

<u>BLAENAU GWENT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL</u>	
Report to	Members of the Democratic Services Committee
Report Subject	Democratic arrangements and structures; Proposals for consideration.
Report Author	Bernadette Elias Head of Policy and Performance
Report date	1st April 2016
Directorate	Corporate Services and Strategy
Portfolio	Corporate Services
Date of meeting	20th April 2016
Date signed off by Monitoring Officer	N/A
Date signed off by Section 151 Officer	N/A
Date signed off by Chair	11th April 2016
Key words	Democratic Processes Review

Report Information Summary

1.	Purpose of Report*
1.1	To present options following a review of current arrangements in relation to (i) Scrutiny Committee structures (ii) the new cycle of Council, Executive and Scrutiny committee meetings and the (iii) recording and reporting of formal Council Committee meetings.
2.	Scope of the Report*
2.1	The report sets out a number of options following a review process that has included both current internal arrangements and benchmarking information from across Local Authorities in Wales.
2.2	The options provide the opportunity to establish a sustainable structure and cycle of formal committee meetings of the Council and a support service that meets legal requirements and operates within available resource.
3.	Recommendation/s for Consideration*
3.1	That the Democratic Services Committee considers the options set out in paragraph 2 and makes recommendation to Council for approval.

Why this topic is a priority for the Council?*

Report author to identify links to the main corporate strategies.

Single Integrated Plan (SIP)	Corporate Improvement Plan (CIP)	Performance Management Improvement Framework (PMIF)	Operating Model	Transforming Blaenau Gwent (TBG Programme)	Other (please state)
			X	X	

Reporting Pathway*

Report author to identify proposed reporting pathway. (To include dates where possible)

Directorate Management Team (DMT)	Corporate Management Team (CMT)	Audit	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny	Executive	Council	Other (please state)
	5 th April 2016		20 th April 2016			4 th May 2016	

***Denotes mandatory section**

Main Report

1.	Background and Context*
1.1	<p>The review of the current arrangements takes account of a number of factors including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The end of the commissioned service via the external funding of the Welsh Government to support webcasting arrangements; • The Council decision taken in 2014 to focus the minutes taken at formal committee meetings on salient points, actions and recommendations / decisions; and • The annual review process of setting the cycle of meetings. • As part of the review process analysis of current arrangements has been undertaken to help inform the development of options. Desk top research to gain comparative information has also been completed.
1.2	<p>The options developed as a result of the review offer sustainable arrangements for formal democratic meetings that meet organisational and stakeholder requirements within available resource.</p>
2.	Options for Consideration
2.1	<p><u>Frequency/cycle of Full Council Meetings</u></p> <p>To retain the current approach (Full Council meetings to be called dependent on business to be addressed).</p>
2.2	<p><u>Frequency/cycle of Executive Committees</u></p> <p>Option 1 Do not make changes to the current cycle i.e. continue with 3 weekly committees.</p> <p>Option 2 Move to a 4-6 weekly cycle, with the flexibility built in dependent on Forward Work Programme items and the business that needs to be undertaken.</p>

2.3	<p><u>Frequency/cycle of Scrutiny Committees</u></p> <p>Retain a 6 weekly cycle, with the flexibility built in dependent on Forward Work Programme items and the business that needs to be undertaken.</p>
2.4	<p><u>Structure of the Council's Scrutiny Committees</u></p> <p>The Scrutiny Committee Structure to remain the same.</p>
2.5	<p><u>Recording and reporting of formal committee meetings: Webcasting</u></p> <p>Following the ending of the Welsh Government funding and the pilot phase of webcasting of meetings to be ceased.</p>
2.6	<p><u>Recording and reporting of formal committee meetings: Minutes</u></p> <p>Option 1 Make no changes to the current process for producing minutes.</p> <p>Option 2 Retain the current protocol of capturing salient points only, but revise the methodology of how that is undertaken to ensure that the agreed Council approach is implemented effectively (an example from another local Authority is provided in appendix 5)</p> <p>Option 3 Revise the current protocol for minute taking for the recording and reporting of formal Council Committee meetings to record only attendance, declarations of interest and recommendations for all committees other than Licensing, Planning and Appeal committees. (Based on the rationale that for the regulatory committees' sufficient detail of the debate is required from a legal perspective to mitigate risk. For all other meetings, from a legal view, it will suffice for a note of the decision to be taken and nothing else recorded in terms of debate).</p>
2.7	<p><u>Presenting Reports into formal committee meetings</u></p> <p>Enhancing the current protocol (set out within the Executive Member Handbook) specific for invitations of Executive</p>

