

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

31ST JANUARY 2014

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S OFFICE

**REPORT OF THE HEAD OF CORPORATE STRATEGY AND
DEMOCRATIC SERVICES – K.JONES**

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PART 1, SECTION B, ITEM 1

Review of elected Members Annual Reports and the elected Member Development Review process.

Purpose of Report

To provide Members with an update on the processes and procedures that enable elected Members to publish an annual report and how the elected Member development reviews were undertaken.

Background

Following the introduction of the Local Government Measure (Wales) 2011, the Council has agreed a procedure to allow elected Members to publish annual reports and to receive an annual development review. As this is the first year of implementation it was agreed that the processes be reviewed at the end of the year.

Progress

It was essential to get the Members thoughts on what they thought in relation to the two areas under review. A survey was developed using the Council's online Objective consultation tool and exactly 50% of Members responded to the survey. The following information has been split by topic area for ease of reference.

Elected Member Annual Reports

18 of the survey respondents did write an annual report for 2012/2013 and 17 of those had attended the training session that were arranged to advise Members on the scheme.

Members informed the review that there were real reasons why they had been unable to complete an annual report and the reasons were a lack of time, family circumstances, work commitments and one was unaware that they could write a report if they so wished.

As part of the evaluation process elected Members were asked what they found useful about the training for writing annual reports. It was suggested that the training had highlighted how the report should be simple and straightforward and thus put their mind at rest.

It was a welcome opportunity to meet and discuss the content of reports and gain some advice on editing. The headings that were provided were also a key part of assisting the Members in writing a report. One Member stated that it helped them focus their mind to prioritise the facts so that it becomes more understandable to the general public.

The opportunity to have one to one contact with Democratic Services officers was welcome rather than just being given a document to assist the Members in writing a report. The opportunity to listen to what other Members do was also welcomed.

Members were asked whether they thought any improvements could be made to the process. Again there were a number of responses which can assist the unit to address any issues. The main suggestion was that it may encourage more Members to complete a report if a template was developed that allowed answers to be provided for set questions. It was suggested that preparations could begin earlier but the reason for the short timescales was due to the late publication of the guidance from Welsh Government.

An issue that has been highlighted by officers from Democratic Services is the need to provide an absolute end date for submission of reports. As this was the first year of the process it was decided to leave it open ended. However, this has resulted in a number of reports being presented half way through the civic year which may result in them being out of date. A suggestion is made that the following is adopted:

April 2014 – Members are reminded of the option to write a report

May 2014 – A refresher training is provided is required

July 2014 – Reports to be submitted by the end of July 2014

Any submissions after the end of July will not be moderated or published.

Elected Member Annual Development Review

Of the 32 respondents to the survey 12 Members stated that they had received a review. There were a number of reasons stated as to why Members did not have a review but the main reason was due to time constraints although some other reasons were too busy, unaware of the process and one stated that they did not need a review as they take advice off senior officers.

15 Members stated that they found the process easy to understand and although 2 stated they did not there was no additional information on where the lack of understanding lay. Members were asked whether there was a sufficient level of

training provided and two Members stated they thought there was an insufficient level of training and suggested that it may be better to provide a more direct approach to questions and answers in the form of a set questionnaire which may help members who are reluctant to participate in the reviews.

Additional suggestions for improvement were given as interviewees need to attend a review having undertaken some preparatory work; it may be beneficial to provide a range of example responses so that Members know what they should be aiming for and to actually be invited to a review.

In conclusion it appears that there is a suggestion that not all Members were made aware or invited to be part of the annual development reviews but this is incorrect as all Members were invited to take part in this if they so wished. Through the review process a number of development opportunities were identified and these are currently being progressed with dates in the diary up until May for potential development sessions. A list of the identified and organised sessions so far is included below. Within this list are a number of Member Seminars which were arranged to brief Members on a number of important issues.

