

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

1 July 2016

Report of the Head of Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services – Karen Jones

Matter for Information

Wards Affected:

All Wards

MEMBERS' FACILITIES

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide Members with an update in relation to the progress made with the provision of Members Facilities within Port Talbot Civic Centre and to provide information on potential improvements for the Neath Civic Centre.

Background

2. Following the formation of Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services in October, 2012, the provision of facilities for Members has been kept under review.
3. Where appropriate, improvements have been suggested to ensure that the democratic processes of the Council can operate more effectively and

support Members in carrying out their duties and responsibilities, as well as assist Members of the Public properly seeing and hearing proceedings.

4. In particular, with regard to the Committee Rooms and Council Chamber located within the Port Talbot Civic Centre, very limited investment has been made in maintaining the equipment and facilities within these meeting venues since the creation of the authority in 1996.
5. As such, much of the audio and visual technology which had previously been utilised by Members had started to malfunction on a regular basis requiring continuous repair and maintenance and resulting in complaints.
6. This resulted in the necessity to put in place a programme of works to ensure that facilities particularly within the Port Talbot Civic Centre were sufficient to provide adequate meeting venues for the use of all Members, Officers and Members of the Public interested in attending Council meetings.
7. While facilities within Neath Civic Centre have not required the same level of works as have been undertaken for the Port Talbot Civic Centre, further works are currently being considered specifically in relation to improving the Committee Room audio facilities.

Progress

Port Talbot Civic Centre - Council Chamber

8. Within the Council Chamber a new digital delegate microphone system was installed in April 2016 to replace the previous analogue audio network which had ceased to function. As part of the new system integrated facilities were installed to assist with Welsh translation during meetings, an enhanced induction loop for Members with hearing aids, and better audio facilities for Members of the Public.
9. Improved speakers were also installed within the Chamber for better sound clarity, and the ability to utilise streaming media and airplay technology during meetings.
10. In addition, the Chamber was also fitted with 'in-built' projectors and larger screens which allow for a clear view of meeting presentations to be seen

from any seated location, preventing members and Individual Members of the Public having to strain to read a screen 'slide', and assist those with poorer eyesight.

11. To complement the installed audio and visual equipment, IT Officers placed four Wi-Fi Hotspots within the Chamber to give Members the ability to utilise their Mobile devices (i.e. iPads) to a much greater extent during meetings.
12. Further significant works were undertaken in August and September 2015 to improve the general lighting levels throughout the Council Chamber for future meetings and install new seating to replace the previous stock which were in a poor condition.
13. These works also tie in with the launch of the Mod.Gov App and the extension of the Modern.Gov software which allows members to read and annotate Council Papers digitally.

Port Talbot Civic Centre - Committee Rooms

14. Within the Committee Rooms a number of improvements have also been completed to again support Members in carrying out their role and assist in facilitating the democratic processes of the Council.
15. A new wireless digital delegate microphone system is now available in the Committee Rooms to assist Members and all other attendees, during large meetings to ensure that they are able to clearly hear all discussion and presentations.
16. In addition, Committee Rooms One and Two have now been fitted with 'in-built' projectors and larger screens, to replace the portable equipment that previously had to be used. While improving the quality of all audio/visual presentations for Members, this will significantly reduce the amount of time and staff resource within the Democratic Service team required in assisting with 'set-up' arrangements which can be more effectively used on other work activities.
17. Due to the smaller size of Committee Room Three it has not been fitted with a projector or large screen, however to assist with meetings two large television screens have been installed again to provide improved audio/visual presentations for Members, Officers and others which can be viewed clearly from any part of the room.

18. Streaming media and airplay technology is also available in each of the Committee Rooms along with improved Wi-Fi connectivity for mobile devices.
19. Due to the deterioration in the condition of the vertical blinds within the Committee rooms these have been replaced allowing for improved viewing of visual presentations for Members, Officers and Members of the Public.
20. Remodelling works on installing new disabled toilet facilities near to the Council Chamber on the second floor were also completed during the summer last year.
21. In relation to the furniture within the Committee Rooms, several committee tables in recent months have had to be removed due to being damaged beyond repair while the condition of the seating continues to deteriorate. As a result discussions are currently ongoing to identify alternative arrangements which could be offered for Members.

Neath Civic Centre - Committee Rooms

22. Following on from the installation of a wireless digital delegate microphone system in the Port Talbot Civic Centre, Officers have also been requested to examine the possibility of similar facilities being installed at the Neath Civic Centre. Potentially this could help to improve acoustics of the meeting venue and allow Members, Officers and Members of the Public to better hear discussions and debate.

Members Rooms

23. As part of the continued development of the Modern.Gov system, consideration is also being given to how the Members Rooms can potentially be adapted to better support Members and provide them with modern work space environments better suited to access council information systems digitally.

Financial Impact

24. With regard to the improvements to Members' facilities all relevant costs will be met within current accommodation budgets and as such the financial impact will be neutral.

Equality Impact Assessment

25. A screening assessment has been undertaken but a full equality impact assessment is not warranted.

Workforce Impacts

26. There are no workforce impacts associated with this report.

Legal Powers

27. There are no legal impacts associated with this report.

Risk Management

28. There are no significant risks associated with this report.

Consultation

29. There is no requirement under the Constitution for external consultation on this item.

Recommendations

30. That the Democratic Services Committee note the progress made in relation to Member facilities.

List of Background Papers

31. None.

Officer Contacts

Karen Jones - Head of Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services

e-mail: k.jones3@npt.gov.uk

Telephone: 01639 763284

Rhys George - Electoral and Democratic Services Manager

e-mail: r.j.george@npt.gov.uk

Telephone: 01639 763719