
DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE, 19.03.13

Present: Councillor Lesley Day (Chair);
Councillor Anne Lloyd Jones (Vice-chair).

Councillors: Anwen Davies, Tom Ellis, Selwyn Griffiths, Jason Humphreys, Charles Wyn Jones, Sion Wyn Jones, Dilwyn Morgan, Gareth Thomas

Cabinet Member: Councillor Ioan Thomas (Cabinet Member – Customer Care).

Officers: Geraint George (Head of Strategic and Improvement Department), Gwenan Parry (Head of Customer Care Department), Vera Jones (Democratic Services Manager), Huw Ynyr (Senior Manager – Information Technology and Business Transformation), Sion G. Williams (Communications Manager) and Gwyn Parry Williams (Members' Support and Scrutiny Officer).

Apologies: Councillors Jean Forsyth, Linda W. Jones, Michael Sol Owen and Mandy Williams-Davies.

Thanks

The Chair thanked the former Chairman, Councillor Dewi Owen, for his service over the recent months.

1. CHAIR

RESOLVED to confirm the Council's resolution at its meeting on 28 February 2013 to elect Councillor Lesley Day as Chair of this Committee for the remainder of 2012/13, to succeed Councillor Dewi Owen.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received from any members present.

3. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 11 December 2012 as a true record.

4. SUPPORT FOR MEMBERS

i) Submitted – the report of the Democratic Services Manager giving an update to members regarding the support available and developments realised and in the pipeline.

ii) The Committee members expressed their opinion and the following was noted:-

a) That Cabinet members had received details of the champions' job descriptions but that members of this committee had not received them.

In response, the Democratic Services Manager noted that she would draw this matter to the attention of the Monitoring Officer as she was responsible for developing the information etc. for the champions.

b) A member drew attention to the fact that the Cabinet considered having two other champions and it was asked whether it would be possible for the committee to have the details about them.

In response, the Head of Strategic and Improvement Department noted that, once the Cabinet had made its decision, the details of the two other champions would be submitted to this committee and all Council members.

c) In relation to the Area Assemblies, a member referred to the possibility of establishing cross-boundary sub-committees. He noted that he had raised the matter at the Council on 28 February 2013, when it was promised that this would be looked into.

In response, the Democratic Services Manager noted that work was currently being undertaken on the development of the Area Assemblies.

ch) A member referred to the intention of having two Area Assemblies in Arfon and it was asked whether a decision had been made on the geography of both areas.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Customer Care noted that further consideration was needed with the members on this, but that the Felinheli and Rhiwlas representatives had already suggested Bangor/Ogwen and Caernarfon/Dyffryn Nantlle as two areas.

A member proposed that the two areas should be known as Caernarfon/Gwyrfai and Bangor/Dyffryn Ogwen. The proposal was passed. The Cabinet Member for Customer Care noted that he would note this proposal as part of the consultation with Arfon Area members.

d) A member noted that the Meirionnydd Area Committee held the previous week had agreed unanimously to call it the Meirionnydd Area Forum rather than an Area Assembly and that it should meet at least six times a year starting in May 2013. He asked the Cabinet Member for Customer Care to note this as part of his discussions.

dd) A member referred to the need to establish groups within the areas to consider particular topics.

e) In relation to electronic information for members, the Democratic Services Manager noted that 13 member training sessions had been held on the iPads and that by now 69 members were using them. The helpdesk had received many

enquiries from members regarding the iPads. She encouraged the members to continue to contact the helpdesk if any problems arose.

f) A member was of the opinion that sending paper copies of meeting agendas etc. should stop in light of the fact that the majority of members now used the iPads.

In response, the Democratic Services Manager noted that this would be arranged and that paper copies of meeting agendas etc. would be provided for the remaining members without electronic provision.

ff) A member noted that any problems, such as diaries, receiving documents that were not editable should be reported.

In response, the Senior Manager – Information Technology reported that it was important for him to be told of any difficulties with the provision.

g) In light of the failure of the information portal, a member enquired whether it would be possible to upgrade “exchange”.

In response, the Head of Customer Care Department noted that steps could be taken to redefine gaps in the provision.

The Senior Manager – Information Technology noted that it was intended to upgrade “exchange” during the next year.

ng) In response to a question by a member regarding difficulties in receiving e-mails from the Planning Department involving planning applications, the Head of Customer Care Department noted that this would be addressed.

h) A member noted that reading documents on the iPad for long periods of time could be tiring for the eyes and that paper copies were much easier to read.

