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## DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE, 04.06.13

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

**Councillors:** Thomas G. Ellis, Jean Forsyth, Evan Selwyn Griffiths, Charles W. Jones, Linda Ann Wyn Jones, Sion Wyn Jones, Dilwyn Morgan, Michael Sol Owen, Gareth Thomas, Mandy Williams-Davies.

**Officers:** Geraint George (Head of Strategic and Improvement Department), Gwenan Parry (Head of Customer Care Department), Vera Jones (Democratic Services Manager) and Ioan Hughes (Member Support and Scrutiny Officer).

**Apologies:** Councillors Annwen Davies, Ioan Thomas (Cabinet Member – Customer Care).

### 1. CHAIR

**Resolved: To confirm the Council's resolution at its meeting on 2 May 2013 to elect Councillor Lesley Day as Chair of this Committee for 2013/14.**

### 2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

**Resolved: To re-elect Councillor Anne Lloyd Jones as Vice-chair of this Committee for 2013/14.**

### 3. WELCOME

Councillor Jean Forsyth, who was attending her first meeting of this Committee, was welcomed.

### 4. CONGRATULATIONS

It was confirmed that Debbie Anne Williams Jones had been appointed as the temporary Democratic Services Manager. The officer was congratulated and best wishes were extended to Vera Jones who would be absent on maternity leave.

### 5. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

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

### 6. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 19 March 2013 as a true record.

## **5. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

a) In response to an enquiry, it was explained that the term 'information portal' referred to the work carried out to have a single specific area on the internet to keep information for elected members.

It was added that this was what was meant by 'information portal' and although the existing technology did not match the Council's requirements, it was noted that further research was being undertaken towards achieving this ambition.

It was noted that the 'member bulletin' developments addressed this on a temporary basis.

Furthermore, it was noted that the term 'exchange' mainly dealt with upgrading the email system.

b) A member noted that she had not received information regarding the majority of the 13 training sessions on electronic information for members. She added that she was aware that one had been held on 24 April, but that this had been unsuitable for her as it had not been held bilingually.

In response, it was noted that the sessions included sessions such as an introduction to the i-pad. Afterwards, sessions would be arranged to deal with specific matters as needed. A further request was made to hold an additional session in the south of the county as well as an English-medium training session. It was intended to arrange dates for these sessions in the near future.

## **6 WEB CASTING AND REMOTE ATTENDANCE**

Submitted – the report of the Head of Customer Care Department and the Head of Democratic Services outlining the latest information regarding the requirements of web casting, remote attendance at meetings and developments in relation to the grant for Community Councils.

The work done thus far was expanded upon and it was noted that the risk was that the Welsh Government provided a grant for starting up a web casting and remote attendance procedure, but the Council would be required to fund any costs to continue with the scheme. It was noted that research was being undertaken at present into the minimum that could be done without revenue costs.

The total grant was £72,000 and upon receipt of the money, the Council would commit to:-

- Broadcast all or some Council meetings;
- Provide some finance, namely a total of £32,000 to community councils to support them to prepare their own websites;
- Arrange remote attendance for members

In response to observations made by members, officers highlighted the following main points:-

- That the cameras located in the Council chamber, prior to the renovation works, had not been working for many years;
- That the matter of allocating grants to community councils was completely separate to the work of broadcasting the Council's meetings.;
- That 'up to' £500 grant would be released to individual community councils;
- That there was a need to consider criteria and look into many things in terms of community councils that had already faced the costs when completing or starting to prepare websites;
- That it would not be reasonable for Gwynedd Council to receive additional workload in terms of updating the community councils' websites;
- That updating the website of each community council was one of the grant conditions;
- That web casting would not call for the creation of a new post.

A member expressed concern that the advantages of acting within the grant conditions would be very limited and that community councils would have to place further pressure on the ratepayers in order to achieve the required work.

In response, it was explained that the intention of the Welsh Government was to promote the work of providing information to residents on the activities of community councils.

**Resolved:**                    (a)    **Approve to:**

- (i)    **Move ahead 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;**
- (ii)   **Not to make simultaneous translation provision for web-casting beyond the Council's current translation provision at the meeting rooms themselves;**
- (iii)   **Move ahead with the provision for remote member access, subject to the conditions in paragraphs 7(a) and 7(b) in the report;**
- (iv)   **Continue to support the work of facilitating the development of websites for Community Councils.**

Following the discussion, it was reported that the officer had only just received a consultation document regarding remote attendance at Council meetings.

It was explained that the members would receive a copy of the draft guidelines and it was suggested that they could submit observations through the Chair. Then, they could be relayed to the Cabinet Member, Customer Care, who would send a response to the draft guidelines on behalf of the Council.