Member Development Draft Programme

Date	Time	Item	Venue
3 rd June	2.00pm	Corporate Parenting Seminar – this was a continuation session to provide Members with important information in relation to Corporate Parenting.	The Orangery, Margam
4 th June	All Day	Member Annual Report Training – Four sessions were arranged to allow as many Members as possible to benefit from training on how to write an Annual Report	Boardroom, Neath
8 th July	10.00am	Review of the Community Areas and Electoral Arrangements in NPTCBC	Chamber
9 th July	2.00pm	All Member Seminar on Crime and Disorder	Chamber
10 th September	1.00pm	All Member Seminar on the proposed Atlantic Array Wind Farm	Chamber

12 th September	2.00pm	All Member Seminar on the potential issues arising from the Local Government Settlement	Chamber
22 nd October	1.00pm	All Member Seminar on changes to Permitted Development Rights	Chamber
23 rd October	2.30pm	All Member Seminar following the announcement of the Local Government Budget Settlement	Chamber
5 th November	1.00pm	All Member Seminar to advise of the outcomes following a Review of 3 rd Sector Funding.	Chamber
6 th November	2.00pm	Chairing Skills – Joint session with attendees from Swansea Council	Chamber
7 th November	10.00am	All Member Seminar advising of the changes to the Community Resource Team	Chamber
27 th November	10am	Equality Impact Assessment Training for Cabinet Members, Chairs and Vice Chairs. The session will be delivered by the WLGA	Committee Room Three
9 th December	1.30pm	Basic First Aid Training – this has been organised following a request by elected Members.	Postponed until later in 2014
2014			
8 th January	2.00pm	Equalities – delivered by the WLGA and is the same standard as the pilot scheme last year.	Chamber
14 th January	2.00pm	All Member Seminar on Crime and Disorder focussing on Domestic Abuse	Chamber
5 th February	2.00pm	Local Government Finance	Chamber
19 th February	TBC	Chairing Skills	Swansea Council
21 st February	9.30am	Active Listening Training – a session that has been funded	Chamber – Port Talbot

		by the Centre for Public Scrutiny and will be held jointly with Members from the City and County of Swansea	
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Additional Notes/Possible Sessions

Report Writing – Elected Members have requested sessions on report writing to assist them in writing newsletters and possible future reporting.

Questioning Skills – this will be for all Members and probably run over three sessions. Dates are to be confirmed and will take into consideration any additional development that is undertaken on social services scrutiny.

Health and Safety has also been raised by elected Members and this is being explored with training.

IT training – elected Members have been asked what specific training they would like but the response rate has been low.

Media Training – discussions will be held with the in house communications team on a convenient date. A proposal has been put together by officers and requires agreement from the Head of Service.

A request was made in relation to training around the constitution of the Council and David Michael has stated he can provide training but it would be more relevant if this was done following the governance review and in conjunction with the relevant officers.

The Training and Development team have also offered sessions on POVA awareness should Members be interested in taking this up. This will be a vital component in addressing the Members knowledge of safeguarding issues across all of Social Services.

The sessions listed above have not been arranged as yet due to a number of reasons including inconvenient timing, cost and on occasions a lack of clarity on what is required.

IT training is an example of a lack of clarity; elected Members have a varying level of need in this area and it will take more time to ensure that the support provided is the correct support.

An additional session that has not been delivered is that of questioning skills, this is due to cost. Ideally this topic would have been delivered over a number of sessions to maximise the attendance, however it has not been possible to identify convenient dates with elected Members and the training provider. It would be too expensive to book the number of training sessions required to reach the maximum number of elected Members.

We have also not organised a report writing session as it is not something that will provide real benefit to elected Members, however as the Council develops there may be a need to provide the training to allow elected Members to write more formal reports.

Children's Social Services

Following the inspection report by the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) a great deal of work has been done in relation to Children's Services. There have been seminars on Corporate Parenting, which were not just providing Members with information but actually gave them a real insight to service issues. The last session was attended by a Care Leaver who provided Members with a warts and all account of what it was like for them.

The Children, Young People and Education Scrutiny Committee have also received a lot of targeted support to assist them in their role in addressing the issues and problems identified during the inspection. The work will continue through more intense development assisted by representatives from the Centre for Public Scrutiny.

Next Steps

It is essential that the Member Development programme remains owned by the Members and developed through discussions and the more formal Annual Development Reviews. The next year will allow elected Members to further comment on the training they received in the previous year. It is hoped that there will be further uptake of the reviews for 2014/2015.