In response, the Senior Manager – Information Technology noted that it would be possible to dim the screen a little.

i) The Council Chairman drew attention to the fact that, by virtue of his post as Chairman, he received copies of every agenda and that this should be reviewed. He thanked staff of the Information Technology Department for all the assistance received from them.

l) In response to a question by a member regarding e-mails disappearing from the system, the Senior Manager – Information Technology noted that the matter would be addressed.

ll) In relation to information bulletins from Cabinet Members, a member referred to the fact that some departments provided information to local members about matters undertaken in their areas but that other departments were reluctant to provide information.

In response, the Communications Manager noted that research had started to find out where the gaps were. A message had been sent to members at the end of the previous week and the next stage would be to send out questionnaires during this week to identify where the gaps were locally and then the first issue would be produced and sent out in mid April.

m) A member noted that Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd (CCG) did not provide details of tenants to local members when houses were let within their wards and that there should be a better understanding between CCG and the members.

In response, a member who represented the Council of the Board of CCG noted that she had already asked for this information; however, due to the Data Protection Act it was not possible to provide information about tenants. The only information they were willing to disclose was details about the property that had been let.

n) In response to a question by a member regarding responding to enquiries or complaints by local members, the Head of Strategic and Improvement Department noted that they should use the appropriate systems in the first place as it was more likely to lead to a resolution to the enquiry.

o) A member was of the opinion that the champions as well as individual members should be permitted to attend Cabinet meetings.

RESOLVED to accept the report noting the observations made above.

5. WEB CASTING AND REMOTE ATTENDANCE

a) Submitted – the report of the Head of Customer Care Department noting that the Local Government (Wales) Bill 2011 aimed to promote local democracy and be more inclusive of the public's input and engagement. The Minister for Local Government and Communities had noted that local authorities were best placed to work with community/town councils to enable the public to have access to information concerning the business of their local council, and how to contact them. In addition, Section 4 of the Bill noted the requirement for authorities to allow for remote attendance at Council meetings i.e. all members did not have to be present at the principal meeting place in order to participate in the meeting. No specific guidance had been produced by the Welsh Government to date on how exactly the requirements of the act would be delivered.

She noted that, at the beginning of the year, information had been received from the Minister for Local Government and Communities about allocating grants to assist with responding to the aforementioned elements. On 21 February 2013, a copy of a grant agreement had been received with direction to sign and return it by 7 March 2013, which stated that up to £72,000 would be available to the Council, namely -

- £42,000 for web casting Council meetings and allowing remote access by elected members
- £30,000 for issuing grants of up to £500 each for community councils in Gwynedd to establish their own websites.

She referred to the fact that the grant was to be spent during the period between 1 April 2012 and 31 March 2013 and needed to be claimed in full by 31 March 2013. However, there was provision to transfer the expenditure to 2013/14. As the timescale for responding to the grant application had been very limited, it was agreed that the grant should be received, with further work to be undertaken within the Council with regards to how to broadcast meetings over the web.

She noted that the Council was in an advantageous situation as the infrastructure required for webcasting the meetings had been installed as part of the work in Siambr Dafydd Orwig during the last few weeks and was part of the scheduled work in Siambr Hywel Dda. This would allow members to join in meetings in these chambers from the video conferencing rooms in Dolgellau and Pwllheli.

In order to broadcast efficiently and bilingually, it appeared that the Council may have to purchase broadcasting/editing services. There was one prominent company operating the market in Wales and a quotation for £32,000 had been received for an agreement to broadcast meetings for a period of two years. We would continue to research the best and most cost effective approach, working with other authorities in Wales and seeking guidance from the Welsh Government regarding their requirements.

In relation to the grant allocation of up to £500 for every community/town council to provide websites, this Council was expected to administrate the grant for them. Discussions were currently underway with the Economy and Community Department with regards to undertaking this work.

b) The Committee members expressed their opinion and the following was noted:-

i) A member enquired whether it would be possible to contact the community/town councils as soon as possible to draw their attention to the grant.

