

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

3 March 2020

Report of the Assistant Chief Executive and Chief Digital Officer

Matter for Decision

Wards Affected: All wards

Democratic Services – Assessment of Resources to support the Democratic Services Function

Purpose of the Report:

1. To report the outcome of an assessment of the adequacy of resources available to support the democratic services function of the Council.

Background:

2. The Head of Democratic Services has a statutory responsibility to organise the discharge of the “democratic services functions” in accordance with the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 which includes:
 - The production of reports, as required, on the number of staff required to support democratic services and how the staff should be organised to ensure the Council, the Cabinet and Committees receive high level support in the discharge of its democratic functions.
3. Since I reported my last assessment to the Democratic Services Committee, there have been a number of developments that have impacted on the workload of Democratic Services:

- a) Further strengthening of the scrutiny function to respond to developments agreed by the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the scrutiny committees;
 - b) Establishment of support for the Joint Scrutiny Committee charged with holding the Joint Committee for the Swansea Bay City Deal to account;
 - c) Publication of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill by the Welsh Assembly Government - this Bill proposing significant new duties including: mandatory webcasting of all Council meetings; mandatory petition schemes; a duty to create a public participation scheme that will strengthen public involvement in the Democratic Process; and further development of family absence provisions for elected members.
4. Attention will also need to be given towards the end of the next civic year to preparations for the local government elections 2022. A significant piece of work will be to design and deliver the induction programme for Members returned in those elections.
 5. Taken together, these developments will increase the workload of Democratic Services and introduce changes to roles.
 6. The structure chart in Appendix 1 sets out the current structure of the Democratic Services Team.

Assessment of Resources

7. To support the further development of scrutiny activities and the servicing of the Joint Scrutiny Committee for the Swansea Bay City Deal, changes to the duties of scrutiny officers were made in 2019-20, in particular, to relieve those officers of taking the minutes of meetings to concentrate on support to chairs of the scrutiny committees during meetings and to carry out preparatory work to support the work of the scrutiny committee outside of the meetings. This change has transferred the workloads involved in taking minutes to the committee/Member services team. It has not been possible to fully absorb this workload within the existing capacity and accordingly, it is necessary to establish additional capacity in the committee/Member services team to accommodate the additional workload.

8. Following the departure of the former Electoral and Democratic Services Manager, management oversight of Democratic Services has been provided on a temporary basis by the Principal Officer - Business Support Policy & Democratic Services. Given the significant new developments to be introduced by the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill it is necessary to establish permanent management capacity.
9. A revised structure has been created and this is set out in Appendix 2. The key changes are:
 - Establishment of a full-time Democratic Services Manager role;
 - Realignment of the existing Grade 5 role in the Service which is currently vacant to provide additional capacity to committee/Member services.
10. The changes proposed to the structure for Democratic Services can be done within the overall cash limit set across the budgets for the Assistant Chief Executive and Chief Digital Officer. A further assessment of resources will be needed when the Bill is enacted.

Financial Impact:

11. The financial costs of the above changes can be met within existing salary budgets across the responsibilities of the Assistant Chief Executive and Chief Digital Officer.

Equality Impact Assessment:

12. No impact.

Workforce Impact:

11. These changes will provide for more manageable workloads for the Democratic Services workforce and also provide additional leadership and management capacity to implement the changes that will arise from the Bill and to prepare for the local government elections in 2022.

Risk Management:

12. Without these changes, staff morale is likely to deteriorate and the quality of the work undertaken is likely to reduce.

Legal Powers:

12. Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011.

Consultation:

13. There is no requirement for external consultation on this item. Democratic Services staff have been consulted about the proposals in accordance with the Council's Management of Change in Partnership Policy.

Recommendations:

14. That the Democratic Services Committee endorses the proposed structure set out in Appendix 2 and commends this change to Council.

Reason for Decision

15. To enable the Head of Democratic Services to discharge the statutory duty placed upon her as set out in the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011

Implementation of Decision:

16. After the three day call in period.

Appendices:

17. Appendix 1 – Current structure chart –
Appendix 2 – Proposed structure chart – March 2020

List of Background Papers:

18. None

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