In addition to the outcomes of the development reviews discussions will take place with the Leader, Chairs and Vice Chairs of Scrutiny to get their thoughts on whether they think the development programme for the 2013/2014 Civic Year has been beneficial and also what items they would like included in the future. It may be pertinent to also invite the opposition group leaders for this discussion.

Recommendation

That Members of the Democratic Services Committee consider the analysis of the feedback and makes any changes as appropriate to the procedures.

List of Background Papers

Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011-

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/localgovernment/publications/statguide/?lang=en>

Elected Member Annual Report – Examples (Hard copies to be circulated at the meeting)

http://www.npt.gov.uk/pdf/members/Cllr_R_Jones_2012_2013.pdf

http://www.npt.gov.uk/Default.aspx?page=1500&area=PEL#councillor_130

http://www.npt.gov.uk/pdf/members/Cllr_E_Jones%202012_2013.pdf

http://www.npt.gov.uk/pdf/members/Cllr_A_Woolcock_2012_2013.pdf

http://www.npt.gov.uk/pdf/members/Cll_J_Dudley_2012_2013.pdf

Wards Affected

All

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PART 1, SECTION B, ITEM 2

Town/Community Council website grant funding.

Purpose of Report

To provide Members with an update in relation to the specific Welsh Government grant funding which has been made available for the development of Town and Community Councils websites within the Neath Port Talbot area.

Background

The Welsh Government wrote to councils on 21st February, 2013, notifying local authorities of specific grant funding that it was making available to modernise democratic arrangements.

Within the total grant funding allocation a sum of £9,500 was provided for the development of all 19 Town and Community Councils within the Neath Port Talbot area to establish or enhance their corporate web presence. A sum of up to £500 was made available to each council for this purpose.

The funding provided to Town and Community Councils directly links to provisions within Section 55 of the Local Government (Democracy) (Wales) Act 2013, which states that a community council must make available electronically;

- Information on how to contact the council and its individual Members
- Minutes and relevant documentation of Council Meetings
- Any audited statement of the council's accounts

It is unclear at present when these provisions will be commenced by the Welsh Government although it is expected to occur at some point within the next 24 months.

Progress

Currently, of the 19 Town/Community Councils within the County Borough, 18 councils have either signed an agreement with NPTCBC to accept the funding or will do so shortly. One council has made the decision to formally decline the funding.

In signing the agreement in the event that any grant needs to be repaid liability will rest with the Community Council concerned. To date one council has so far met the full criteria of the agreement and submitted an acceptable claim for payment which has been authorised. The deadline for the receipt of all grant claims is 31st March 2014.

Recommendation:

That Members of the Democratic Services Committee note the above report.

List of Background Papers

Local Government (Democracy) (Wales) Act 2013

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2013/4/section/55/enacted>

Wards Affected

All wards with a designated Town or Community Council.

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PART 1, SECTION B, ITEM 3

Webcasting and Remote Attendance at Meetings.

Purpose of Report

To provide Members with an update in relation to the Welsh Government grant funding made available to support the development of webcasting and remote attendance facilities in principal councils.

Background

On 21st February, 2013, The Welsh Government wrote to local authorities notifying them of specific grant funding that it had decided to make available to modernise democratic arrangements. Specifically:

- To enable councils to make particular arrangements to broadcast council meetings;
- Introduce remote attendance at council meetings; and
- Assist community councils to publish information on and be contactable through the Internet.

The conditions of the grant funding were drafted in such a way that councils would need to deliver on all three of these developments in order to secure any of the grant funding. The total grant available to Neath Port Talbot Council was £49,500.

To secure the grant the Council was required to:

- Broadcast some/all of the council meetings by 31st March 2014;
- Provide funding to community councils to assist them with the development of their websites by 31st March 2014.
- Arrange for remote attendance by councillors at council meetings by 31st March 2014.

Following an exchange of correspondence with Welsh Government, officers received written confirmation that it would be possible to distribute the funding to Town and Community councils even if this Council chose not to proceed to use the funding allocated for broadcasting and remote attendance.

Progress

The Council decided in Policy and Resources Cabinet Board of the 11th July 2013, following scrutiny that it did not wish to proceed with the introduction of webcasting due to the fact that there was no recurring additional funding available to support the maintenance of these activities and Council budgets were already under significant pressure. In relation to remote attendance at meeting by Members this was also rejected due to the lack of demand for the facility in this area and again due to issues of cost.