In response, the Head of Customer Care Department noted that there was not much detail at present but in terms of financial planning for the next year, it would be beneficial for them to be informed.

ii) A member drew attention to the fact that the Planning Committee was held in the three areas in turn and, at times, local members, who were not necessarily members of the committee, were required to travel considerable distances to these meetings. With this new system, he referred to the possibility of local members, say from the Arfon Area, to participate in the discussion from Siambr Hywel Dda if the committee itself was held in Pwllheli or Dolgellau.

iii) A member asked for assurance that the capacity would be built into the Council to broadcast the meetings after the end of the two-year agreement with the company.

In response, the Head of Customer Care Department noted that the principle was important and that they sought to launch something sustainable and consideration would be given to this suggestion.

iv) The Cabinet Member for Customer Care noted that reference had been made to the possibility of having the capacity within the Council to continue to broadcast meetings and to assist the community/town councils; however, as it was a challenging time for the Council, care must be taken.

RESOLVED

a) To allow the relevant officer to undertake further research on the work involved with the requirements of the Bill when the full guidance is published, and the possibilities in terms of using the grant funding.

b) That relevant officers discuss the matter with the Chair of the Committee and submit a further report to the next committee on 4 June 2013.

6. MEMBERS' REPORTS

a) Submitted – the report of the Head of Strategic and Improvement Department on the requirements, schedule and risks in order to decide on a direction for the rest of the members.

He noted that the Council was required to make arrangements to enable members to publish an annual report but that no member was required to do so. It was optional for any member to publish an annual report and he recommended that the Cabinet Member for Customer Care and the Chair of this Committee could create an annual report for 2012/13 in order to experiment and learn from different examples. He referred to the items which should be contained in the report and also the risks. It was intended to publish the report annually in June.

b) The Committee members expressed their opinion and the following was noted:-

i) That it was important for every member to keep a record of all the meetings etc. that they had attended during the year.

In response, the Democratic Services Manager noted that trying to keep a record was very important. She noted that a lot of information was available within the Council e.g. member training, meetings attended etc. but there were no details of the meetings attended outside the Council.

ii) Consideration should be given to the resources available within the Council to undertake this work.

iii) In response to a question by a member in relation to including school governor reports within the annual report, the Democratic Services Manager noted that this would be possible, but that it was a matter for the members themselves to decide as to whether they wished to do so.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Member for Customer Care and the Chair of the Democratic Services Committee create an annual report for 2012/13 to set out a direction and provide guidance, and the rest of the Council members to create reports for 2013/14 onwards, in accordance with their wishes.

7. MEMBERS' TRAINING

a) Submitted – the report of the Chairman of the Training Sub-group, Councillor Dilwyn Morgan.

He reminded members of the decision to establish a sub-group to consider members' training specifically. The sub-group decided to establish a focus group which included elected members in order to try to encourage members to take ownership of the training programme. He noted that a meeting of the focus group had been held in Porthmadog on 18 February 2013 and he drew attention to the main issues discussed which were to Define the Purpose of the Learning and Development Programme; what a Development/Training Programme meant to you and Which elements you would like a development/training programme to include. The focus group was of the opinion that it was important that individual members took personal responsibility for the development programme. The Learning and Development team would incorporate all the focus group's aspirations into a future training programme.

b) The Democratic Services Manager referred to the requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Bill 2011 which required local authorities to ensure that reasonable training and development opportunities would be provided for members. Also, it must be ensured that all members were afforded the opportunity to receive an annual review of their training and development needs. She drew attention to the possibility of winning a Support and Development Charter for the Council. She noted that the Council had won the Charter in the past.

RESOLVED

a) That the Learning and Development Service proceeds with planning and adapting the training programme for members, based on the work of the Training Sub-group

b) To allow officers to undertake further research on the work associated with the Measure and the Charter, and discuss the matter with the Chair of this Committee and to report back to the next meeting of the Committee on 4 June 2013.

8. VOTING SYSTEM

The Democratic Services Manager referred to the various options available within the new voting system in Siambr Dafydd Orwig.

The members noted the following observations -

- That the vote should appear on the screen at the end of an ordinary vote and not while voting was underway.
- That this way of voting was complicated for a committee as the process of opening and closing the vote etc. took more time than a show of hands.
- That the name of every member should appear on the screen at the end of every vote to show how they had voted.
- That this system was not suitable for a small committee.

The officer promised to address these matters.

The meeting commenced at 10.00am and concluded at 12.00pm