

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO:	<u>THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE</u>
SUBJECT:	<u>DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE – 7TH NOVEMBER, 2017</u>
REPORT OF:	<u>SENIOR BUSINESS SUPPORT OFFICER - DEMOCRATIC & CORPORATE SUPPORT</u>

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR H. McCARTHY, B.A. (HONS) (CHAIR)

Councillors P. Baldwin
J. Collins
N. Daniels
J. Holt
J. Millard
J. C. Morgan
J. P. Morgan
L. Parsons
B. Summers
S. Thomas

AND: Head of Policy and Performance (designated Head of
Democratic Services)
Head of Financial Services
Corporate Support Manager

ALSO: **Scrutiny Chairs & Vice-Chairs**
Councillors M. Cook
L. Elias
P. Edwards
H. Trollope

ITEM	SUBJECT	ACTION
1.	<p><u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u></p> <p>It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.</p>	
2.	<p><u>APOLOGIES</u></p> <p>An apology for absence was received from:-</p> <p>Councillor K. Hayden</p>	
3.	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.</p>	
4.	<p><u>DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE</u></p> <p>Councillor L. Parsons joined the meeting at this juncture.</p> <p>The Minutes of the Democratic Services Committee held on 6th March, 2017 were submitted for consideration.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
5.	<p><u>DEMOCRATIC ARRANGEMENTS PROGRESS REPORT</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Policy and Performance (designated Head of Democratic Services).</p> <p>At the invitation of the Chair, the Head of Policy & Performance (designated Head of Democratic Services) advised that the progress report had been developed to incorporate the established action plans covering scrutiny</p>	

support and Member development together with a new section in respect of the democratic process. It was recognised that by integrating progress against these plans into one report, Members would be provided with a fuller picture of performance in respect of the democratic arrangements.

The report style and format used to present this report was consistent with the style and format used to present other performance information into the democratic process.

Work would continue with the Democratic Services Team to continue to develop the progress report to include further actions and performance measures which would be linked to the corporate business planning arrangements and this information would be available for future reports. In addition, further work to present the measures contained in the appendix would also be undertaken in order that the 'Brag' rating system could be clearly identified.

% of Member Attendance at Formal Scrutiny Committees – Quarters 1 and 2

The Committee was advised that although there was downward trend during Quarter 1 in terms of Member attendance this related to only one cycle of meeting i.e. one month (June 2017) due to the pre-election period. Quarter 2 covered the period July to September 2017 and in terms of the percentage of Members attending scrutiny there had been an upward trajectory compared to the same period last year.

In reply to a comment it was noted that if Members had difficulty attending meetings at a particular time discussions should take place with the Chair of the relevant Committee. It was noted that all Committees at the start of the cycle agreed the commencement time of meetings.

A Member referred to Page 38 of the progress report and pointed out that the Joint Scrutiny Committees had the lowest attendance compared to the main Scrutiny Committees and said it may be worth identifying the reason(s) for these low attendance levels.

Number of Recommendations Amended by Scrutiny

A Member referred to the number of recommendations amended by Scrutiny (5 during Quarter 2) and expressed his concern that a number of items submitted to the Scrutiny Committee that he chaired were for 'monitoring' purposes. Therefore, he felt that recommendations to the Executive would be proportionate.

The Head of Policy and Performance (designated Head of Democratic Services) confirmed that a number of Scrutiny Committees, where relevant did make recommendations to the Executive, which was a positive move forward. The Scrutiny Committees forward work programmes contained a range of items for pre-policy and monitoring purposes.

RESOLVED to recommend, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and Option 1 be endorsed, namely that the information contained within the Democratic Arrangements Performance Report be recommended to Council for approval.

6. SUPPORT ARRANGEMENTS FOR MEMBERS ON OUTSIDE BODIES

Members considered the report of the Head of Policy and Performance (designated Head of Democratic Services).

The Committee was advised that the former Council had requested that arrangements be put in place to support Members on Outside Bodies and that mechanisms for Members to provide relevant information and feedback in a structured format to Council be established.

