

# Minutes



## Democratic Services Democratic Services Committee

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Date: 2 July 2015

Time: 9.30 am

Present: Councillors C Ferris (Chair), T Bond, M Evans, D Harvey, J Mudd, K Thomas and T Watkins

In Attendance: R Jefferies (Head of Democratic Services) and J Howells (Democratic Services Support Officer)

Apologies: Councillors E Corten, W Godfrey and G Price

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### 1 Apologies for Absence

Noted above.

### 2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

As it was the first meeting since the Council AGM the committee congratulated Cllr Ferris who had been re-elected as Chair.

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 February 2015 were confirmed as a true record.

### 3 Annual Report by the Head of Democratic Services

The Head of Democratic Service reported that the Local Government Measure prescribes the functions of the Democratic Services Committee. One of those prescribed functions is to keep 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.

The Head of Democratic Services presented his annual report which provided an outline of the staff resources provided by the Council. The Council provides the staff with adequate office space and equipment to carry out the various roles within the service area.

The report stated that staff allocated to both the Democratic Services Team and the Scrutiny Team provide the Council with a hard 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. In recognising the financial challenges faced by the Council the Committee was informed in the annual report 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 Head of Democratic Services explained that efforts were being made to continue to provide services beyond the statutory requirements.

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.

### **Agreed**

- I. To receive the annual report and recognise the contribution made by staff supporting members
- II. To endorse the view of the Chief Democratic Services Officer 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.
- III. To ask the Chief Democratic Services Officer to keep under review the provision of staff, accommodation and other resources made available to members to ensure that statutory requirements and any changing needs of elected members are met and to present a report to this committee should any review be required.
- IV. To record the thanks of the Democratic Services Committee to the staff in each area of work

## **4 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.

The Committee considered the content of the Democratic Services Committee's annual report for 2014-2015 setting out the work of the committee over the past year.

The City Council agreed to widen the role of the Democratic Services Committee at its inception to include the consideration of any proposed amendments to the council's constitution for recommendation to the executive where appropriate and to the Council and the Head of Democratic Services.

In the past year the committee had undertaken a range of activities, including:

- School Organisation Code
- Family Absence
- Statutory Guidance to the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales in relation to the salaries of Local Authority Chief Executives.
- Broadcasting/Webcasting of Meetings
- Local Authorities (Standing Orders)(Wales)(Amendment) Regulations 2014
- Council Agenda (Hard Copy)
- Receipt of Petitions
- Evaluation of Executive and Scrutiny Arrangements
- Modern.gov
- Member Development

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

The Head of Democratic Services confirmed that the committee will continue to work in reviewing proposals for amendments to the Council's constitution for recommendation to the Executive where appropriate and to the Council and this was the next item on the agenda.

## **Agreed**

To agree the content of the Committee's annual report for submission to the Council as required by the Local Government Measure. The report would also be available on-line for the public to view.

## **5 Review of the Council's Constitution**

The recent Corporate Assessment by the Wales Audit Office had contained a proposed action that stated:

- Reviewing and updating the Council's constitution ensuring that roles, responsibilities and accountabilities are clear, and that all members understand and apply their respective roles in relation to each other without compromising independence;
- Empowering members to be more proactive and accountable for their roles and responsibilities;
- Strengthening decision-making arrangements to ensure transparency and appropriate safeguards are in place;

The Committee considered a report which suggested the opportunity is taken to review the constitution and to address these issues as part of that review.

The overriding aim of the review is to make the document a worthwhile and understandable document but at the same time aim at addressing the issues highlighted by the Audit Office.

The City Council's existing constitution is, in the main, based on the original model constitution prepared by the Assembly Government in 2001. It has been revised and updated in a piecemeal manner as and when necessary over the past 14 years. The existing Constitution meets all statutory requirements and there is no doubt that it remains fully fit for purpose.

## **Agreed**

To agree that the Committee undertakes a review of the Constitution and to address the issues raised by the Wales Audit Office as part of that review.

*Councillor Mudd left the meeting at this point.*

## **6 Date of Next Meeting**

It was agreed to meet in September 2015 with the final date to be confirmed.

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