

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

(Civic Centre, Port Talbot)

Members Present:

12th July, 2012

Chairman: Councillor Mrs.L.H.James

Vice Chairman: Councillor Ms.C.Morgans

Councillors: M.Harvey, E.E.Jones, R.G.Jones, C.Morgan and
A.L.Thomas

Officers in Attendance: S.Phillips, P.Graham, D.Michael, Miss A.M.Farrell,
N.Evans and Mrs.A.Manlipp

Report of the Interim Head of Democratic Services

1. LOCAL GOVERNMENT MEASURE: DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

The above report set out the background to the establishment of this Committee, as contained within the provisions of the Local Government Measure 2011. A number of the issues contained in the circulated report had previously been discussed by Council at its meeting on 29th March 2012. A copy of the Council report was included as an Appendix. Newly-elected Members had also received the report in their Induction Packs.

Members noted that the prescribed functions of the Committee were to recommend to Council on (a) the designation of a Head of Democratic Services and (b) the adequacy of provision of resources by the Authority of staff, accommodation and other resources to discharge democratic services functions. The Committee may not exercise any other function.

The Committee was advised of the interim arrangements for the Head of Democratic Services, as set out in the report, and that the matter of the permanent appointment would be further considered at its next meeting. In addition, Members noted the arrangements to relocate the Scrutiny Officers to the Committee/Member Services Section, with the current accountable manager arrangements to remain in place for the time being.

With regard to the additional requirements of the Measure, including Member accommodation and other resources (i.e. ICT support), concern was expressed at the possible financial implications. It was noted that a Members' Survey would be undertaken at the end of the year on these issues to ascertain Members' requirements. Any expenditure would of course be within the Authority's financial constraints. During the discussions at the meeting, a few suggested amendments were made regarding Member accommodation, with some reference to remote provision, which was not yet in force as part of the Measure.

Whilst outside the remit of the Committee, other Democratic Services issues were included in the report and discussed by Members -

- **Timing of Meetings:** Members' views were sought on the draft Members' Questionnaire, tabled at the meeting, wherein it was suggested that a range of times be included for guidance. Once the views of Members had been analysed and any proposed changes agreed by Council, it was anticipated that minor changes could be introduced immediately, although major amendments to the cycle would probably be introduced at the beginning of the next Civic Year. It was agreed that the Survey would also include a question on the Measure's proposal for a Training and Development - Annual Training Plan for each Member. Members would have a choice as to whether or not they wished to participate in this.
- **Annual Reports:** In relation to the publishing of Annual Reports, the Committee felt that this requirement should be highlighted to all Members of Council, in particular the need to record the number of meetings attended. The Committee agreed that a template would be needed to assist Members in the preparation of these reports. A database would also be useful to enable the number of meetings held and attended by each Member to be readily available.
- **Overview and Scrutiny:** In relation to the development of the Overview and Scrutiny function, it was agreed that the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the Authority's Scrutiny Committees be invited to attend the next meeting, when a detailed report would be presented. Scrutiny issues would also be considered by the Modernisation Group, to ensure that any proposed new developments had the benefit of the views of the Political Group Leaders and other Senior Members.

- **Members' Training and Development:** This had already been progressed via the extensive post-Election Induction Programme and a survey undertaken on Members' ICT requirements. The next stage would be to ascertain the training needs of Members through the Annual Review (for those Members wishing to participate in same) and to identify the resources needed/suitably qualified person(s) to undertake the interviews. As previously noted, a question on the Annual Training Review would be included in the Timing of Meetings Member Survey.

- RECOMMENDED:**
- (a) that the designation of the Head of Corporate Strategy as Interim Head of Democratic Services be confirmed with the position being reviewed in October 2012;
 - (b) that a Members' Survey be undertaken later in the year to obtain Members' views on the provision of accommodation and other resources to support Members in their role as Council Members;
 - (c) that a detailed report on the provisions in the Local Government Measure relating to Overview and Scrutiny Committees be presented to the next meeting of the Committee, together with a report on the next phase of development of the scrutiny function, and that the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs be invited to attend;
 - (d) that the amended survey questionnaire in respect of the timing and frequency of Council meetings and Members' training and development review requirements, as presented to the meeting, be approved and that the outcome be presented to the next meeting;
 - (f) that a report on the proposed format of Members' Annual Reports be presented to a future meeting;

- (g) that a report on the Council's Strategy and Charter for Member Support and Development be presented to a future meeting, together with an outline Member Development Programme;
- (h) that the Committee meets three times a year subject to a review prior to the next Annual Meeting.

CHAIRMAN