The Democratic Services Committee agreed in their meeting on 4th October, 2016 to accept the report and recommend to Council that Option 1 be endorsed. However, due to the pending local election the decision had been deferred to the new Council.

Therefore, Members were requested to consider the support arrangements outlined in paragraph 6.1 of the report.

A Member welcomed the review of the list of outside bodies. However, he expressed his concern that he had been appointed to a number of bodies for example, the Admissions Forum but did not receive the minutes of these meetings.

The Senior Business Support Officer advised that the Admissions Forum was not technically classed as an 'outside body' within the membership booklet and was classed as a 'special/ad hoc meeting'. However, the officer undertook to pursue the issue of the reporting mechanism for these meetings.

RESOLVED to recommend accordingly.

In reply to a question, the Head of Policy and Performance (designated Head of Democratic Services) advised regardless of the appointees role within the Council, Members' had requested the introduction of support arrangements in order that there was an opportunity available to feedback key messages from the outside body that they had been appointed to.

In addition, the officer confirmed that the Democratic Services Team had begun collating information relating to the role and remit of the Member that had been appointed to a particular outside organisation.

Another Member said that this support and feedback arrangements would provide the Council with information that it had never previously received and it would give the appointed Member a voice. He, thereupon, proposed that Option 1 be endorsed. This proposal was seconded.

FURTHER RESOLVED, subject to the foregoing, to recommend that the report be accepted and Option 1 be endorsed, namely:-

- The following new support and feedback arrangements be agreed to be put in place:-

Support arrangements

- A short pre-meeting be held between the Member(s) and relevant lead officer to discuss the agenda and any particular points of interest.
- Member(s) attend the meeting.
- A short post-meeting be held between the Member(s) and lead offer to de-brief.

Feedback arrangements

- An agenda item to be added to Council on a quarterly basis for communication/feedback from Members on outside bodies. A template for Members to complete for sharing the feedback had been produced.

Review of the current outside bodies appointments

- A review of the list of outside bodies to rationalise the number of current appointments required be undertaken. This should be completed in advance of the AGM in May 2018.

7. PROPOSED PROCEDURES FOR AN ELECTED MEMBER MENTORING FRAMEWORK

The report of the Head of Policy and Performance (designated Head of Democratic Services) was submitted.

It was noted that due to a technical error Appendix 1 which consisted of the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) mentoring framework and guidance and an outline mentoring contract had been omitted from the agenda. However, this matter would be rectified when the report was submitted to Full Council for consideration.

Members were advised that the previous Council had endorsed the adoption of a framework for Member Mentoring prior to the local election in May. However, it was now felt that it was an opportune time to reconsider the mentoring framework the reasons for this were two-fold:-

- to reinforce the commitment and ensure that both new and returning Members were given the appropriate level of support and guidance to carry out their duties; and
- since the original report was agreed in October 2015 only half of the original cohort of mentors that received the training were current serving Councillors.

The proposed framework, if approved, would be driven by Member commitment, involvement, experience and expertise – it would be a matter for Members to organise and negotiate their own patterns of mentoring. Expressions of interest for those Members who would like to become a mentor should be forwarded to the Head of Democratic Services. If the framework was approved training for mentors would be delivered in-house by officers.

A Member suggested that shadowing could be part of the framework for example a mentee attending a specific Scrutiny Committee shadowing their mentor appointed to that Committee.

The Head of Policy and Performance (designated Head of Democratic Services) advised that the scope of the report was to propose a mentoring framework and although observation skills could be valuable it was outside of the scope of the report to comment on application and attendance of Members not appointed by Council to specific committees.

The Member continued by expressing his concern that Minority Group Members would have few opportunities to be shadowed and said that if the Chair of the Committee welcomed observers this should not obstruct the mentoring process.

The Chair, thereupon, proposed that the report be accepted.

RESOLVED to recommend that the report be accepted and Option 1 be endorsed, namely that:-

- The new Council fully endorsed the framework for Member mentoring based on the WLGA guidance in response to previous Member feedback and to build on the current informal arrangements. Training for mentors would be delivered in-house by officers.
- Expressions of interest for those Members who would like to become a mentor be forwarded to the Head of Democratic Services.

