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DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Remote meeting held on 21st March, 2025.

The Committee agenda is available [here](#).

The Meeting recording is available [here](#).

Present: Councillor Dr. I.J. Johnson (Chair); Councillor N.C. Thomas (Vice-Chair); Councillors G. Bruce, G.D.D. Carroll, S.M. Hanks, K.P. Mahoney, S.D Perkes and J. Protheroe.

ANNOUNCEMENT –

Prior to the commencement of the business of the Committee, the Operational Manager – Democratic Services read the following statement: “May I remind everyone present that the meeting will be live streamed as well as recorded via the internet and this recording archived for future viewing”.

APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE –

This was received from Councillor H.C. Hamilton.

MINUTES –

RESOLVED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 10th February, 2025 be approved as a correct record, subject to minor typographical changes.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

No declarations of interest were received.

RESHAPING SCRUTINY (REF) –

The Head of Democratic Services presented an overview of proposals to review scrutiny arrangements, including changes to ways of working, meeting frequency and the number of overall Scrutiny Committees. They advised they were seeking input from the Committee surrounding how this impacted Member development needs and resources within the Democratic Services team, with comments being used to shape any final proposals.

Councillor Dr. Johnson shared that they were concerned about the reduction from 5 Committees to 4 Committees, and had asked for “dummy” agendas to see what type of things would be on the agendas in the future. He also indicated that there needed to be considerations of scrutiny of partnership work, the call-in process and

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emphasised how Scrutiny was often an opportunity for Councillors to discuss topics in a public forum.

Councillor Bruce sought further information surrounding the potential benefits, and how Councillors would be informed of next steps. Benefits such as responding to Member feedback, public feedback, regulatory reports, the Performance Panel Assessment were shared, alongside the opportunity for Scrutiny Committees to drive policy and improving public participation in the work of the Council.

Councillor Carroll agreed around the need to review the Scrutiny function, and cited examples of where they felt the Council had not performed where Scrutiny could have played a role. They welcomed the opportunity to improve, but reflected the changes could have the opposite effect in terms of accountability, with a reduction in the number of Committees being regressive and not fitting with the principles of good governance and accountability. They noted that presentations should be a brief outline, with the focus upon asking questions, rather than Scrutiny being an information dissemination exercise.

Councillor Bruce welcomed the proposed move to a shorter agenda and queried if meetings held on a six-weekly basis, instead of the proposed change from monthly to bi-monthly, could be an option for the future.

Councillor Thomas agreed with previous comments surrounding presentations, and that Councillors should read reports ahead of meetings, which would make the meetings themselves more effective. He also welcomed proposals to look at alternative means for information only/noting items, which could be circulated by e-mail, with the opportunity for feedback to be provided if they wanted to. He reflected that proposals would hopefully improve the depth and quality of Scrutiny, and particularly welcomed the move to Task and Finish, but stated that this would need concentrated effort and a focused mind from Members. He also felt that the reduction in potential topics coming to Committees could support the proposed move to 4 Committees, but there needed to be careful consideration of topics which could fall within multiple Committees and how the cross-Committee working would happen in practice.

Councillor Perkes queried around what other Councils in Wales were doing, and how many pieces of Task and Finish work had been undertaken during this Administration. They were advised models of Scrutiny were different, with nearly all Councils in Wales having a different number of Committees, themes and meeting frequencies, and that it was local discretion as to how the statutory guidance was applied. Alongside this, Task and Finish work was currently sparse due to capacity within Democratic Services, with the procurement work being the only significant topic in recent years, with the proposals seeking to release capacity for this to be undertaken more systematically.

Councillor Hanks agreed with the need to change Scrutiny, but was in favour of remaining as 5 Committees, as this would impact public perceptions. They also sought clarity surrounding Chairing of Task and Finish work, where they advised this would be at the Scrutiny Committees' discretion to appoint.

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Councillor Dr. Johnson noted that the ability to opt out of participating in Task and Finish could lead to only a few Members participating in this work, but there was clearly a need to review arrangements, as there was a common agreement to improve Scrutiny's effectiveness.

RESOLVED –

- (1) T H A T the Reshaping Scrutiny proposals be noted
- (2) T H A T Members' comments surrounding the proposed changes to Scrutiny arrangements be fed to Cabinet back accordingly.

Reason for decisions

(1&2) To ensure that Members of Democratic Services Committee had had opportunity to share their viewpoints surrounding any proposed changes.

DEMOCRACY AND BOUNDARY COMMISSION CYMRU – RESEARCH OF THE WORKLOAD OF COUNTY COUNCILLORS IN WALES (HDS) –

The Head of Democratic Services presented the report, the purpose of which was to provide Members with an overview of nationally conducted research aimed at reviewing Councillor workload in Wales, and shared that this research identified a number of factors on Councillor workload, including the structure of wards, geography and demography and the impact of a fluctuating population, whilst also considering the support provided to undertake the role as effectively as possible.

Councillor Dr. Johnson felt that this was an interesting report, as a national report representing a range of views (20% response rate) across Wales, and not solely that of Vale of Glamorgan Councillors.

Councillor Carroll stated they were concerned by the tone of the report, and felt it was in danger of re-defining the role of an Elected Member, as being a Councillor was not a standard job, but a public service and opportunity to give back to their communities. He reflected that the role did not have contracted hours, and that residents were respectful of workload, and that the role of about community leadership, which did have a degree of personal sacrifice, which was a different direction to a salaried role.

Councillor Protheroe noted that it was interesting to see the experience of other Councillors and agreed with the differences in rural wards due to challenges such as increasing travel time and being involved in more Community Councils. They also shared that being a Councillor was a significant amount of work, and that was up to individual Members how much they wanted to get involved in this work. They also reflected upon the importance of the need for a work-life balance, particularly considering the role of evening meetings and the opportunities to participate online, and welcomed support from Democratic Services upon induction, but suggested there could be increased support to newer Councillors following this surrounding what the role entailed.

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Councillor Bruce indicated they felt there was a disparity in the number of hours presented, as most Members worked 7 days a week, despite only being paid for 3 days (based upon IRPW recommendations).

Councillor Mahoney stated disbelief at reading this research, and that he perceived that Members gave the impression of being volunteers, but these were paid roles with no set hours, and that any Members who did not feel able to serve in this way should consider resignation.

RESOLVED – T H A T the contents of the report and the comments and experiences of Councillors be noted.

Reason for decision

Having regard to the contents of the report, discussions at the meeting and following consideration by Committee Members concerning Councillor workload.

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME (HDS) –

The Head of Democratic Services presented a report providing a provisional Forward Work Programme (FWP) for the Committee for the next Municipal year, considering “Standard”, “Cyclical” and “Other” items.

RESOLVED – T H A T the provisional Democratic Services Committee Forward Work Programme for the 2025/2026 Municipal year be agreed.

Reason for decision

Having regard to the contents of the report to allow for the Committee to have a clearly structured programme of work to support their ongoing work.