However, the Council did agree that arrangements should be put in place to disperse the ring-fenced £9,500 in grant aid to Town and Community Councils for the development of websites.

Following the decision of the Council, the Chief Executive, Mr Steven Phillips, formally wrote to the Welsh Government on 1st August, 2013, confirming the Council's decision to return the allocated grant funding of £40,000. To date no further correspondence has been received from the Welsh Government in relation to this matter.

Despite the fact that the Council does not intend to make provision for remote attendance the legislation requires that the Council make an amendment to its standing orders affecting quorum. The proposed amendment was agreed by Council on 22 January 2014, however will have no practical effect unless the Council decides at some time in the future to provide facilities for remote attendance. In that event of that decision being made a further amendment to the Constitution would be required.

Recommendation:

That Members of the Democratic Services Committee note the above report.

List of Background Papers

Policy & Resources Cabinet Board – 11th July 2013
Council – 22 January 2014

Wards Affected

All

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PART 1, SECTION B, ITEM 4

Current structure of Democratic Services.

Purpose of Report

To provide Members of the Democratic Services Committee with an update in relation to the current organisational structure of the Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services Department.

Background

The Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services Department was formed on 1st October 2012. The Department brings together services that previously sat in the portfolio of the Head of Change Management and Innovation with some of the services that sat in the portfolio of the Head of Corporate Strategy.

The Department comprises:

- Democratic and Electoral Services;
- Corporate Strategy, Communications and Performance;
- Change and Innovation Support; and
- Customer Services.

Additionally, a number of key corporate responsibilities are vested in the role of the Head of Service, including management of the corporate interface with the voluntary sector and the Wales Audit Office and supporting the Cabinet and the Corporate Directors' Group in formulating and delivering the Council's forward work programmes.

To reflect the bringing together of a wider range of responsibilities under one head of service, the management structure of the Department was formally revised in January 2013. Also, a wider review of the staffing arrangements was carried out between January 2013 and April 2013 and further alterations made between October 2013 and December 2013 to ensure the department is firmly focused on the priorities for improvement that are set out in the Council's Corporate Improvement Plan, the Single Integrated Plan and the specific personal objectives set by the Chief Executive for the Head of Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services in 2013-14.

Recommendation:

That Members of the Democratic Services Committee note the above report.

List of Background Papers

Current organisational structure – Corporate Strategy & Democratic Services Department.

