
DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE, 10.09.13

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

Councillors: Anwen Davies, Tom Ellis, Jean Forsyth, Selwyn Griffiths, Jason Humphreys, Sion Wyn Jones, Dilwyn Morgan, Michael Sol Owen and Gareth Thomas.

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

Officers: Arwel Ellis Jones (Senior Manager, Corporate Commissioning Service), Debbie Williams Jones (Temporary Democratic Services Manager), Sion Gwynfryn Williams (Communications Manager) and Eirian Roberts (Member Support and Scrutiny Officer).

Apologies: Councillors Charles Wyn Jones and Mandy Williams-Davies.

1. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

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

2. BEST WISHES

Vera Jones, Democratic Services Manager, was congratulated on the recent birth of her daughter.

3. URGENT ITEM – GWYNEDD COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO THE COMMISSION'S CONSULTATION ON GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC SERVICES PROVISION

This item had not been included on the agenda; however, the Chair agreed to discuss it as an urgent matter under Section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972, in order to receive clarification on the constitutional situation prior to the discussion in the full Council on 19 September 2013.

Concern was expressed regarding the contents of a letter sent by the Council Leader in response to the Commission's consultation on Governance and Public Services Provision, and the fact that the response had been sent on behalf of the Council before consulting with members. The item was on the Council's agenda on 19 September, but it was argued that this was too late, and that an urgent Council meeting should have been called to discuss the response prior to the end of the consultation period on 31 August.

Regarding the process, the Senior Manager – Corporate Commissioning Service, outlined the usual process of submitting provisional comments until a committee had convened, and he also explained that it would be unconstitutional for this committee to discuss the response as the matter was outside its remit.

RESOLVED to leave the matter for discussion by the Council.

The Chair noted her willingness to forward any observations that members wished to submit as individuals, to the Commission.

4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 4 June, 2013 as a true record.

5. SOCIAL MEDIA

Submitted – the report of the Head of Democratic Services presenting the Welsh Local Government's guidelines on social media to councillors, requesting that the committee considered amending them specifically for Gwynedd's use and/or producing specific protocol on the use of social media by councillors.

The Communications Manager elaborated on the Council's corporate use of social websites and outlined the influence and potential of these new media. He suggested that the national guidelines were a good starting point, but that there was scope to strengthen them, for example, from the perspective of the Welsh language.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and offer observations. During the discussion the following main observations were highlighted:-

- It was important to recognise that many constituents chose to contact the Council by visiting the office, telephoning or sending a text message or e-mail.
- Following their adoption, it would be beneficial to provide members with training on the guidelines, and a series of suggestions relating to the use of *Facebook* and *Twitter*.
- A sub-group could examine the possibility of Cabinet Members using *Twitter* as a method of sharing information about what was happening within the remit of their portfolio.

A member referred to the technical difficulties with the I-pad, noting that members required more support from the Information Technology Unit. The Senior Manager – Corporate Commissioning Service, agreed to relay the message.

RESOLVED

- (a) **To recommend that Gwynedd should adopt its own guidelines on the use of social media.**
- (b) **To recommend establishing a sub-group jointly with the Standards Committee to collaborate on drawing up guidelines on social media for councillors in Gwynedd (with the exact process for achieving this to be agreed between the Chairs of both committees).**
- (c) **To nominate the Chair of this committee, Councillor Lesley Day, and Councillors Selwyn Griffiths and Sion Wyn Jones to serve on the sub-group.**

6. WEB CASTING AND REMOTE ATTENDANCE

Submitted – the report of the Head of Democratic Services presenting the most recent developments regarding web casting and remote attendance requirements, and the developments relating to the grant for town and community councils.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and offer observations. During the discussion the following main observations were highlighted:-

Remote attendance at meetings

- Those members participating from Pwllheli or Dolgellau could feel isolated as it would be difficult for them to attract the Chair's attention in Caernarfon.
- Although it was a medium that worked, there was no wish to see it being extended excessively.
- A policy should be established on what would happen if the equipment failed.
- A study on the cost benefits of holding meetings by remote attendance could be considered.
- Chairs required training on how to conduct a meeting through video conferencing.
- It was difficult for Chairs in Ystafell Ogwen, Caernarfon, to keep an eye on the large screen (Dolgellau) and the small screen (Pwllheli), as well as on the people in the room, and that there was a danger of ignoring people not present in the same room.

Web casting

- Special effort should be made to arrange web casting when a major or contentious issue was being discussed, as it was important that everyone wishing to listen to the discussion had the opportunity to do so.
- With regards to the public's right to listen to Council proceedings, it was noted that the external door of the Chamber had not been open at the beginning of meetings recently, and the Senior Manager – Corporate Commissioning Service, noted that this would be resolved.

Website development for town and community councils

- A question was raised on the possibility that community councils could create websites jointly, and the Senior Manager – Corporate Commissioning Service, agreed to check the guidelines to see whether this would be possible.

