electronic petitions.

The current staffing resources were outlined in the report and the team currently comprised of 12 members of staff including support to the Council's Cabinet and the Mayoral functions. The report also included a summary of the work that the team had undertaken in the previous twelve months including ongoing work and initiatives that the team has actively engaged in. Senior Officers had been working on updates to the Council's Constitution to ensure that the requirements

of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 introduced on 5th May, 2022 were reflected in the Constitution despite the new statutory guidance not being available until the Autumn. Following this guidance being received, any further updates required would be reported to Council in due course.

The Head of Democratic Services also thanked Members for their patience and co-operation during the period in the initial stages of the Covid-19 Pandemic whereby Democratic Services needed to implement new ways of working to facilitate remote meetings, including setting up and introducing new software solutions for meetings. Councillor Hanks in turn thanked ICT and Democratic Services for their support in overcoming these challenges. The Head of Democratic Services referred to the appendix to the report which detailed public viewing figures for virtual Council meetings as an indication of levels of demand for such meetings amongst the public. He also explained that a further appendix covered public engagement with the Planning and Scrutiny Committees.

The Democratic Services team had recently been working on compliance with the provisions of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 for hybrid meetings, including working with the Council's hybrid solutions provider, Civico, and training Members on such new technology so as to enable the requirements of the Act. The Council Chamber at the Civic Offices had been upgraded to reflect the new technical requirements. There had previously been some delay with this process due to equipment supply chain issues, however, the upgrade was now in place and a Cabinet meeting had been held in the past week using the new hybrid format. The Head of Democratic Services further highlighted that, in order to run all aspects of the governance and the technology smoothly, facilitating hybrid meetings looked likely to need an additional two Officers to staff each meeting, with a member of ICT to support the Council Members in attendance and to deal with any ICT issues that may arise. He also passed on his thanks to the Officers in Democratic Services and ICT who had fully supported the process of introducing hybrid meetings.

Other aspects of work referred to in the report included a number of working groups that had been established in regards to collaborating with other Local Authorities, which met periodically through the year in order to share best practice across all sectors in Wales, and to work with colleagues in Welsh Government. The report also included information on relevant independent bodies to the Service including the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales, and the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (IRPW). Some insight into the role of the IRPW was provided, explaining that the Panel dealt with remuneration and other forms of support for Elected Members, for example reimbursements for costs of care, and ICT support. The Head of Democratic Services highlighted that the IRPW had intended that payments and remuneration should encourage diversity amongst Elected Membership, and that this therefore supported the Welsh Government's diversity agenda.

In conclusion, the Head of Democratic Services advised that an indication of the work that the Democratic Services team would undertake for the rest of this year was also included in the report. The Chair of the Committee, in commenting on the hard work being undertaken by the Democratic Services Team and there

being no request for additional resources currently, acknowledged that this would no doubt be a matter for ongoing future discussion.

RESOLVED – T H A T the report be noted.

Reason for decision

Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.

205 MEMBERS' ANNUAL REPORTS (HDS) -

The report outlined the provision in the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 for the production and publication of Annual Reports by Members. Whilst the Measure required Councils to make this facility available to its Members, there was no obligation on individual Members to produce one. The Head of Democratic Services stated that to date there had not been a significant take up historically by Members, and advised that it was a matter for each individual Member to choose to prepare such a report. He suggested that a Member's Annual Report could be used as an opportunity of informing constituents of the work that had been carried out during the year by a Member.

The Head of Democratic Services had the responsibility to retain certain aspects of editorial control over the content of reports, which had to comply with certain rules around factual accuracy and defamatory content. The Chair of the Committee commented that, as such reports needed to be suitable for publication on the Council's website, they should not be overtly political in nature.

RESOLVED – T H A T all Members be informed of the facility for them to produce for publication an Annual Report on the Council's website.

Reason for decision

To facilitate the Council's compliance with the relevant provision of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 ("the Measure").

206 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2022/23 (HDS) –

The Head of Democratic Services presented the report which proposed a Work Programme for the Democratic Services Committee for the Municipal Year 2022/23 for Members' consideration. In noting that a discussion had already taken place regarding Member training and development being added to the Committee's work programme for the Autumn, earlier in the meeting it was subsequently

RESOLVED – T H A T the Work Programme and timetable as set out in report be approved.

Reason for decision

Having regard to the content of the report and discussions at the meeting.