

Report of the Democratic Services Committee

May 2020 to February 2022

Draft

1. Chairperson's Foreword

It is with great pleasure that I present this Report for the Democratic Services Committee covering the 2020/2021 civic year and the period from May 2021 to February 2022 of the 2021/2022 civic year, which will be the Committee's final report for the current Council administration.

It is the fourth 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 this extended period.

2. Purpose of the Report

The main aim of this report is to highlight the work that has been undertaken by the Democratic Services Committee during 2020/2021 and between May 2021 and February 2022.

The document may also facilitate discussions on additional items that could be included within the work programme for 2022/2023 and future years.

3. Committee Membership

The members of the Democratic Services Committee from May 2020 to February 2021 were:

Councillors M.Harvey, S.Miller, S.Pursey, S.Renkes, A.J.Taylor, A.Llewelyn, A.J.Richards, S.K.Hunt, J.Hurley, E.Latham.

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

The members of the Democratic Services Committee from March 2021 to February 2022 were:

Councillors J.Hurley, S.Miller, S.Pursey, A.Llewelyn, A.Richards, A.Hunt, A.Taylor, S. Renkes, L.Jones and S.Lynch.

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 twice during 2020/2021 and six times between May 2021 and February 2022. Meetings were held remotely over the Microsoft Teams platform.

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 the period covered by this report, the following task and finish groups were active: the Members' IT Reference Group, the Constitution Review task and finish group and the Members' Induction 2022 and Diversity in Democracy task and finish group.

5. Issues Considered During 2020/2021

The following topics were discussed:

Independent Remuneration Panel Wales Draft Annual Report 21/22

The committee considered the Draft Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales. The committee discussed the proposed changes to be implemented in 2021/2022 and agreed to make a brief response to the consultation requesting clarity and transparency in terms of the details to assist and support members.

Webcasting / Public Participation

Members considered the introduction of webcasting of Council meetings and enhancing public participation. It was noted that the pandemic had caused the acceleration of much of the planned work. Members considered the outstanding work in relation to this item. The Committee agreed to move forward with the consideration of a petitioning arrangement, options for introducing rights of audience for certain meetings and to consider improvements to the public facing democracy web pages. Members also agreed to continue to explore arrangements for Welsh translation and live streaming of meetings.

Democratic Services Team Structure

The committee agreed to changes to the staff structure, which were subsequently endorsed by Full Council.

WLGA Competency Framework for Councillors 2021

Members noted that the framework outlined the knowledge and behaviour required by Councillors in Unitary authorities. Members

further considered the draft Development Framework for Councillors in Wales 2021. The Chair prepared a response on behalf of the Committee, noting all feedback that was provided, which was submitted to the all-Wales Lead Members and Officers for Member Support and Development Network.

Review of the Neath Port Talbot Constitution

Whilst most of the Constitution is prescribed by law, and various amendments had been made as necessary to comply with changes to legislation, Members were advised of the need to consider a simplified version to ensure that the document is user friendly and understandable to members of the public. Members agreed to establish a task and finish group to undertake a review of the Constitution leading to the preparation of advice to Council.

Members' ICT Environment

Members were updated on the progress of the upgrading of Members' ipads and other devices to facilitate the new Microsoft platform.

6. Issues Considered from May 2021 to February 2022

The following topics were discussed:

Member Induction 2022 and Diversity in Democracy

Members were asked to consider Member Induction for the 2022 intake and what key considerations should be given priority. Members also noted the requirement to promote Diversity in Democracy and how this can be achieved. Members agreed to support further work in these areas and established a task and finish group with a view to contributing towards proposals for the shape and content of the Member Induction 2022 programme and to consider the Diversity in Democracy programme.

Members' Annual Report Scheme

Members were reminded of the current policy to support the production of annual reports by members of the Council. Members received and noted the Members' Annual Report Scheme.

Members' Personal Development Review Process

Members were reminded that, wherever possible, members can have an opportunity to review their training and development needs on an annual basis should they wish to undertake this. Members noted that the Democratic Services Manager would communicate with all Members via email to remind them of the scheme and inviting them to complete a Personal Development Review should they so wish.

Independent Remuneration Panel Wales Draft Annual Report 22/23

The committee considered the Draft Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales. The committee discussed the proposed changes to be implemented in 2022/2023 and agreed to note the report.

Members' IT Reference Group Annual Report

Members noted that the report outlined support for the introduction of Zoom for Council meetings which would enable Welsh translation of meetings. Members expressed their concern about using two platforms for meetings and were pleased to be informed that extensive practice sessions would be run before this commenced. Members accepted the report of the Members' IT Reference Group. Members noted the requirement of the Group to meet regularly over a short period to carry out additional work in preparation for the next Council administration. Members also approved the updated Terms of Reference for the Group.

Appointment of Head of Democratic Services

Members were in support of the recommendation of the appointment of Head of Democratic Services to Full Council.

Constitution Review Task & Finish Group Report

Members noted the extensive review that had been undertaken of the Constitution and were in support of the recommendations to be placed before Council for consideration.

Hybrid Meeting Arrangements and Equipment

Members were informed of the legislative requirement for meetings to operate within a hybrid model. In order to be able to operate effectively, members were informed that the Council also needs to address some of the Disability Discrimination Act issues that were currently in existence within the Chamber. The Committee was asked to consider the physical element of hybrid working at this stage only; the policies and protocols would be considered at a later stage. It was also noted that the works would contribute towards increasing public participation in Council meetings. Members were in support of the recommendations, to be placed before Cabinet, to purchase equipment and upgrade the Chamber.

Assessment of Resources for the Democratic Services Committee

Following consideration of a report on the outcomes of an assessment of the adequacy of resources within the Democratic Services Team, Members were in support of the recommendations contained within the report.

Report of the Member Induction 2022 and Diversity in Democracy Task & Finish Group.

Members looked at the outcomes of the task & finish group. An induction timetable was drafted and officers were going to be meeting with Corporate Directors to obtain their views on the induction programme. Members also set out an action plan with regard to contributing positively to diversity in democracy. Members endorsed the Member Induction Timetable for Local Government Elections 2022 and forwarded this to Full Council for information. Members also endorsed the proposed Diversity in Democracy Plan and forwarded this to Full Council for approval.

Public Speaking Protocol

Members were presented with a draft public speaking protocol, which was developed as part of the Council's response to the requirement for promoting public participation. It was noted that it would be applied to the decision making forums only at this time. The scheme would be a pilot, to run for 12 months, after which time it would be reviewed. A final draft was approved, taking into account appropriate changes suggested by the Committee, which was then commended to Full Council.

Members' ICT Policy

Under this item, Members considered both the IT equipment requirements of Members and the use of the items that Members are provided with. Members approved the ICT Policy (including Internet usage policy) and commended it to Council for ratification.

E-Petitions

Members considered the requirements in relation to this initiative in some detail. It was noted that much of the content within this policy was dictated by legislation. However, Members did have discretion with regard to the relevant signature number thresholds for different petitions. Where a petition is to be considered, it must be in relation to an area where the Council has "some influence." Members made appropriate changes to the draft policy and the final draft was commended to Council. The scheme will commence in 2022.

7. 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
February 2022