

2018/2019

Democratic Services Committee

Draft Annual Report

1. Chairperson's Foreword

It is with great pleasure that I present the Annual Report for the Democratic Services Committee for the 2018/2019 civic year.

It is the second such report to be produced by the committee, having produced its initial Annual Report following the 2017/2018 civic year. Its publication is an attempt to provide an element of good practice for Members in addition to the production of an appropriate yardstick with which to approach the generation of future reports.

The committee's forward work programme is agreed by members on a rolling basis. Whilst the committee takes decisions and provides direction for the Council on several key matters relating to member support and associated issues, members remain mindful that it is the cabinet and ultimately Council that has overall responsibility for all strategic and far reaching decision making on behalf of Neath Port Talbot Council.

However, members are also mindful that they are charged with the duty of carrying out all of the statutory requirements provided for this committee under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011. In this respect, I am delighted to report on the success of the committee during the last civic year.

2. Purpose of Annual Report

The main aim of this report is to highlight the work that has been undertaken by the Democratic Services Committee during 2018/19.

The document may also facilitate discussions on additional items that could be included within the work programme for 2019/2020.

3. Committee Membership

The members of the Democratic Services Committee were:

Councillors J.D.Morgan, M.Harvey,
S. ap Dafydd, S.K.Hunt, S.Miller, M.Protheroe,
S.Pursey, S.Renkes, A.J.Richards, A.J.Taylor,
R.L.Taylor and A.Llewelyn

The committee Chair was Cllr. Dr. Del Morgan, and the Vice Chair was Cllr. Mike Harvey.

4. Number of Meetings Held

The committee formally met three times during 2018/19. The committee is also responsible for forming a number of specific task and finish groups as appropriate to look at particular key topics in more detail. These groups are then able to feed back to the committee with a set of recommendations, as appropriate. During 2018/2019, the following task and finish groups were active: Members' IT Reference Group and the Disability Audit Working Group.

5. Issues Considered During 2018/2019

The following topics were discussed:

Members' Personal Development Review (PDR) Process

In September 2018, the committee received the findings of the task and finish group set up to consider the Members' Annual Personal Development Review (PDR) process.

The council is required to make arrangements to secure reasonable training and development opportunities for elected members and specifically that each elected member should have the opportunity for an interview with a suitably qualified person each year to advise about their training and development needs. As part of their review, the members of the task and finish group considered the statutory guidance and scheme already in place.

The following recommendations of the task and finish group were supported by the committee:

1. That the current Annual Personal Development Review Scheme for elected members be retained and all members be reminded on an annual basis of their entitlement to participate;
2. That alongside the Annual Personal Development Review Scheme all members are reminded on an annual basis of the alternative ways their training and development needs can be met alongside the scheme; and
3. That a small group of councillors be nominated from the individual political groups to undertake training to allow them to be 'reviewers' for the purpose of the Scheme, and that the Head of Democratic Services also be identified as a 'reviewer' to undertake Annual Personal Development Reviews with elected members if they so choose, reflecting the preference of a number of members who are already addressing their development needs in this way.

Following receipt of the above recommendations, a cohort of members were identified, along with the Head of Democratic Services, as reviewers and received the necessary training to undertake PDR's. All members were reminded of the entitlement to participate in the scheme.

Members' IT Reference Group

During 2018, the group was re-established and its terms of reference reviewed to reflect the focus of the work of the group:

- To provide a structured and focussed opportunity for members to consider the extent to which the ICT equipment, support and training meets members' needs;
- To provide a structured mechanism to shape the use of the committee administration system Modern.Gov to best suit members' needs.

On 21 February 2019, the group met to discuss the issues and challenges members have when using information technology (IT) devices, such as iPad's, laptops and mobile phones. During 2019/2020 it is planned for the group to explore the new skype and Office 365 systems that will be introduced to members and staff. Going forward, this group will be utilised as a forum to pilot the systems, to ensure a seamless roll out to the wider group of members.