Wards Affected

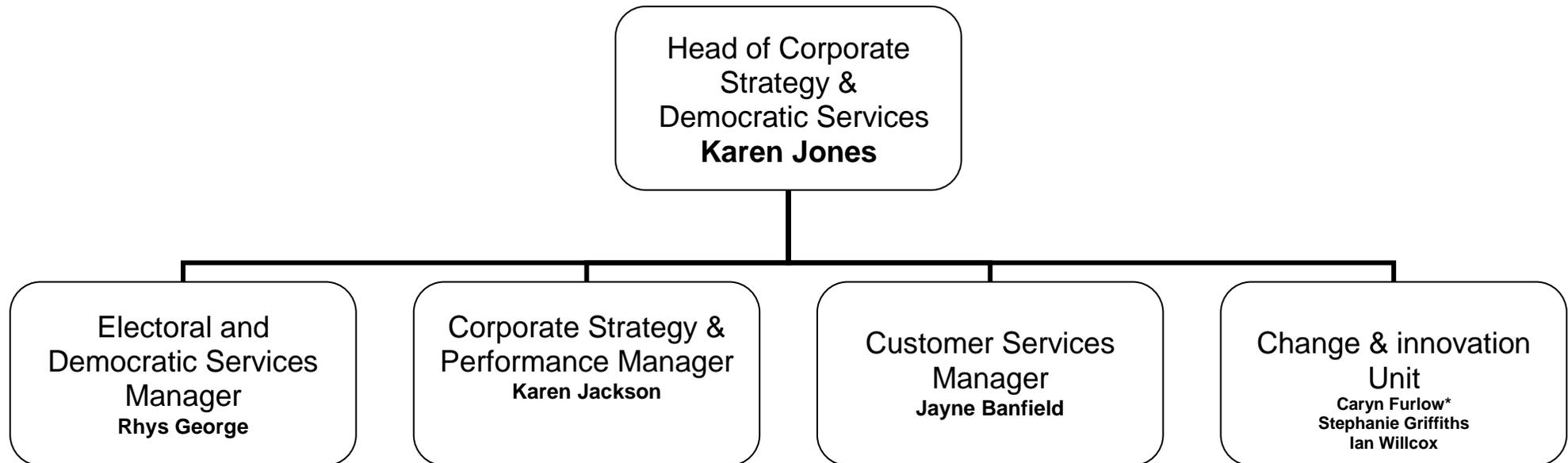
All

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Organisational Structure



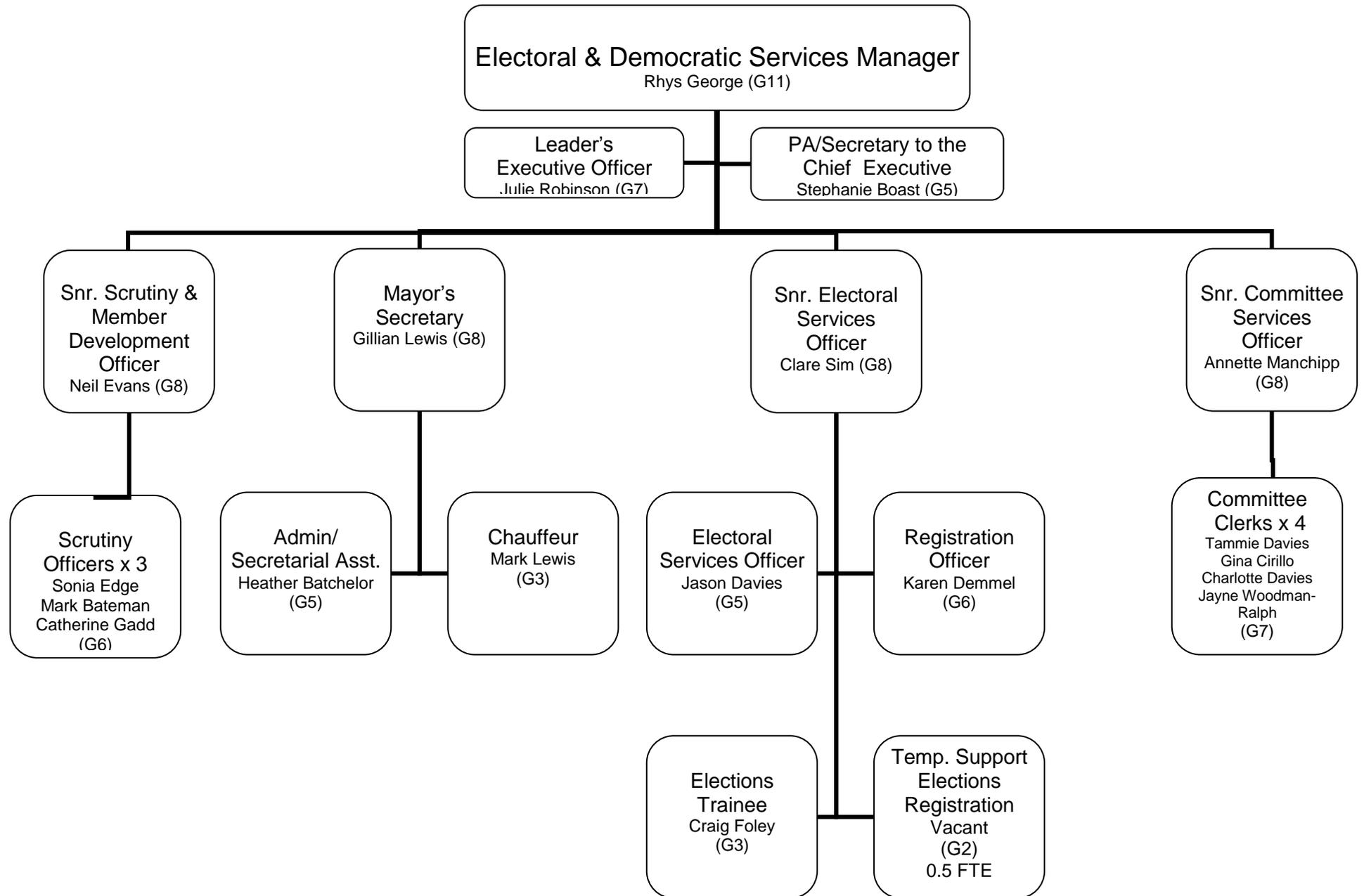
Electoral Services
 Committee Services
 Scrutiny
 Member Development
 Member Support
 Mayoralty
 Leader Support
 Community Council Liaison
 X-boundary arrangements
 Democratic Services Committee
 Forward Work Programme Mgt