	<p>Members into Scrutiny Committees, Executive Members to attend to present reports as part of the Committees Forward Work Programme on areas which would be considered as key decisions for pre decision Scrutiny include those of:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A strategic or controversial nature; • Are likely to have a significant effect on the delivery of Council services across the County Borough; and • Have a significant element of risk implications. <p>Proposed Option</p> <p>As part of the scrutiny action plan and protocol, scrutiny committee chairs attend Executive Committee to present reports where the scrutiny committee are recommending an amendment or additions to the report recommendations for Executive to consider.</p>
3.	Performance Evidence and Information*
3.1	As part of the review process analysis of current arrangements has been undertaken to help inform the development of options. Desk top research to gain comparative information has also been completed.
3.2	The Information is contained in the attached appendices as follows:
3.3	Appendix 1 details the frequency of Executive Committee meetings across all other Local Authorities in Wales.
3.4	Appendix 2 details of the scrutiny committees and the frequency of meetings across all the Local Authorities in Wales. There are a number of examples of where 8 weekly cycles are in place and also where there is a level of flexibility e.g. 6-8 weekly, depending on Forward Work Programmes.
3.5	Appendix 3 details the number of scheduled scrutiny committees within Blaenau Gwent from June 2015 to May 2016 and the number of meetings cancelled up until March 2016. In the large majority of cases this is due to insufficient items being brought forward for the agenda.
3.6	Appendix 4 provides detail of the webcasting arrangements across a number of Local Authorities. Blaenau Gwent is the

	<p>higher range in relation to the breadth of meetings webcast, although this does not necessarily equate to being in the higher range of the actual number of committees webcast. Comparative evidence shows there are a number of Local Authorities who do not currently webcast any formal committee meeting of the Council.</p>
3.7	<p>Appendix 5 provides detail of the average length of the minutes in Blaenau Gwent taken as a record, using scrutiny committee meetings as an example.</p>
3.8	<p>Appendix 6 provides an example of minutes undertaken of a Scrutiny Committee meeting in a different Local Authority.</p>
3.8.1	<p>The internal performance target for turnaround of minutes across committees has not been consistently met and this is also prior to the implementation of Business Support. Although this has not impacted on the overall Democratic process, critical Member feedback has been received on occasion. Concise minutes will support the overall democratic and decision making processes.</p>
4.	Impact Assessment Against Proposals / Options*
4.1	<p>The options consider a number of factors, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The potential future demands on Councils, depending on the outcome of Local Government Reform. • Establishing a sustainable approach that meets organisational needs delivered within available resource.
5.	Financial Implications*
5.1	<p>The Welsh Government funding provided to support the pilot phase of webcasting has ceased. There is a financial implication if the Council continued webcasting arrangements of approximately £2k per meeting. (Note: there is one meeting remaining as part of the commissioned service for 2015/16 due to agreed changes in the webcasting schedule).</p>
6.	Risk Implications*
6.1	<p>There could potentially be a perception that democratic processes could be compromised in relation to options</p>

	regarding altering the current frequency of meetings and reduction in recorded minutes.
6.2	There is no definitive evidence to suggest that the public engage in the democratic process solely via the committee minutes (or webcasting). In Councils where the cycle of committee meetings are less frequent and shorter minutes are produced, the democratic process has still operated.
6.3	Without adaptation to our operating approaches there is the risk that we will not be prepared as an organisation to meet future operating environments.
6.4	Workforce planning and capacity issues are not properly addressed if expected standards are not matched by available resources.
7.	Staffing/Workforce Development Implications*
7.1	The options which set the expected standard and alter the frequency of meetings, webcasting arrangements and reduce the amount of recorded minutes would provide an opportunity to review the capacity required to provide the service.
8.	Conclusion*
8.1	If approved, the proposals would be implemented following the AGM meeting of the Council.

***Denotes mandatory section**