

Democratic Services Committee

(via MS Teams)

Members Present:

13 December 2021

Chairperson: Councillor J.D.Morgan

Vice Chairperson: Councillor A.R.Aubrey

Councillors: S.Pursey, A.J.Richards, S.K.Hunt, A.J.Taylor,
S.Renkes and L.Jones

Officers In Attendance C.Griffiths, S.Curran, C.Owen and A.Thomas

1. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest received.

2. **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

Minute 5, Paragraph 7

To delete sentence "Following consideration of the proposals, Members were in support of the recommendations contained within the report."

Resolved: To approve minutes of the meeting held on 11th October 2021 as a true and accurate record with above amendment

3. **Member ICT Policy Report**

Craig Griffiths went through the report. It sets out two different structures of information. Firstly it sets out the IT equipment Members will be provided with as part of the induction in 2022. Secondly, the report covers the use of the items that Members are provided with.

Members queried if disabilities are considered within the type of equipment that is provided to members. It was confirmed at the

Member Induction next year Members will take part in an equality screening process where the individual needs of Members are considered. This ensure that Members individual requirements are considered and there is no bar to any participation in the processes of Council.

Members queried if the policy as presented prevents Members from accessing Council emails etc. on their own personal laptops. Further there was concern about the use of office applications. Officers confirmed that the current version of Outlook that is being used does not support its use on external devices as it does not provide the necessary security. This is currently being looked at and considering if the applications can be updated to do this. It was noted that the policies can be reviewed and updated as and when required to take account of any changes required.

Following discussion Members approved the amended Members ICT Policy (including Internet Usage Policy) and commended the same to Council for ratification.

4. **E-Petitions**

Craig Griffiths went through the report. Members were advised that much of the content within the policy is dictated by legislation. Members do have flexibility with regards to the threshold for what triggers something being debated at a Council meeting. Paragraph 4.10 sets out a basic set of figures, however it is open to amendment. The figures are based on what other authorities have based their figures on and this has been balanced against the population. An e-petition scheme will be placed on the website, which will be linked in with mod.gov. Mr Griffiths went through the procedure to set up a petition.

Members queried, within the special characteristic brackets, what may be an example of a type of petition that can be considered. Members were informed that the policy is the legal guide and has set out the legal requirements of the petition scheme. If the policy is agreed, officers advised that user friendly documents will be drafted to sit alongside the legal documents.

Where a petition is requested, it must ultimately relate to the Council's functions, or something that the Council has control over.

Members queried how wide it will be considered in relation to where the Council has “some influence” and who will be ultimately responsible for interpreting this element of the policy. Officers confirmed that a lot would depend upon the wording of the petition itself. For example if the petition asked the Council to directly respond to an item which is outside their remit then this would not be considered, however, if the Council were petitioned to write to the primary responsible body and ask them to consider a matter this would be within the gift of Council to consider. There would be an opportunity to go back to the person submitting the petition request and explain the difference to them where appropriate.

Members were advised that any arrangements relating to this item would begin at the start of the new administration in 2022.

Members considered the signatures on the petitions and how these will be dealt with. Officers confirmed that the person who starts the petition will be verified as best possible, however officers will use their best judgement and information available to them to determine if the signatories fit within the guidelines of the policy.

Officers confirmed that petitions and correspondence under 100 signatures will be considered as the same. However, members of the public can be assured that they will receive a response even if it does not meet the threshold for consideration at a meeting of Council.

Members raised queries with regards to the duration of the petition. This element is quite vague within the policy and members expressed their concern about petitions being opened for a long time. It was noted that within the policy the petition organiser determines the time that it is open for. Officers agreed that an appropriate timescale needs to be considered within the policy to ensure that items remain relevant.

Members queried how the petition organised will be kept up to date with the progress of the item through Council. Officers agreed that this could be added to the policy so that the person would be kept up to date of the progress of the petition through Council, unless they indicate contrary to this.

Members agreed to add Petitions to the Forward Work Programme as a standing item.

Resolved: It is recommended that, having due regard to the Integrated Impact Screening Assessment:

(a) Members of the Democratic Services Committee consider the draft Neath Port Talbot Petition Scheme recommending any changes that they feel are appropriate; and

(b) Delegated authority be granted to the Chair of the Democratic Services Committee to agree the final draft for commending to Council on behalf of the Democratic Services Committee.

5. **Forward Work Programme 21/22**

To note the forward work programme.

6. **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

CHAIRPERSON