8. DRAFT REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL FOR WALES 2018/19

Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Finance Officer.

At the invitation of the Chair, the Head of Financial Services explained that following visits to each of the 22 principal Council in Wales the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) had published its draft report in respect of Members remuneration for 2018/19.

The consultation period in respect of the Panel's proposed determinations would end on 29th November, 2017 and it was anticipated that the final report would be received during February 2018. The Panel would consider any feedback received between the months of December 2017 – to February 2018.

The main salient points and proposed changes which related to Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council were, thereupon, highlighted:-

- **Basic & Senior Salaries** – the basic salary for members of principal councils would increase by £200 per annum i.e. from £13,400 to £13,600 effective from April 2018.
- **Executive Members & Chairs of Committees** – as a result of strong views expressed during the visits the Panel had recognised the overwhelming support for its determinations to be prescriptive and proposed to remove the two tier arrangements for Executive

Members and Committee Chairs.

- **Job Share Arrangements** – some Council's had raised the possibility of operating some senior salary posts on a 'job share' arrangement. The Panel was supportive of this principle and had determined that:-
 - for Members of an Executive each should be paid 50% of the appropriate salary; and
 - the statutory maximum level of Senior Responsibility Allowances could not be exceeded - in the case of Blaenau Gwent this number was 17. In addition it would be the number of persons in receipt of a senior salary and not the number of senior salary posts that would count towards the cap.

- **Sickness Absence for Senior Salary Holders** – it was proposed that the framework to provide specific arrangements for long term sickness of senior salary holders be amended.
 - a senior salary holder on long term sickness could continue to receive remuneration for the post held if the authority decided so; and
 - the maximum length of sickness absence was proposed as 26 weeks or until the individual's term of office ended.

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

Supporting the Work of Elected Members – a Member referred to the support provided and in particular to the Wi-Fi arrangements and access within the Civic Centre building and said he trusted that this would be taken into consideration.

The Executive Member – Corporate Services confirmed that a report relating to ICT Scheme for Members would be considered by Full Council on 7th December, 2017.

IRP Feedback - a Member supported the report in totality not withstanding that there was always a possibility Members to personally consider the determinations.

The Head of Financial Services advised that due to the consultation period in respect of the proposed determinations ending on 29th November, 2017 and the timescale for the next Full Council meeting (7th December, 2017) the recommendation of the Democratic Services Committee would be unable to be progressed to Full Council for consideration. However, any feedback received from the Committee would be submitted to the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) and if Members had any issues or individual views they would be entitled to provide views directly to the IRP.

The officer continued by advising that the Council had a duty to comply with the IRP determinations, however, it would be a matter and at the voluntary discretion of individual Members if they wished to choose to accept or decline the increase in allowances.

It was proposed and seconded that the report be accepted in its entirety.

Upon a vote being taken it was unanimously,

RESOLVED to recommend that the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales be advised that the Panel's draft report for 2018/19 had been accepted in its entirety.

9. THE 2018 REVIEW OF PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES IN WALES – REVISED PROPOSALS

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Legal and Corporate Compliance.

The Committee was advised that the report had been presented for Members to consider the revised proposals of the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales in respect of a Review of Parliamentary Constituencies in Wales which had to be completed by 1st October, 2018.

The Corporate Support Manager reported that the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 as amended by the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011 had established a UK electoral quota and reduction in the number of parliamentary constituencies in the United Kingdom from 650 to 600. In Wales parliamentary constituencies would be reduced from 40 to 29.

The Act specified that all constituencies should have approximately similar sized electorates based on an electoral quota. The initial consultation period, which included Public Hearings, had ended and all of the representations had been considered.

The northern electoral wards of the existing Islwyn constituency were connected to Blaenau Gwent via the A467 and A4048 and were a natural continuation of the valleys in their area. Therefore, the recommendation for a revised Blaenau Gwent constituency included Argoed, Crumlin, Blackwood, Cefn Forest, Pengam, Penmaen and Newbridge.

