

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

11th October 2020

Report of the Head of Democratic Services

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.

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, amongst others, 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. On 9th September 2021, the Chief Executive reported the most recent assessment to the Democratic Services Committee on the adequacy of resources available to support the democratic services function of the Council. At that meeting, the Committee approved the assimilation of the Democratic Services Manager to the Head of Democratic Services (subsequently approved by Council on 29th September 2021)

The structure chart in Appendix 1 sets out the current structure of the Democratic Services Team.

4. Following the successful assimilation of the Democratic Services Manager to the post of Head of Democratic Services there is need to consider the operational capacity and structure of the Democratic Services Team as the Head of Democratic Services role involves focussing more on the strategic aspects of the function. The continued response to the Covid-19 emergency has had and continues to have a direct impact on the workload of Democratic Services as a result of introducing and holding meetings across remote meeting technologies. Use of remote technologies is requiring all those involved in supporting, chairing or participating in meetings to learn new skills. Direct support has been provided by Democratic Services to Members and Officers and it continues to significantly impact on the workload of the team.
5. In addition to the above, attention now needs to be given 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.
 - Publication of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 by the Welsh Assembly Government - this Act proposes significant new duties including: mandatory webcasting of all Council meetings; public speaking at 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.
 - The work associated with the implementation of Corporate Joint Committees and the role of Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council. This will likely require further work in respect of democratic services where the rules applicable to the authority will be equally applicable to Corporate Joint Committees.
6. Taken together, these developments will increase the workload of Democratic Services and introduce changes and new requirements to the roles.

Assessment of Resources

7. Following the changes in staffing set out in paragraphs 3 and 4 above, it would be proposed that the current structure of the Democratic Services section be revised to ensure resilience to meet these new requirements. Accordingly a proposed structure is set out in Appendix 2 of this report. It is proposed to introduce two Senior Democratic Services Officers (Grade 9) to the team (ring fenced to the existing Democratic Services Team members) to oversee Scrutiny Support and Project Management of the Mod.Gov system and Committee Administration and Forward Work Programmes respectively. It will also enable suitable focus to be provided on ensuring compliance with the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 and enabling the Council to fully prepare for and resource these new requirements
8. It is proposed to recruit to the vacant Grade 7 Democratic Services Officer post.
9. The Grade 5 post will remain vacant until the skills and capacity required to implement the Act become clearer.
9. The changes proposed to the structure for Democratic Services can be delivered within the overall financial resources. A further assessment of resources will be needed when the Act is enacted.

Financial Impact:

10. The financial costs of the above changes can be met within existing budgets.

Integrated Impact Assessment:

11. A first stage Impact Assessment has been undertaken to assist the Council in discharging its legislative duties (under the Equality Act 2010, the Welsh Language Standards (No.1) Regulations 2015, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. The first stage assessment, attached at (Appendix 3), has indicated that a more in-depth assessment is not required as the proposals

Workforce Impact:

12. These changes will provide for more manageable workloads for the Democratic Services workforce whilst at the same time ensuring resilience in respect of service delivery.

Risk Management:

13. The proposed structure will enable the Council to meet its legislative requirements in respect of democratic services and the more recent updates stipulated by the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. Failure to do so could render the Council open to challenge or reputational damage.

Legal Powers:

14. Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011.

Consultation:

15. There is no requirement for external consultation on this item.

Recommendations:

16. It is recommended that having due regard to the integrated impact screening assessment, the Democratic Services Committee endorses the proposed structure set out in Appendix 2.

Reason for Decision

17. 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:

18. This decision is proposed for implementation immediately.

Appendices:

19. Appendix 1 – Current structure chart October 2021
Appendix 2 – Proposed structure chart – October 2021
Appendix 3- IIA Screening

List of Background Papers:

20. None

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