

Report

Democratic Services Committee

Part 1

Date: 2 July 2015

Item No: 4

Subject Annual Report of the Democratic Services Committee

Purpose To prepare an annual report of this committee for submission to the Council

Author Chief Democratic Services Officer

Ward All wards

Summary The Local Government Measure requires each county and county borough council to establish a Democratic Services Committee.

The Measure prescribes the functions of the democratic service committee and states that the committee must make a report at least annually to the Council.

This report proposes the content of the Democratic Services Committee's annual report for 2014-2015 setting out the work of the committee in this past year.

It also provides evidence that the committee has carried out its required function by reviewing the adequacy of staff to support members.

Proposal To endorse the content of this annual report and to submit the report to the Council

Action by Chief Democratic Services Officer

Timetable Immediate and ongoing

This report was prepared after consultation with:

- Chief Executive
- Monitoring Officer
- Head of Finance
- Head of People & Business Change

1. Background

1.1 The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 (The Measure) requires the Council to appoint a democratic services committee.

2. Functions

2.1 Members are reminded that the Measure prescribes the functions of the democratic service committee as:

- Designating the Head of Democratic Services:

This was undertaken at the Committee's first meeting in 2013 where the existing post of chief democratic services officer is designated as the statutory role of Head of Democratic Services.

- 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: A report elsewhere on the agenda of the Committee provides this analysis
- Making reports, at least annually, to the Council in relation to these matters.
- 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)

Members will recall that 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. This was undertaken at the earliest possible stage in Newport. Welsh Government has advised that other Councils should consider a wider role.

3. Provision of staff, accommodation and other resources made available to the Head of Democratic Services

Elsewhere on this agenda, the Head of Democratic Services has prepared his annual report in which he informs the committee that staff allocated to the Democratic Services and Scrutiny functions provide the Council with a skilled, hardworking and committed working team supporting elected members in their varying roles.

The individuals working in this area clearly provide value for money and each works hard to ensure that elected members needs are met.

The Head of Democratic Services states that the provision by the authority of staff, accommodation and other resources by the Council is adequate to discharge the statutory requirements in relation to Decision Making, Democratic Administration and Scrutiny as they currently exist.

The impact of any changes in statutory requirements, or the needs of members would need to be kept under review and would be the subject of a report to this committee.

Financial Summary

The chair of the democratic services committee is entitled to a special responsibility allowance in accordance with the prescribed members' allowances scheme. There are no specific costs associated with the running of this committee other than those involved in the cost of administration of this and other council functions within the democratic process.

Risks

Risk	Impact of Risk if it occurs* (H/M/L)	Probability of risk occurring (H/M/L)	What is the Council doing or what has it done to avoid the risk or reduce its effect	Who is responsible for dealing with the risk?
Non-compliance with the requirements of the Local Government measure	H	L	This report suggests the content of an annual report in line with the requirements of the Measure.	Chief Democratic Services Officer and Monitoring Officer.

Links to Council Policies and Priorities

Consideration of this report meets the requirements of the Local Government Measure.

Options Available

To consider the annual report and to present an agreed version of the report to the Council

To take no action

Preferred Option and Why

To consider the annual report and to present an agreed version to the Council in order to meet the requirements of the Local Government Measure

Comments of Chief Financial Officer

The chair of the democratic services committee is entitled to a special responsibility allowance in accordance with the prescribed members' allowances scheme. There are no specific costs associated with the establishment of this committee other than those involved in the cost of administration of this and other council functions within the democratic process. These can be met by the existing budget

Comments of Monitoring Officer

There are no legal issues arising from the Report. The Annual Report sets out the work of the Committee over the past year and confirms that it has discharged its responsibilities in terms of the democratic services function in accordance with the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011.

Staffing Implications: Comments of Head of People and Business Change

The Head of Democratic Services states that the provision by the authority of staff, accommodation and other resources by the Council is adequate to discharge the statutory requirements in relation to Decision Making, Democratic Administration and Scrutiny as they currently exist. There are therefore no staffing implications arising at this time

Local issues

There are no local issues as this is matter relating to the democratic process and is for the council as whole to consider.

Scrutiny Committees

This report is an annual report that has to be presented to the Democratic Services Committee and Council.

Equalities Impact Assessment

An Equalities Impact Assessment is not required for this report.

Children and Families (Wales) Measure

The proposals do not relate to children and young people.

Consultation

Statutory Officers have been consulted.

Background Papers

The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011

Dated: 10 June 2015

**Newport City Council
Democratic Services
Committee
Annual Report
2015**

1. Introduction

The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 (The Measure) requires the local authority to appoint a democratic services committee.

2. Prescribed Functions

The Measure prescribes the functions of the democratic service committee as:

- 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.