This constituency would consist of 75,664 electors which was 1.2% above the electoral quota of 74,769.

It was noted that the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission's report and maps were available for inspection at the General Offices, Ebbw Vale.

The Corporate Support Manager concluded by advising the Boundary Commission for Wales was due to report to Parliament during autumn 2018 on its proposals.

Councillor L. Elias left the meeting at this juncture.

Financial Implications

In reply to a question, the Corporate Support Manager advised that there would be no direct financial implications for the authority associated with the increase in size of the Parliamentary constituency. There would, however, be financial implications for the Cabinet Office who funded these elections.

In terms of staffing arrangements, on occasions electoral administrative officers from other constituencies would assist with the additional work as part of the election process but these officers would again be paid directly by the Cabinet Office and not the authority.

A brief discussion ensued when it was

RESOLVED to recommend that the report be accepted and a county constituency be created from:-

- the existing Blaenau Gwent constituency as a whole(49,661electors); plus
- the electoral wards within the existing Islwyn Parliamentary Constituency of Argoed (1,910 electors), Blackwood (5,947 electors), Cefn Fforest (2,765 electors), Crumlin (4,195 electors), Newbridge (4,611 electors), Pengam (2,571 electors) and Penmaen (4,004 electors).

The constituency would then consist of 75,664 electors which was 1.2% above the electoral quota of 74,769.

10.

REVIEW OF ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS IN BLAENAU GWENT

Members considered the report of the Head of Legal and Corporate Compliance.

The Corporate Support Manager advised that a review of electoral arrangements in Blaenau Gwent would commence in January 2018. This review would be carried out by the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales and would be presented to Welsh Government in readiness for the 2022 local elections.

Prior to conducting the review the Commission was required to consult the mandatory consultees on its intended procedure and methodology for the review and in particular, on how it proposed to determine the appropriate number of members for any principal council. Therefore,

representatives of the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission would meet with senior officers and leaders of the political groups and a presentation would be made to Full Council and Town and Community Councils as soon as possible.

Some initial work on the review had been undertaken by the Commission and taking into account matters such as the urban nature and population density of the Borough and many other factors the proposed number of Councillors in Blaenau Gwent would reduce from 42 to 38.

The Corporate Support Manager concluded by stating that the Council had the opportunity to drive the review and suggest options for consideration and recommended that Member peruse the 'Electoral Reviews: Policy and Practice Document' that was available on line.

A Member suggested that a Task and Finish Group be established to assist and suggest further options for consideration by the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission.

A brief discussion ensued regarding the composition of the Task and Finish Group when the Head of Policy and Performance (designated Head of Democratic Services) suggested that in the first instance the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Democratic Services Committee and the Corporate Services Manager hold an initial meeting to scope out the terms of reference for the Task and Finish Group and membership of the Group could then be determined based on scope of the work.

A Member gave examples of where ward boundaries had been previously been redefined and the impact that this had had on those constituents that had been affected. For example, some residents had transferred from a Communities First ward within which they had been able to access funds to a ward that was not categorised as a Communities First area. Therefore, a full assessment and impact of any proposals needed to be made to ensure that decisions did not affect the livelihood of residents.

A discussion ensued when it was agreed that the Chair and Vice-Chair meet with the Corporate Support Manager to scope out the review and terms of reference of the Task and Finish Group and once completed a further report be submitted to the Democratic Services Committee for consideration. It was noted that the wider implications of the review would be considered by Full Council.

RESOLVED to recommend accordingly.

Upon a vote being taken it was unanimously,

FURTHER RESOLVED recommend, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and a Special Council meeting be convened and the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales be invited to make a presentation to Full Council.

This presentation would set out the general practices and procedures of the review to be undertaken and allow Members to pose questions.

Prior to the conclusion of the meeting, a Member requested that the 'Reporting Pathways' for Items 9 and 10 be fully completed prior to the reports being submitted to Council.