

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

(Committee Rooms 1/2 - Port Talbot Civic Centre)

Members Present:

12th February 2015

Chairman: Councillor Mrs.L.H.James

Vice Chairman: Councillor Ms.C.Morgans

Councillors: M.Harvey, E.E.Jones, R.G.Jones, J.D.Morgan,
A.L.Thomas and A.N.Woolcock

Officers In Attendance: Mrs.K.Jones, D.Michael, S.John, R.George,
Miss. S. Sullivan and Mrs.A.Manlipp

1. **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 29TH JULY 2014**

RESOLVED: that the Minutes of the Democratic Services Committee held on 29th July, 2014, as circulated, be confirmed as a correct record.

2. **ROLE AND RESOURCES OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES**

Committee received the above report which outlined the role and resources of the Head of Democratic Services in light of the 2015/16 budget savings. Attached, as an Appendix to the circulated report, was a copy of the staffing structure for 2015/16 which highlighted the changes to the structure.

RESOLVED: that the report be noted.

3. **WEEKLY COURIER SERVICE**

Committee received the above report which outlined options for the future of the Authority's courier service to Councillors, set against the savings of £10,000 contained in the Forward Financial Plan.

Committee considered, in depth, the proposals contained in the circulated report, whilst taking into account the provisions of Schedule 12, Paragraph 4 of the Local Government Act 1972 which states:

‘...a summons to attend the meeting...shall, subject to sub-paragraph (3) below, **be left at or sent to the usual place of residence of every member of the Council.**’

In evaluating the options put forward, discussion centred on practical issues such as the provision of facilities and suitable training to support Members should they rely on digitally distributed services.

After debating the matter it was proposed that cost savings in the short term should be focussed on reducing the requirement for overtime working, whilst a small number of Members pilot digital options supported by Democratic Services and ICT.

RESOLVED:

- a. That the Head of Legal Services explore whether the delivery of Members mail could be undertaken during part of the normal working day and not incur overtime costs; with any consequential savings being set against the £10,000 already identified in the Forward Financial Plan.
- b. That the Head of IT look further at the equipment, support and training available to Members;
- c. That the Head of Democratic Services explore the possibility of providing ‘pigeon holes at the Neath Civic Centre, to allow Members to collect any mail;
- d. That all Members be given the opportunity to take part in a pilot of Option 2, contained in the circulated report, but that in the meantime officers implement a to c above;
- e. That further update reports, in relation to the above, be submitted to the next meeting.

4. MODERN GOV AND MEMBERS IT PROGRESS UPDATE

Committee received an update on the installation and development of the new software system Modern Gov.

Members were reminded that a Workshop had been held to introduce Members to the new system. In addition an all Members Seminar had been held in December.

An 'IT Hub' has also been established in the Democratic Services Office to help Members with specific issues.

Committee noted the changes to the system to date together with the next steps.

- RESOLVED:**
- a. That the progress made in the installation and development of the Modern.Gov decision management software, be noted;
 - b. That email notifications, be switched on;
 - c. That the content of the letter attached at Appendix 1 to be circulated to Members;
 - d. That, in order to fully consider how the additional functionality of Modern.Gov can be implemented to suit Members needs, the Member IT Reference Group be formalised so that the next phase of the system's implementation can be planned in accordance with Members' needs.

5. **MEMBER DEVELOPMENT**

The Committee received the above report which outlined the progress made to date in relation to Member Development, together with the proposals for 2015/16.

The report recognised the Council's track record of providing a range of opportunities for Members to improve their knowledge and understanding of issues that affect their roles and responsibilities. However, it also recognised that there was scope for these arrangements to be better co-ordinated; better aligned to forward work programmes and for Members to have greater involvement in setting the programme.

On discussing the report, some Members of the Committee, commented that they felt that little progression had been made in relation to the completion of individual Annual Development Reviews (ADRs) over the past 12 months. In response the Head of Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services outlined the work that had been undertaken to facilitate the ADR process highlighting the fact that further engagement work may be required to maximise uptake from Members in what was a purely voluntary scheme.

- RESOLVED:**
- a. That a second round of Member Annual Development Reviews be undertaken, in line with the scheme as revised by the Democratic Services Committee in 2013/14;
 - b. That a further report in relation to Member Development be submitted to the next meeting of Committee.

6. **CORPORATE ASSESSMENT AND DEMOCRATIC ARRANGEMENTS**

Committee received, circulated at the meeting, a copy of the Wales Audit Office Annual Improvement Report which included the Corporate Assessment Report 2014. Attached to the circulated report was a copy of the Action Plan drawn up by Officers in response to the proposals, as agreed by Council.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

7. **WEBCASTING OF COUNCIL MEETINGS**

Committee received the report in relation to the current position regarding the Welsh Government's initiative around the Webcasting of Council Meetings. Following this Authority's decision not to participate in the scheme, Welsh Government investigated the possibility of entering into a single contact arrangement on behalf of the remaining 21 Welsh Local Authorities, however following discussions the decision was taken not to progress this further.

Members were advised that, as part of the Welsh Government's White Paper, which was presently out for consultation, it was proposed to introduce a requirement to broadcast Council meetings at some future date.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

8. **DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

Committee noted that the Work Programme would be further developed and submitted to the next meeting.

CHAIRMAN