

## DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE 18/3/14

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**Present:** Councillor Lesley Day (Chair)

**Councillors:** Anwen Davies, Jean Forsyth, Gweno Glyn, E. Selwyn Griffiths, Sion Wyn Jones, Dilwyn Morgan, Michael Sol Owen, Gareth Thomas and Mandy Williams-Davies.

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

**Others invited:** Councillor Peter Read (for item 9 on the agenda)

**Officers:** Geraint George (Head of Strategic and Improvement Department), Arwel Ellis Jones (Senior Manager – Corporate Commissioning Service), Dilys Phillips (Monitoring Officer – for item 5 on the agenda) and Bethan Adams (Member Support and Scrutiny Officer).

**Apologies:** Councillors Thomas G. Ellis, Jason Humphreys, Anne Lloyd Jones, Charles W. Jones and Linda Ann Wyn Jones.

### 1. WELCOME

Councillor Gweno Glyn, who was attending her first meeting of this Committee, was welcomed.

### 2. REPRESENTATIVE TO ATTEND THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

It was noted that an invitation had been extended to the Chair and Vice-chair of the Committee to attend a meeting of the Standards Committee on 7 April. It was reported that it was not possible for the Vice-chair to attend the meeting, therefore, the views of the Committee was sought as to whether another member should attend as a representative.

**RESOLVED to nominate Councillor Selwyn Griffiths as a representative of the Committee to attend a meeting of the Standards Committee on 7 April with the Chair.**

### 3. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

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

### 4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 11 December 2013, as a true record.

### 5. REVIEWING THE COUNCIL'S CONSTITUTION

The Monitoring Officer was welcomed to the meeting.

It was reported that the Council Constitution Review Working Group established by the Audit Committee to assist with the work of reviewing the constitution was consulting with the relevant stakeholders. It was noted that the Working Group wished to obtain the Committee's views on parts of the Constitution that dealt with the rights and operation of the Full Council, along with rules on members' rights to gain access to information.

A discussion was held on the matters listed in the report.

**RESOLVED to submit the views of the Committee to the Council Constitution Review Working Group as follows:**

- **Not to separate the Chair's civic role from the work of presiding at Council meetings;**
- **That the Committee in general is against imposing a time limit on full Council meetings;**
- **To agree that the ability to join committees remotely is restricted to meetings where it is not essential to obtain an urgent decision;**
- **To change the required percentage of members to sign a motion to dismiss the Council Leader for it to be considered at a meeting of the Full Council from 15% to 20%;**
- **To retain the arrangement whereby a Cabinet Member presents a report before the Council and responds to questions and that something should be built into the procedure rules to manage that;**
- **The Committee's support to allow questions from members of the public at meetings of the Full Council within strict conditions;**
- **That the Committee supports the use of social media at meetings and committees but is concerned in terms of allowing filming as there would be no control of the use, however, the Committee does not wish to disrupt the rights of the public;**
- **That the Committee is generally supportive of a procedure rule which allows a member to be absent for family reasons but that we should wait before detailing how it will work until the Welsh Government guidance are received, when the Committee will consider the matter;**
- **The Committee's support to obtain a forward work programme for the Cabinet, the Scrutiny Committees and the Council which is updated regularly with details regarding the content of the items;**
- **Satisfied with the arrangements for the decisions of individual Cabinet members but it is recommended that Champions should be consulted when appropriate;**
- **That arrangements for Council members' access rights to information are suitable.**

## **6. ACCESSIBILITY OF THE COUNCIL'S HEADQUARTERS**

Councillor Peter Read was welcomed to the meeting.

It was reported that the *Access All Areas* company had undertaken a detailed inspection into all aspects of accessibility in the main offices. Councillor Peter Read had been consulted regarding their recommendations and it was noted that the final list of the improvements recommended was appended to the report in Appendix A.

Councillor Peter Read noted that the adaptations agreed responded to many of the problems that existed in the Council's Headquarters.

In response to an observation by a member regarding the need for two members' lounges, it was noted that the downstairs lounge offered a working area for members and on days when the Full Council meetings were held, one lounge was insufficient.

