

**RHONDDA CYNON TAFF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**MUNICIPAL YEAR 2014-2015**

**DEMOCRATIC SERVICES  
COMMITTEE  
5<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER, 2014**

**Agenda Item No. 5(c)**

**REPORT OF THE HEAD OF  
DEMOCRATIC SERVICES**

**REVIEW OF THE LOCAL  
GOVERNMENT (WALES) MEASURE  
2011**

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**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To inform Members of the review that is currently being undertaken by Welsh Government in respect of the provisions introduced by the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 to support elected members to effectively undertake their representational and scrutiny roles.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Note the information.
- 2.2 Receive a further report following the findings of the Welsh Government into the Review of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011.

**3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 During the latter part of 2009 the then Welsh Assembly Government intended to introduce a Measure on Scrutiny and Political Structures in Welsh Authorities. At that time, Cabinet and Scrutiny Working Groups were established to give consideration to the consultation paper in order that a Council response could be made by the deadline of the 17<sup>th</sup> March, 2010.
- 3.2 On the 10<sup>th</sup> May, 2011, Royal Assent was given to the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 ("the Measure"), which introduced changes to the original document as referred to in the earlier paragraph.
- 3.3 The Measure introduces new duties and powers in the fields of promoting and support membership of Local Authorities, Local Authority Democratic Services, Local Authority functions, Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Audit Committees. It provides powers for Welsh Ministers to issue guidance to which local authorities must have regard.
- 3.4 Since the matter was reported to the Annual Meeting of the Council on the 23<sup>rd</sup> May, 2012, statutory guidance has been published by the Welsh

Government in respect of various sections of the Measure, some of which were considered by this Committee during the consultation processes e.g. Family Absence.

- 3.5 On the 19<sup>th</sup> September of this year, the Leaders and Chief Executives of Welsh Local Authorities were contacted by the Welsh Government indicating that a review was being undertaken on the provisions as introduced by the Measure to support elected members to effectively undertake their representational and scrutiny roles, which would be approached by each Authority nominating four attendees (including the Head of Democratic Services and preferably the Chair of the Democratic Services Committee) to contribute to one of three workshop events which were held during the month of October.
- 3.6 The aim of the workshops was to assess the effectiveness of the creation of the statutory role of the Head of Democratic Services in supporting Members to undertake their representational and scrutiny roles; exploring the impact of current Welsh Government policy in respect of openness and transparency in local government; and seeking to share innovative practice in areas such as support for Scrutiny Committees, identification of Councillor training needs, how Councillors use social media and how broadcasting is used effectively by Councillors to engage with the public and the authority.
- 3.7 Officers and Members from this Authority attended the third and final workshop held on Friday, 24<sup>th</sup> October, 2014 at the Welsh Government Offices at Penllergaer, Swansea and attached to this report are the questions asked at each of the three "Discussion Tables", which were facilitated by officials from the Welsh Government.
- 3.8 The findings from the review will be reported to local authorities by the Welsh Government in the next few months when it will be interesting to see if any changes will be made to any sections of the Measure e.g. whether training in areas such as the Code of Conduct and/or Regulatory functions (Planning and Licensing) will become mandatory.

## Table discussion 1: Structural

### 1.1 Head of Democratic Services (HODS)

- *Does the HDS role provide adequately for the needs of non-executive councillors?*
- *What resources do they have? Is this sufficient to deliver the service?*
- *How would you describe the relationship between scrutiny support and other democratic services?*

### 1.2 Democratic Services Committees (DSC)

- *Prior to the Measure, did your authority have arrangements in place, such as member development working groups, that considered and promoted the development and support needs of members?*
- *What has the Democratic Services Committee achieved in your authority?*
- *How could the effectiveness of the committee be improved?*

### 1.3 Scrutiny

- *Is scrutiny provided with adequate resource within the council? Is support for scrutiny considered by the Democratic Services Committee?*
- *How much effort is made to engage with the public by scrutiny committees?*
- *Are there any examples of effective engagements with the public and what outcomes did it achieve?*
- *Has the prohibition of whipping in scrutiny impacted on the independence and the effectiveness of scrutiny? Please explain your answer.*
- *Are there any aspects of scrutiny, such as possible new powers, updated guidance or amendments to the Measure that would further empower, strengthen and support overview and scrutiny?*



## **Table discussion 2: Supporting members**

### **2.1 Remote attendance**

- *If remote attendance was possible and affordable within your authority, would you wish to implement it? What benefits do you see?*
- *What changes in legislation would be required to make implementation possible*
- *Beyond legislative changes what else would need to be in place to enable remote attendance*

### **2.2 Timing of meetings**

- *What changes to meeting times have happened as a result of the surveys?*
- *Do some committees have the flexibility to meet at varying times depending on the preference or convenience of the majority of members?*

### **2.3 Training and development**

- *Have authorities offered more development opportunities for councillors since the introduction of the Measure?*
- *Do councillors get the training which they need? If not, please explain why.*
- *Should certain areas of development be mandatory for members? If so which ones?*

### **2.4 Family absence**

- *Are these provisions useful?*
- *Are they likely to be more useful if we achieve greater diversity?*
- *Do councillors know of the availability of this facility?*



## **Table discussion 3: Improving public accessibility**

### **3.1 Broadcasting council meetings**

- *Should members of the public/press have an automatic right to record/film meetings? Please explain your answer.*
- *Is the official broadcasting of meetings worthwhile?*
- *Should broadcasting of council meetings become compulsory? If so, should this be for all meetings? If not all, for which committees?*

### **3.2 Council newspapers**

- *Are council newsletters effective tools of communication with the public?*
- *Are they cost effective?*
- *Do they act too much as the voice of the leadership of the council?*

### **3.3 Social media**

- *How much use is made of social media by the council itself?*
- *How much use is made of social media by individual councillors? Are members encouraged or supported to use social media?*
- *When used, is it productive?*
- *How could members be further encouraged to develop SM skills or use SM more effectively*

### **3.4 Annual reports**

- *What are the main reasons for the low uptake in some areas?*
- *How have some councils achieved very high rates of publication?*
- *Has there been any feedback from the public about annual reports? Has your authority undertaken any analysis or evaluation about the impact of annual reports?*
- *Should publication of annual reports become compulsory?*

