

No.

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Remote meeting held on 10th February, 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, E. Goodjohn, S.D Perkes, S.C. Hanks, J. Protheroe and K.P. Mahoney.

Also present: Councillor E. Williams.

ANNOUNCEMENT –

Prior to the commencement of the business of the Committee, the Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer 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 25th November, 2024 be approved as a correct record, subject to minor typographical changes.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

No declarations of interest were received.

UPDATE FROM THE WELSH LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION (WLGA) HEADS OF DEMOCRATIC NETWORK (HDS) –

The Head of Democratic Services provided an update surrounding activity currently happening nationally surrounding the democratic function, including areas such as video conferencing, electoral reform, member training and the development of a scrutiny self-evaluation framework.

Councillor Carroll stated they were concerned with the references to diversity, equalities and inclusion within the update, as many organisations had been dropping said policies and hoped the Council would move away from the stated approach.

No.

The Chair responded that the viewpoint would need to be shared by the Member with Welsh Government, as it was a national policy.

Councillor Thomas stated that changes were not anti-democratic, but around improving democracy and representation of all groups in communities within positions of responsibility, and political party make up.

RESOLVED – T H A T the contents of the report be noted and agreed for the report to be disseminated to all Elected Members.

Reason for decision

To ensure that the Committee and all Elected Members were aware of the work being undertaken on a national basis, and monitored by the WLGA Heads of Democratic Services Network, to support the Council in discharging its Democratic Services function.

LEARNING NEEDS ANALYSIS SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE OUTCOMES (HDS) –

The Democratic Services and Scrutiny Officer presented the report, the purpose of which was to provide Members with future development proposals arising from the Learning Needs Analysis Self-Assessment Exercise conducted in Phase 4 of the Council's Induction and Development Programme.

Appendix A of the report provided an overview of the comments raised by Members in response to the Learning Needs Analysis Self-Assessment Survey 2023 and the Annual Scrutiny Impact Surveys 2023 and 2024, as well as associated commentary from Officers, for the Committee's consideration. Appendix B of the report listed a series of proposed development topics for the Committee's approval, to schedule and disseminate a Member Development Programme Schedule to all Elected Members and Co-opted Members where appropriate.

The Chair suggested that the topics of Child Exploitation and Safeguarding, as well as Community Cohesion, be prioritised and brought forward within the proposed schedule (Appendix B) as they were pertinent issues that had been discussed by Council frequently e.g. in the context of the Vale being a County of Sanctuary.

Councillor Carroll stated they would like the Council to drop its Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) and Unconscious Bias training, and indicated they would not support County of Sanctuary training being mandatory. In response, Councillor Goodjohn noted that the vast majority of training topics were not suggested as mandatory but welcomed the mandatory Rules of Debate and Code of Conduct training, alongside Chairs and Vice-Chairs training to maintain standards as a public authority.

RESOLVED –

(1) T H A T the comments raised by Members in response to the 2023 Learning

No.

Needs Analysis Self-Assessment Survey and Annual Scrutiny Impact Surveys 2023 and 2024, as well as associated commentary from Officers, (Appendix A) be noted.

(2) T H A T the proposed development topics and associated delivery timescales, as presented (Appendix B), be endorsed, subject to the topics of Community Cohesion and Child Exploitation being provided earlier in the schedule during the 2025 calendar year.

Reasons for decisions

(1) Having regard to the contents of the report to meet the Committee's responsibility for overseeing the Council's approach to Member Development in accordance with the Council's Member Development Strategy.

(2) To provide Democratic Officers with approval to schedule and disseminate a Member Development Programme Schedule to all Elected Members (and Co-opted Members where appropriate) based on the proposals as agreed, in line with development topics identified as required by Elected and Co-opted Members themselves prior to the 2027 Local Government Election.

PROVISIONAL 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, and also highlighted that the proposed meeting to be held on the 7th April, 2025 be moved to the 21st March, 2025 to accommodate wider approval timescales, and sought Members' feedback on the FWP.

Councillor Carroll indicated that he was concerned surrounding the timetable for the Reshaping Scrutiny proposals, as this would be a major change and needed a significant amount of time to progress, and therefore suggested that the 2026 Municipal year would be a more appropriate time to make said changes after a longer period of consideration.

The Chair also stated that they felt timescales were tight. In addition, Councillor Thomas made Members aware that the matter was being addressed by the Scrutiny Committee Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group and other Council committees.

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.