

2019/2020

Democratic Services Committee

Annual Report

1. Chairperson's Foreword

It is with great pleasure that I present the Annual Report for the Democratic Services Committee for the 2019/2020 civic year.

It is the third such report to be produced by the committee and 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 2019/20.

The document may also facilitate discussions on additional items that could be included within the work programme for 2020/2021.

3. Committee Membership

The members of the Democratic Services Committee were:

Councillors M.Harvey, J. Hurley, S.K.Hunt, S.Miller, S.Purse, E.V Latham, A.Llewellyn, S.Renkes, A.J.Richards, A.J.Taylor, and the late S.ap Dafydd.

The committee Chair was Cllr. Dr. Del Morgan, and the Vice Chair was Cllr. Angharad Aubrey.

4. Number of Meetings Held

The committee formally met four times during 2019/20. 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 2019/2020, the following task and finish groups were active: Members' IT Reference Group, the Disability Audit Working Group and the Webcasting/Public Participation Task and Finish Group.

5. Issues Considered During 2019/2020

The following topics were discussed:

IRPW (Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales)

The committee considered the Draft Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales. The committee discussed the proposed changes to be implemented in 2020/2021 which informed the Council's formal response to the proposals and the Chair participated in a Videoconference session with IRPW and other councillors in relation to the IRPW draft report

The committee noted the final IRPW Report and forwarded their concerns to the IRPW on the two tier nature of the care allowance as proposed and requested a clearer rationale as to why two different rates of payment were being proposed.

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 final report and recommendations were considered by the committee in March 2020.

Democratic Services Staffing Structure

The committee noted the updated staffing structure, which was subsequently endorsed by Council

Webcasting and public participation

Following an instruction from Council, the Committee initiated a major review of webcasting and public participation and a working group was launched.

Research included the Chair and officers attending a meeting of the Swansea Bay City Region Joint Scrutiny Committee at Pembrokeshire County Hall to witness webcasting in action.

The Chair and senior Democratic Services officers viewed live and recorded webcast sessions from various councils and other public bodies to gain best practice ideas and worked extensively with IT colleagues as well as exploring demonstrations of new software to find a solution suitable for NPT.

A substantive report on next steps was prepared and commended by Council, although next steps were halted due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The group are looking forward to revisiting their planned actions and revising them in light of the consequences of the pandemic on digital democracy and remote meetings and are focusing on improving public participation as their next strand of work.

Members' IT Reference Group

The Group's terms of reference 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.

The group has continued to meet to discuss the issues and challenges members have when using information technology (IT) devices, such as iPads, laptops and mobile phones. During 2019/2020 the main focus was overcoming the challenges of remote meetings and attendance and planning for the rollout of the Office 365 system. This group has been

utilised as a forum to pilot the systems, to ensure a seamless roll out to the wider group of members.

All Wales Network for Member Support and Development

The Chair is a member of and attends regular meetings of the All Wales Network for Member Support and Development where best practice is discussed and useful relationships are formed.

Cllr. Dr. Del Morgan, Chairperson
January 2021