

**COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT**

<b>REPORT TO:</b>	<b><u>THE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL</u></b>
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b><u>DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE – 1<sup>ST</sup> OCTOBER, 2015</u></b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b><u>TEAM LEADER – DEMOCRATIC SERVICES</u></b>

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PRESENT: COUNCILLOR R. JONES (CHAIR)

Councillors G. Collier  
M. Dally  
N. Daniels  
Mrs. A. Hobbs  
C. Meredith  
Mrs. J. Morgan, J.P.  
J. Morgan  
D. Owens

AND: Head of Policy and Performance (Designated Head of Democratic Services)

WITH: **Scrutiny Chair**  
Councillor M. Cross

ITEM	SUBJECT	ACTION
1.	<b><u>APOLOGIES</u></b>  Apologies for absence were received from:-  Councillors K. Chaplin, T. Sharrem and the Chief Finance Officer.	

2.	<p><b><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></b></p> <p>There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.</p>	
3.	<p><b><u>DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE</u></b></p> <p>The Minutes of the Democratic Services Committee held on 20<sup>th</sup> April, 2015 were submitted for consideration, whereupon:-</p> <p><b><u>Apologies for Absence</u></b></p> <p>It was noted that Councillor Mrs. J. Morgan's apology for absence had not been recorded.</p> <p>RESOLVED, subject to the foregoing, that the minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
4.	<p><b><u>PROPOSED PROCEDURES FOR AN ELECTED MEMBER MENTORING FRAMEWORK</u></b></p> <p>Members considered the report of the Head of Policy and Performance.</p> <p>At the invitation of the Chair, the Head of Policy and Performance spoke briefly to the report and highlighted points contained therein. The officer explained that views in respect of introducing a more structured approach had been sought as part of the Members Training Needs Analysis survey. A high percentage of respondents advocated the approach of developing a pool of Member mentors as part of the Council's approach to Member development and support.</p> <p>The mentoring framework and approach was part of wider support offered to Members and had been based on the Welsh Local Government Association's (WLGA) guidance. The framework would be driven by Member commitment and involvement.</p>	

Members were then given the opportunity to raise questions/comment in relation to the report.

### **Financial Implications - Training**

It was confirmed that the cost of the training which would be delivered via the WLGA would be met in full from the training and development budget.

Members expressed their concern regarding the poor attendance of Members at training events in general when it was suggested that the mentoring training be deemed 'mandatory' for participating Members.

RESOLVED to recommend accordingly.

The Head of Policy and Performance noted the comments regarding attendance levels and undertook to pursue this issue as part of the wider Member Development and Training Programme.

A brief discussion ensued when Members endorsed Option 1 subject to the above additional recommendation regarding mandatory training.

FURTHER RESOLVED to recommend, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and

- Option 1 be endorsed, namely that Council adopted the framework for Member Mentoring based on the Welsh Local Government Association's (WLGA) guidance in response to Member feedback to build on the current informal arrangements.
- Training for mentors to be delivered via the WLGA.
- Training for all participating Members be deemed 'mandatory'.

5.

**MEMBER TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT ACTION PLAN PROGRESS UPDATE**

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Policy and Performance.

At the invitation of the Chair, the Head of Policy and Performance spoke to the report and highlighted points contained therein. The officer explained that the revised Member Training and Development Strategy had been approved by Council in February 2015 (following a recommendation made by Democratic Services Committee) and this was the first update report which covered the progress made between January – September 2015 against the 9 priority areas.

The Head of Policy and Performance continued by highlighting that the Council's re-assessment against the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) Charter for Member Development and Support in May 2015 had been successful and Level 1 Charter status had been achieved. It was noted that feedback from the WLGA in terms of the Charter submission had been very positive with elements identified to be shared as good practice with other local authorities.

**ICT Training – Brag Status: Amber**

In the absence of an officer from the Resources Directorate, the Head of Policy and Performance gave an update in respect of the above. The officer explained that introductory and refresher training in terms of ICT provision linked to individual and collective needs would be delivered to Members during the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter. This training would include a practical element within a formal environment setting.

It was noted that Members' ICT requirements and needs had been identified via the Personal Development Review (PDR) process and this information had been supplied to the relevant officers in order to inform and structure the training programme.

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The Head of Policy and Performance added that the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee would be considering a report at its October Meeting regarding the 'paperless environment'. One of the considerations was that a Task and Finish Group be established to review the ICT Scheme for Members and stated that this may present an opportunity for Democratic Services Committee Members to be part of this group.

A Member pointed out that Members had varying degrees of experience with regard to the use of ICT and expressed her concern that it would be difficult to pitch the content of the sessions to address all identified needs.

