

Minutes



Democratic Services Committee

Date: 20 June 2017

Time: 5.00 pm

Present: Councillors C Ferris (Chair), M Evans, Y Forsey, R Hayat and T Watkins

In Attendance: Cllr K Thomas, G Price (Head of Law & Regulation), E Mulligan (Interim Head of Democratic Services) and J Howells (Democratic Services Support Officer)

Apologies: Councillors C Evans, J Mudd and H Thomas

The Chair welcomed new members Councillors Forsey and Hayat to the meeting

1 Apologies for Absence

Noted above.

2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Item 4: A query was raised in relation to the unwritten convention regarding ward issues which was due to be included in the induction pack. The Head of Law & Regulation confirmed that this was something that would now be discussed with the new Business Managers.

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 February 2017 were confirmed as a true record.

3 Terms of Reference

The Local Government Measure requires each county and county borough council to establish a Democratic Services Committee. The City Council at its meeting held on 22 May 2012 established the committee, agreed its composition, its chair and adoption of terms of reference.

As this is the first meeting of the Committee since the elections in May 2017, the report was prepared to provide some information as to the role and scope of the Committee as part of the member development programme.

The Head of Law & Regulation confirmed that the Committee had been fairly prescriptive in following the functions as set out in the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, these functions being:

- I. Designating the Head of Democratic Services.
- II. Keeping under review the provision of staff, accommodation and other resources made available to the head of democratic services in order that it is adequate for the responsibilities of the post.

- III. Making reports, at least annually, to the Council in relation to these matters.
- IV. The City Council agreed to widening the role of the Democratic Services Committee (DSC) to include the consideration of any proposed amendments to the council's constitution for recommendation to the Executive where appropriate and to the Council.
- V. The DSC cannot perform other functions, apart from overseeing the democratic services functions prescribed in the Measure and, therefore, cannot discharge any dual role (for example doubling-up as a Scrutiny committee).

In the past the Committee had been more reactive in the issues it had considered in addition to those listed above but it was suggested that a work programme now be compiled and its make-up would need to be discussed at the next meeting.

There was also an opportunity to once again consider member development as there was now a Cabinet Member appointed to cover member development. Training would be tailored to meet members' specific roles and responsibilities. Whilst the budget for member training was limited a lot could be done in-house.

The timing of future Democratic Services Committee meetings was discussed and it was agreed that it would continue in its previous format of alternating the meetings between 10am and 5pm.

Agreed:

The report was noted

4 **Annual Report by the Head of Democratic Services**

This report was prepared by the previous Head of Democratic Services.

One of the duties of the Democratic Services Committee is to consider whether the Head of Democratic Services has sufficient staff and resources to discharge the statutory functions of democratic services.

The contents of the report were discussed. In addition to all statutory obligations continuing to be met, staff were also carrying out work outside of these obligations. Acknowledging the financial challenges currently faced by the council the Head of Law & Regulation agreed that the provision by the authority of staff, accommodation and other resources by the council is adequate to discharge democratic services functions as they currently exist. However, whilst statutory requirements were being met potential pressures which could arise from:

- Any changes in the demands and needs of elected members and external factors, particularly post-election
- Any changes in statutory requirements or local decisions in relation to scrutiny (such as recent changes in relation to Scrutiny of PSBs)
- Increased day to day demands
- Any increased requirements from the Welsh language standards
- Any increased requirements from the Wellbeing of Future generations legislation
- Any further demands from regulatory bodies
- Changes in legislative requirements
- Member development
- Any increase in requirements relating to broadcasting
- Any Impact of the Welsh Government's proposals for local government

A discussion ensued highlighting the following:

- whether the section would have sufficient resources to discharge democratic services functions if it was faced with extra pressure from the demands of Welsh Government.
- that the introduction of the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act will require an alternative way of thinking by the Council

The Head of Law & Regulation confirmed that the above list had been compiled as possible extra pressures. However, Democratic Services and Communications and Marketing were presently undergoing a restructuring which should help alleviate any problems with lack of resources.

The Interim Head of Democratic Services informed members that Scrutiny had also been reorganised to cover scrutiny with the present resources.

Agreed

To accept and endorse the Annual Report by the Head of Democratic Services

5 Annual Report of the Democratic Services Committee

The Local Government Measure requires each local authority to establish a Democratic Services Committee. The Committee is required to provide an annual report to Council.

At its inception the City Council agreed to widen the role of the Democratic Services Committee to include the consideration of any proposed amendments to the Council's Constitution for recommendation to the Executive where appropriate and to the Council.

The Measure was subsequently amended by the Local Government Democracy (Wales) Act 2013, to specifically provide for a wider range of functions for Democratic Services Committees, along the lines adopted in Newport.

The report is traditionally a backward looking report covering issues which had been discussed by the committee over the past year. Ideally if a work programme was agreed the items would be included in the annual report showing which had been considered by the committee over the year.

With no issues raised it was agreed that the report go to the next Council meeting.

Agreed

To agree the content of the Committee's annual report for submission to the Council as required by the Local Government Measure.

6 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place on Thursday 9 November 2017 at 10am.