

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

**SUBJECT: DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE –
17TH SEPTEMBER, 2021**

**REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC & COMMITTEE SUPPORT
OFFICER**

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR J.C. MORGAN (CHAIR)

Councillors B. Summers
M. Cook
D. Davies (substitute for Cllr J. Collins)
G.A. Davies
K. Hayden
J. Hill (substitute for Cllr L. Parsons)
J.P. Morgan (substitute for Cllr S. Healy)
K. Pritchard

**ALSO: Scrutiny Chairs & Vice-Chairs
Councillor C. Meredith**

**AND: Managing Director
Service Manager, Performance & Democratic
Chief Officer – Commercial & Customer
(outgoing Head of Democratic Services)**

ITEM	SUBJECT	ACTION
No. 1	<u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u> It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.	
No. 2	<u>APOLOGIES</u> Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J. Collins, G.L. Davies, M. Day, S. Healy, L. Parsons, J. Holt, T. Sharrem and H. Trollope.	
No. 3	<u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u>	

	<p>The Service Manager, Performance & Democratic declared an interest in item 5 – Designation of the Head of Democratic Services.</p>	
<p>No. 4</p>	<p><u>DEMOCRATIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the Minutes of the meeting held on 16th July, 2021.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the Minutes be received as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
<p>No. 5</p>	<p><u>DESIGNATION OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES</u></p> <p>The Service Manager, Performance & Democratic declared an interest in this item and remained in the meeting but took no part in the discussion.</p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Managing Director which was presented to seek affirmation for the designation of the Council’s statutory Head of Democratic Services.</p> <p>The Managing Director spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein. She advised that the post of Head of Governance & Partnerships was currently vacant and was in the process of recruitment. She requested Members consideration and agreement for the designation of the statutory post of Head of Democratic Services continues to be aligned to the Head of Governance & Partnerships and be taken on board by the new Officer when appointed.</p> <p>As the outgoing Head of Democratic Services, the Chief Officer Commercial & Customer thanked Members for the opportunity and their interaction over the years and said that it had been a privilege to hold the post and to work with Members in that role.</p> <p>The Chair thanked the outgoing Head of Democratic Services for all the work she had undertaken and whilst she wouldn’t be leaving she would be missed in her existing role.</p>	

	<p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that the designation of the statutory post of Head of Democratic Services to the Head of Governance & Partnerships be agreed.</p>	
<p>No. 6</p>	<p><u>DIVERSE COUNCIL ACTION PLAN</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Service Manager Performance & Democratic which presented the Draft Diverse Council Action Plan for consideration.</p> <p>The Service Manager Performance & Democratic spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein which included that the action plan had been developed for the Democratic Services Committee following agreement at Council in July 2021 to become a diverse Council as it had been recognised nationally that there was a lack of diversity across Councils. As part of that agreement, it was agreed that an action plan be undertaken.</p> <p>A Member referred to point 30 of the Action Plan, the last bullet point which read – ‘Support the Welsh Government’s and IRPW’s commitment to explore Resettlement grants or ‘parachute payments’ payments for Members who lose their seats at election.’ The Member felt this was unnecessary and placed an unfair burden on taxpayers. The Service Manager Performance & Democratic explained the reason for this was that Members of the Senedd would have a parachute payment if they were unsuccessful at election, it had been highlighted to the IRPW and Welsh Government that Members of local authorities should also have the same remuneration. She advised Members that this was something the Welsh Government and the IRPW may explore, it was not in the IRPW currently and if resettlement grants were introduced nationally then as a Council we would look to support it.</p> <p>A Member commented that one of the barriers to attracting more diverse councillors could be time off from work to undertake the role and enquired regarding statutory rights in relation to this. The Service Manager Performance & Democratic said that Councillors should have time provided back to them from their employer to undertake their role,</p>	

however, this could not be enforced and was something that the Welsh Government and the WLGA were looking at to consider what options could be put in place to accommodate working Members i.e. staggering times of meetings, job sharing and recess schemes etc.

A Member commented that more would need to be done if the Council were serious about diversifying. He felt that Blaenau Gwent did not have the same problems that other areas had i.e. Cardiff. The Service Manager Performance & Democratic said that the Welsh Government desired Councils to become more diverse and agreed that there would be differences and nuances across different local authorities. The Action Plan was Blaenau Gwent's approach which had tried to identify key areas that they either needed to implement directly or support as a Council. There would be a collective approach with other local authorities and the Council could then look to meet the nuances of what specifically was needed in Blaenau Gwent to attract a more diverse set of Members.

A Member referred to paragraph 2.5 of the report, bullet point one which read 'to encourage all political parties, through the WLGA Political Groups, to commit to proactive and coordinated activities to improve diversity in local government democracy' and felt that this should be reworded as some Members were not part of a political group.

Another Member felt that the wording may inhibit individuals from standing for election as they may think a political background was required.

The Chair welcomed the report and was pleased that Blaenau Gwent was leading the way with this Action Plan and suggested that the wording in paragraph 2.5 be amended to include political parties / non-political groups / individuals.

The outgoing Head of Democratic Services clarified that the Action Plan be developed by the Democratic Services Committee and then taken to Council for approval and any amendments from the debate could be included in the report presented to Council at the end of the month. With regard to political groups, she explained that some of the

guidance related specifically to political groups as they could action certain things within the parameters of being a political group.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 2; namely that the Democratic Services Committee considered the Action Plan, attached at Appendix 1, and provided comment that the wording on 2.5 of the report, bullet point one - to encourage all political parties, be amended to include political parties / non-political groups / individuals before submission to Council on 30th September for approval.