Meanwhile, initial steps could be taken in accordance with the abovementioned decisions.

It was emphasised that risks existed and that there was a need to assess the guidelines so that the process could be coped with relatively securely.

It was noted that the complexities could be associated with technological shortcomings that could occur at any given time; quorum; public attendance and exempt items; the demand for many translators and the size of rooms.

**RESOLVED that members should study the draft guidelines and submit observations to the Chair so they can be relayed to the Cabinet Member, Customer Care.**

## **6. ELECTED MEMBERS' ANNUAL REPORTS**

Submitted – the report of the Democratic Services Committee and the Head of Democratic Services outlining the latest situation regarding developments with member reports for 2012/13.

It was noted that 10 members had expressed an interest in preparing a report and that two reports had been received to date. Members were called to voice their opinions on the matter and to draw attention to any problems arising and how improvement could be ensured in future.

A member stated that no effective procedure had been followed to advertise the reports and thus, a very strict timetable was now associated with this.

In addition, the member believed that strict guidelines had been set and that the specific boundaries as to what could be included in the report had made some consider that it was pointless to prepare a report.

In response, it was noted that the Welsh Government had set out the guidelines and that the aim was to create a further opportunity to communicate with the electors. It was added that the guidelines had been adapted, and according to the amended version, reports could be submitted at any time but that the Council adhered to the end of June for the 2012/13 pilot as the timing of the reports would otherwise make them lose value.

The Council's intention was to stick to the end of May as a closing date as this had been a pilot scheme.

Despite accepting that the situation of each member was different, another member noted that the guidelines were very challenging and that the need to restrict the report to two pages underlined this.

A member objected to the idea of preparing a report as he believed that councillors should not have to write about the work they did within their community.

Officers explained that members were not obliged to prepare a report and that it would be beneficial if submitted reports could be viewed. It was confirmed that the reports submitted would be published on the Council's website.

**Resolved: a) To accept the report and that the reports submitted by members would be published on the Council's website;**

**b) That an explanation be placed on the Council's website that this is a pilot scheme.**

## **7. LOCAL GOVERNMENT MEASURE (WALES) 2011 – MEMBERS' TRAINING**

Submitted – the report of the Chair of the Democratic Services Committee and the Head of Democratic Services outlining the requirements of the abovementioned measure in order to reach a decision on the way forward.

It was noted that the aim was to consider the best way of providing for the needs of all members, excluding Cabinet members, to enable them to receive a review of their training and development needs, should they so wish.

In response, members made the following main observations:-

- That Area Forums created the best opportunity for all members to receive information and voice their opinions;
- That there was a need to consider the skills required as councillors as well as the skills they wished to have.

In response to an enquiry, it was noted that the response to various courses varied.

**Resolved: (a) To ask the Head of Democratic Services to write to all elected members (excluding Cabinet members) and give a brief presentation at the Area Forums initially to explain the requirements of the Local Government Measure in the context of Personal Development Plans, and ask them to express an interest in receiving an annual review or not;**

**(b) To adapt the principles and guidelines developed for prioritising and allowing Members to attend external seminars etc, and to make them relevant to training courses and adopt them as part of the above.**

## **8. MEMBER TRAINING CHARTER**

Submitted – the report of the Chair of the Democratic Services Committee and the Head of Democratic Services presenting information on the Member Training Charter in order to reach a decision on the way forward.

Members and officers were of the view that the Council already met a number of the Charter's requirements and it was noted that the idea was to be welcomed as a method of obtaining status to elected member training.

In addition, it was noted that there was room to develop and that the Charter created an opportunity to do so.

**Resolved: To approve to express an interest in applying for the Charter in 2013/14 and report this recommendation to the next full Council on 19 September 2013.**

## **9. ELECTED MEMBER BULLETIN**

The Head of Customer Care Department reported that the 'Member Bulletin' had been launched for some weeks and she called for initial feedback from members.

Attention was drawn to the following main points:-

- That the bulletin was beneficial to members but that the information on it needed to be kept brief;
- No single piece of information should be on the 'bulletin' for too long;
- It could be beneficial for members to receive suitable training;
- That the bulletin was a summary of what was taking place and that further information could be obtained on a specific website;
- That the Highways Department seemed to be making full use of the bulletin and there was possibly a need to encourage other departments to do the same.

It was agreed that there was a need to fill gaps before a completely effective system could be obtained and it was noted that the members had a prominent role in the work of ensuring consistent development.

The meeting commenced at 10.00am and concluded at 11.25am.