LSB and Partnerships
 Single Integrated Plan
 Corporate Plan & Policy Dev
 Equality & Sust. Development
 Collaboration
 3rd Sector Liaison
 Programme & Performance Mgt
 WAO Relationships
 Governance
 Staff Suggestion Scheme

One Stop Shops
 Contact Centre
 Web Content
 Call handling policy
 Customer Care Policy
 Access to Service Strategy
 Complaints

Programme Management –
 Priority Change Programmes
 Change Support
 Press & Public Relations*
 Public Engagement & Strategic
 Communications*

Electoral and Democratic Services



PART 1, SECTION B, ITEM 5

Committee/Decision Management Software Solution ‘Modern.Gov’.

Purpose of Report

To provide Members with an update in relation to the acquisition of a new Software solution for the Council’s decision management process.

Background

Following the organisational re-structure of the Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services Department in January 2013, one of the first tasks undertaken within the newly formed Democratic Services team was to begin a system review of the administrative procedures and practices utilised in servicing the decision management mechanisms of the Council.

In undertaking this review, it became clear that work practices adhered to over many years, while relatively effective in maintaining the flow of Council business, were highly inefficient requiring officers to maintain a system utilising outdated administrative practices which also relied heavily on a relentless cycle of expensive ‘paper based’ print production.

As part of the ‘work flow’ and ‘work demand’ capturing exercises undertaken as part of the systems review research was also carried out to examine how other local authorities administered their decision management processes and what innovations in modern technology were currently available within this specialist field of work.

Conducting these enquiries as well as meeting and talking to other Democratic Services/Member Support officers revealed that the ‘modern.gov’ software solution offered a dynamic software solution with a robust track record providing an effective tool to improve the efficiency and transparency of 190 Democratic Services teams across the country. It is also worth pointing out that the ‘modern.gov’ system is also currently utilised by the National Assembly for Wales to administer its committee system.

At its core the system allows for high levels of functionality in relation to meeting and agenda management including producing agenda frontsheets, report packs, minutes and decision lists and automated publishing of this content to the Council’s intranet and internet websites.

The software solution also has extensive planning features that support the statutory forward plan as well as providing a comprehensive suite of tools for managing the forward work programme of all the Council's committees. The forward plan is also fully integrated with the workflow features of the system which allows the entire lifecycle of any decision (including report writing) to be managed via the modern.gov intranet pages.

In addition, the workflow driven report writing system allows the entire report production process to be managed by Democratic Services with report authors and reviewers performing all of their work via the Council's intranet pages yet still using Microsoft Office to write the report while fully configurable e-mail reminders can be employed to assist with deadline compliance.

Looking further into the future the system can also assist with the new opportunities that are developing for Members around areas such as social media and mobile devices.

Progress

As part of a three year budget saving plan the Head of Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services authorised the purchase of the 'Modern.Gov' software solution on 1 October 2013.

The initial cost of the system is £17,500 including a Welsh Language module with an annual support and maintenance fee of £7,670 from Year 2 onwards.

The system is currently being installed on the Council's servers and rolled out to individual core users. Full training will be provided in due course to Members and Officers as required. While the installation of the system is still at an early stage it is hoped that a tentative 'go live' date for a phased roll-out of the system will be scheduled for May 2014.

List of Background Papers

Modern.Gov – Local Government Decision Management Software Solution
<http://www.modern.gov.co.uk>

Wards Affected

All

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