The Head of Policy and Performance gave an assurance that a range of requirements had been identified via the PDR process and it was anticipated that Members varying requirements could be accommodated.

### **Council Chamber Infrastructure**

Comments were made by a Member regarding the antiquated Council Chamber infrastructure moving forward and said that this would need to be upgraded to become fit for purpose in order to accommodate ICT requirements.

Councillors J. Morgan and N. Daniels joined the meeting at this juncture.

### **WLGA Charter for Member Development and Support**

The Chair referred to the Authority's recent success in achieving Level 1 of the Welsh Local Government Association's Charter for Member Development and Support Award and proposed that a letter of congratulations be forwarded all those involved.

RESOLVED accordingly.

FURTHER RESOLVED to recommend, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and as part of the annual review of the Member Training and Development Strategy:-

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) the associated action plan be updated where relevant; and</li> <li>(ii) progress updates continue to form part of the Democratic Services Committee forward work programme.</li> </ul>	
6.	<p><b><u>SCRUTINY ACTION PLAN UPDATE</u></b></p> <p>The report of the Head of Policy and Performance was submitted for consideration.</p> <p>The Head of Policy and Performance explained that the report provided Committee with a progress update against the scrutiny action plan for the period April to September 2015.</p> <p>The action plan and scrutiny arrangements had both been updated to reflect the recent evaluations. As part of the Wales Audit Office (WAO) work programme within the Council a Governance review with a focus on scrutiny was to be undertaken during the latter part of 2015. When available, the findings of this review and any relevant proposals for improvement from the WAO Annual Improvement Report 2014/15 would also be used to inform the scrutiny action plan.</p> <p>Members were then given the opportunity to raise questions/comment in relation to the report.</p> <p><b><u>Minutes and Action Sheets – Reduce Minutes to only Capture the Salient Points and Recommendations</u></b></p> <p>In response to a concern raised regarding recommendations being omitted from a set of minutes, the Head of Policy and Performance confirmed that Council had agreed to reduce the length of minutes and only capture salient points - recommendations should be included as part of this process. The officer concluded by pointing out, however, that all sets of scrutiny minutes were considered by Committees to ultimately determine their accuracy.</p>	

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Councillor M. Dally left the meeting at this juncture.

### **Scrutiny Information Packs/Scrutiny Process**

#### ***Information Packs:***

A Member referred to a recent case whereby a report relating to the Leisure Trust had not been included as part of a formal Scrutiny Committee agenda but included within the information pack. Given the nature of the information contained therein he enquired who determined which reports were included within the scrutiny information packs. He pointed out that this report had contained relevant financial information that should have been debated within the Scrutiny environment in an open and transparent manner.

Another Member concurred with the views of his colleague and pointed out that given the level of subsidy that the authority was making available to the Leisure Trust the information should have been made available for formal scrutiny in terms of openness and transparency.

The Head of Policy and Performance explained that information packs had been established in order to reduce the volume of items that needed to be considered by Committees and the information reported was mainly retrospective.

The officer continued by advising, that as part of the scrutiny process in the work planning session the Committee was able to request an item from the information pack to be brought onto the main agenda as part of the forward work programme, if it was considered an item that warranted specific scrutiny.

#### ***Scrutiny Process:***

In reply to a concern raised regarding the effectiveness of pre-executive scrutiny, the Head of Policy and Performance advised that a significant amount of work had been undertaken with Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs to rationalise the volume of information being submitted on

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agendas. An element of pre-executive scrutiny had been built into the scrutiny arrangements and the forward work programmes provided clarity on the elements that were to be progressed via these arrangements.

Another Member concurred with the earlier comments and pointed out that because the Leisure Trust, Tai Calon, Coleg Gwent had strong links with the authority these items should be scrutinised and a consistent approach developed. The Head of Policy and Performance commented that an approach to partnership scrutiny arrangements would be developed further.

### **Attendance at Executive by Scrutiny Chairs**

Members commended the approach whereby Scrutiny Chairs would be invited to attend Executive when scrutiny recommendations were being considered.

RESOLVED to recommend that the report be accepted and the Scrutiny Action Plan continue:-

- (i) to be updated and reviewed in line with the Council's evaluation arrangements and findings of the relevant Wales Audit Office review; and
- (ii) monitored via the Democratic Services Committee to recommend to Council for approval.

Councillor J. Morgan left the meeting at this juncture.

7.

### **TIMING OF MEETINGS**

Members considered the commencement times of future Democratic Services Committee meetings.

Upon a vote being taken it was unanimously,

RESOLVED that the status quo remain, i.e. that the Democratic Services Committee meetings commence at 10.00 a.m.