3. A Wider Role for the Committee

When establishing the Committee, the Council considered that the Democratic Services Committee should undertake a wider role than the functions prescribed by the Local Government Measure, as set out above. It was considered that this Committee would provide a forum for discussions on any matters that relate to the Council's Constitution. To this end the function of the Committee was extended to 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.

Welsh Government's subsequent guidance on this part of the Local Government Measure suggests that all Councils consider widening their Committees' role in a similar way.

4. Structure and Membership

The Committee comprises: Councillors: Charles Ferris (Chair), Tom Bond, Emma Corten, Matthew Evans, Debbie Harvey, David Mayer, Jane Mudd, Kate Thomas and Trevor Watkins. This is a politically balanced group comprising members with various roles in the Council and varying levels of experience. This group works well together and shares a joint aim of seeking to improve the way the Council works

Councillors from the various groups have worked together and in a non – partisan way to consider various aspects of the Constitution and other matters that impact on the governance of the Council

The non- political stance taken by members of the committee has encouraged interesting discussions on the topics presented to the Committee.

Member's skills in reviewing the issues presented to them have been enhanced through experience and will continue in the coming year though further experience and, hopefully, development opportunities,

5. Activities

In the past year we have undertaken a range of activities, including the following. The list provides highlights of the issues we discussed and the views expressed by the Committee

School Organisational Code:

We suggested that existing procedures for School Organisation Proposals where there are no unresolved objections should remain in place and that in cases where there remain unresolved objections to School Organisational proposals, to delegate responsibility for the final decision to the full Cabinet. This was agreed by Council.

Family Absence

Despite comments by the Committee, and – we understand – similar concerns from other authorities, the Family Absence Regulations came into effect from 5 December 2013. This year we were presented with the new regulations and a Supplementary Report has now been issued by the Independent Remuneration Panel in relation to the financial issues surrounding these regulations. We recommended to Council to amend Standing Orders and the Constitution to reflect the requirements of these regulations in relation to:

- Maternity Absence
- Newborn Absence
- Adopters Absence
- New Adoption Absence
- Parental Absence

This was agreed and actioned

Statutory Guidance to the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales in relation to the salaries of Local Authority Chief Executives

We considered draft guidance from the Independent Remuneration panel and responded saying we agreed that the Guidance was in keeping with the provisions of the Local Government Democracy (Wales) Act 2013.

Broadcasting / Webcasting of Meetings

We kept up to date on progress and agreed a form of words to be used in meetings and in documents ensuring that all elected members and members of the public attending the relevant meetings are aware that the broadcast is taking place. We also agreed advice for those speaking at meetings that are being broadcast.

Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2014

We agreed revisions to the Council's Standing Orders to meet the requirements of the above mentioned Regulations that came into force on 1 July 2014 as agreed by the Council

Council Agenda: Hard Copy

We agreed that only items for decision are circulated with the hard copy of the agenda. This has been implemented

Receipt of Petitions

We agreed a process for dealing with petitions and tried to identify the various occasions on which petitions may be received

Evaluation of Executive and Scrutiny Arrangements

We considered the results of the independent survey and recommended the Executive and Scrutiny Improvement Group may wish to consider where identified best practices can be considered for use in Newport's decision making processes

Modern.gov

We were informed about progress on the new method of storing documents and preparing agenda papers, reports, decisions and minutes and suggested an all – member briefing. This was agreed and the briefing took place

Member Development

Following a recommendation by this Committee, during 2014, all councillors were invited to have a Personal Development Review, to provide information towards the development of a relevant and appropriate training programme for members. Twenty councillors arranged to attend a Review meeting.

The results of the Review highlighted a need for training and development in a range of IT skills, interpersonal skills and Council or Committee related skills and knowledge. There was a further requirement for where to find general information which will be addressed by a briefing or hand-outs.

It was agreed some training needs may be met in-house at little or no cost, either offering members places on existing Newport City Council courses, or providing a course specifically for councillors. They will also be directed towards e-learning opportunities. Where there is a need for a particular external course, the cost of the training will be considered against the resources within the Members Development budget.

The WLGA were approached to see if there are relevant courses available at no cost which may be shared between Local Authorities, although it was recognised that this option may no longer be available due to funding cuts.

6. The Coming Year

We will need to continue our work in reviewing any proposals for amendments to the council's constitution for recommendation to the executive where appropriate and to the council.

Issues relating to the constitution and any proposed amendments arising from the Corporate Assessment will need to be considered by this committee.

7. Can I attend Meetings of the Democratic Services Committee

Yes – all of our meetings are open to the public, except for specific items in exceptional circumstances. Dates of forthcoming meetings, agendas, reports and minutes are available on the Council website

8. Who do I contact if I want to know more?

If you wish to find out more about the Democratic Services Committee please visit our website: where you will find an online contact form or email us at info@newport.gov.uk

Councillor Charles Ferris
Chair of the Democratic Services Committee

Richard Jefferies
Chief Democratic Services Officer