The Cabinet Member for Customer Care noted that the adaptations agreed offered a realistic solution and that consideration should be given to the use of both lounges to prevent scarce space being wasted at a time of financial hardship.

Councillor Peter Read was thanked for his contribution.

**RESOLVED to recommend:**

- (i) That the Council adopts the schedule of recommendations in Appendix A, in order to ensure that the Headquarters is accessible to visitors;**
- (ii) That the Council re-designates the first-floor Lounge as the main Members' Lounge and ensures that this provision is accessible to all Members.**

**7. WEBCASTING**

It was reported that an update had been submitted on the discussion in relation to webcasting at some meetings at the previous meeting. A proposed work programme was submitted to introduce webcasting as well as an update in terms of the funding arrangements. It was emphasised that the period of trialling and providing training to members was all important.

It was noted that it was intended to note a message on the screen during webcasted meetings where a translator was not required by those present in the meeting room explaining that no translation was available. The Cabinet Member for Customer Care noted that it was difficult to justify providing a translator where there was no assurance that the service was being used in the current financial climate.

In response to an enquiry by a member in relation to appointing a provider, the Senior Manager – Corporate Commissioning Service noted that it was intended to appoint a provider under the Framework Agreement, and as it happened, no local companies were on the list.

In response to a member's observation in relation to webcasting the meetings of the Planning Committee held in Pwllheli or Dolgellau, the Senior Manager – Corporate Commissioning Service noted that there was no webcasting equipment in those locations and should it be decided that an item was of real importance to residents, that it would be possible, but not mandatory, to consider moving the meeting to Caernarfon. He added that there was a need to weigh up the benefits of webcasting against the convenience in terms of travelling for the public.

It was suggested that a procedure whereby members of the public could register their wish to receive a translation beforehand should be trialled.

In response to a member's question in relation to the number of meetings where there were no non-Welsh speaking members, the Senior Manager – Corporate Commissioning Service noted that the Cabinet members and officers were bilingual and therefore, unless members of the public were present at the meeting, then no translator was required.

A member expressed her wish to translate discussions in whichever language used. In response, it was noted that the procedure of translating from English to Welsh had ended for some time and that it would not be possible to justify the additional cost in the financial climate.

**RESOLVED:**

- (i) to accept the report;**
- (ii) to trial the procedure of enabling the public to register their wish beforehand to receive a translation service on the webcast and for it to be reviewed after assessing the use of the service over time.**

**8. WEBSITES FOR TOWN AND COMMUNITY COUNCILS**

The report of the Head of Democratic Services was submitted which provided an update of the timetable and funding position for the provision of a grant of up to £500 each so that Town and Community Councils could establish a website.

A member noted that Blaenau Ffestiniog Town Council had taken advantage of the grant and an estimate price of approximately £2,000 had been obtained for the development of a website. The member noted further, because of the cost, that Town and Community Councils should be encouraged to collaborate as it was mandatory to publish the minutes of Town and Community Councils on the internet.

**RESOLVED that the Committee continues to support the work of facilitating the development of establishing websites for Town and Community Councils during 2014/15.**

## **9. ENGAGEMENT WITH MEMBERS**

The Senior Manager – Corporate Commissioning Service noted that in accordance with the Committee’s wish, a consultation had been held with members regarding the Council’s general engagement arrangements as well as contact with councillors. It was reported that positive comments had been received but that pockets of problems had been highlighted such as the lack of use of local councillors as a way of providing and receiving information.

As a result of the consultation, it was noted that the following steps were being taken:

- Discussing the format of Rhaeadr with the Communication Unit so that it would be made more accessible to members;
- Discussion with the Management Group regarding the barriers to sharing information with members, in order to improve the situation;
- Councillors to receive a link to proactive statements to the Press and an attempt should be made to share links to responsive statements prior to publication;
- It was intended to convene a group of Councillors and Heads to a meeting to discuss further and jointly plan any next steps in the context of the bridging role of members between the Council and Gwynedd residents.

A member noted that he welcomed the establishment of a group of Councillors and Heads to discuss the situation.

A member noted that Area Forums were an opportunity for members to convey messages received from their electors to officers and members.

**RESOLVED to accept the report.**

The meeting commenced at 10.00am and concluded at 12.00pm