Member Annual Report Scheme

In September 2018, the committee received the findings of the task and finish group set up to consider the Member Annual Report Scheme. Members of the task and finish group considered the guidance and template already in place and the ways in which information was disseminated to their constituents.

The following recommendations of the task and finish group were supported by the committee:

1. That the design of the current Annual Report Template be improved

- to make it more dynamic;
2. That members be reminded of the Scheme and be provided with a copy of the improved template;
 3. That training be provided for those members interested in the use of Social Media, and to receive appropriate support including training on analytics;
 4. That a tool kit be developed to assist members in designing their newsletters.

Members' Apologies at Meetings

In September 2018, the Democratic Services Committee reviewed and updated the current Members' Apologies Policy, which was then approved by Council in December 2018.

Guidance Note for Members on Declarations of Interest and Decision Making Issues

In November 2018, members considered a draft guidance note prepared by the Head of Legal Services. Following consideration, members requested some minor amendments before the guidance note was issued to all members.

Disability Audit Working Group

During 2019, the committee commissioned an external organisation to carry out a disability audit of members' facilities in both Port Talbot and Neath Civic Centres. Following an invitation to all members to be involved in this work, a working group was established chaired by Cllr. Sandra Miller. The disability design and access audit was undertaken in April 2019 and the working group will shortly be considering how to progress the recommendations and report back its findings to the committee.

Members' Development and Training Programme

In September 2018, the committee considered the results of the Members' Development Survey which was undertaken during May and

June 2018 to provide a steer on how the information should be used to inform the Member Development Programme for 2018/2019.

Following consideration of the feedback, members identified the following priority areas for training for the remainder of the civic year 2018/19:

- Social Media
- Chiring Skills (for Council meetings and meetings within community wards)
- Committee Procedures (following the update to the Constitution by the Head of Legal Services)
- Income Generation and Commercialisation

IRPW (Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales)

In November 2018, the committee considered the Draft Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales. The committee discussed the proposed changes to be implemented in 2019/2020 which informed the Council's formal response to the proposals.

In March 2019, the committee noted the final IRPW Report and forwarded their concerns to the IRPW on the Carers' Allowance being classified as an income rather than a reimbursement.

Member Scrutiny Champion – Update Report

In March 2019, the committee received an update from the Member Scrutiny Champion, Cllr Arwyn Woolcock, following the conclusion of recent observations of various scrutiny committee meetings.

Following consideration of the content of the Member Scrutiny Champion's update, at the request of the committee, an e-mail was circulated by the Assistant Chief Executive and Chief Digital Officer to all members reminding them that grammatical issues contained in reports and minutes are to be raised with relevant officers and dealt with outside of meetings.

The committee also requested that a report be prepared to the next meeting (2019/2020 Civic Year) regarding non-committee member

attendance at meetings and that the attendance of members at pre-briefings be monitored by the chairs and vice chairs of Scrutiny Forum.

Rules of Procedure

In November 2018, the committee considered and agreed two amendments to the Rules of Procedure to the Council's scrutiny meetings which were subsequently approved at Council. Those amendments were the replacement of the existing paragraph 12.4 with the following:

"12.4 Content and Length of Speeches and Questions

Speeches must be directed to the question under discussion or to a personal explanation or point of order. No speech may exceed 5 minutes without the consent of the chairman save for non-executive Council Committees and Sub-Committees (including the Audit, Standards and Scrutiny Committees) where the time allowed for speeches and/or questions shall be at the discretion of the Chairperson (as a guide around 10 minutes per member)"

and the amendment to the Constitution that the person who is appointed chair to a meeting is to go by the title of "Chairperson".

Democratic Services Staffing Structure

In March 2019, the committee noted the updated staffing structure, which was subsequently endorsed by Council.

Cllr. Dr. Del Morgan, Chairperson
September 2019