RESOLVED

- (a) To approve proceeding with the provision for remote attendance at meetings, subject to the clauses listed below:-**
- (i) That the provision is only available in the video conferencing rooms in the Council's offices in Dolgellau and Pwllheli (in order to ensure the reliability of the provision);**
 - (ii) Not to offer the provision to meetings where executive decisions are made (Cabinet, Planning Committee and Licensing Committee) for the time being, to avoid any constitutional questions if the equipment fails and a member is unable to use his or her voting rights.**
- (b) To approve to proceed with the web-casting provision at Siambr Dafydd Orwig and Siambr Hywel Dda and, subject to the scale of the costs, to provide for any establishment and running costs, over and above the value of grant monies from the Democratic Costs budget;**
- (c) To continue to support the facilitation of developing websites for community councils, and to receive an update on the numbers who have expressed an interest in establishing a website at the next meeting.**

7. ELECTED MEMBERS' ANNUAL REPORTS

Submitted - the report by the Head of Democratic Services detailing the lessons learnt from the members' experiences of producing Annual Reports this year.

A point of accuracy was raised, and it was noted that the reference to Councillor 'Eirwyn Thomas' in paragraph 3.1 should read 'Eirwyn Williams'. <<

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and offer observations. During the discussion the following main observations were highlighted:-

- It was extremely important that members kept a continuous record of their activities in order to facilitate the production of the report at the end of the year.
- It was important that all members understood that it was not mandatory for them to publish an annual report.
- The guidelines were rather restrictive and that there was no freedom for members to make any personal remarks in the report.
- It was difficult to find the annual reports on the Council's website. In response, the Senior Manager – Corporate Commissioning Service, explained that there was a specific section and a link to the individual reports on these pages which included members' photographs and contact details. It was suggested that an item could be included on *Rhaeadr* explaining how to find the eight members' reports for 2012/13, and inviting other members to produce their own annual reports next year.
- The annual statement of members' expenses could refer to the fact that some members produced annual reports.

RESOLVED

- (a) To hold discussions with those elected members who did not produce annual reports this year to identify what support and guidance they would need to enable them to publish annual reports in 2013/14.**
- (b) To submit a report to the next Democratic Services Committee following these discussions, to include clear and definite recommendations that would enable the Council to facilitate the process of producing and publishing the annual reports of elected members in 2013/14.**

8. INFORMATION FOR MEMBERS

Submitted - the report of the Head of Democratic Services presenting feedback received from some members on *Rhaeadr* and discussing methods of communicating with elected members.

The members were asked for guidance:-

- (a) on any further developments for *Rhaeadr*.
- (b) on the next steps that should be taken in terms of looking at methods of receiving observations and/or responses from elected members.
- (c) on the best methods of receiving responses from members to a questionnaire that had been produced for them.

The Senior Manager – Corporate Commissioning Service, noted that he was of the view that *Rhaeadr* was an effective medium of disseminating information to members, but that it was not as effective in receiving responses to consultations.

The Communications Manager expanded on the perception and the use to date of *Rhaeadr*, and noted that there was perhaps scope for improved co-ordination so that responses to many consultations were not requested at the same time.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and offer observations.

RESOLVED to submit the following guidance in relation to *Rhaeadr* and the methods of communication with members:-

- All the departments should be informed that *Rhaeadr* is to be used as the norm for communication with members.
- E-mails should be sent to members requesting comments and responses on specific subjects in *Rhaeadr*.
- The final decision on the frequency of publishing *Rhaeadr* should be taken once the results of the questionnaire have been received.
- The arrangement of reminding members when a new edition of *Rhaeadr* is available is to be welcomed.
- The idea of allocating each Cabinet Member a page on *Rhaeadr* is welcomed, and the Chairman of the Council should also be allocated a page.
- It would be useful to have information on *Rhaeadr* regarding street and road works.
- There is a risk of creating too many information sources for members, and a search facility would be useful.
- It would be beneficial to include a link to enable members to track the outcome of planning applications that go to appeal.
- Items in *Rhaeadr* should be succinct and focused, so as not to overload members with information.
- *Rhaeadr* should not be used as an excuse by officers not to give information to individual members regarding developments in their own areas.

9. MEMBERS' TRAINING

Presented – a verbal report by the Senior Manager – Corporate Commissioning Service, noting:-

- The interest among members in conducting a review of their training and development needs was patchy, and that the response to an item in *Rhaeadr* to attract interest was poor.
- He intended to contact each member formally to ask whether or not they wished to be interviewed for a Personal Development Plan, and would then act accordingly.
- According to the need, arrangements would be made to identify people to conduct the interviews once the numbers had been confirmed.

RESOLVED to accept the report.

The meeting commenced at 10.00am and concluded at 11.35am.