

SUBJECT: Governance and Decision-Making

MEETING: Democratic Services Committee

DATE: 12th March 2018

DIVISIONS/WARDS AFFECTED: All

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To provide the committee with an update on arrangements to improve the transparency of decision-making and ensure that arrangements for making decisions are robust and fit for the future

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Committee has a remit to review the adequacy of the arrangements in place to discharge democratic services functions. The Cabinet member has previously stated the need to improve evaluation and closing loop on decisions made by cabinet and a number of changes have been made since the election to achieve this.

3 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Members are invited to consider the effectiveness of decision-making processes following a number of recent changes and whether they are having the desired impact in contributing to a culture of informed and transparent decision-making.
- 3.3 Members are invited to consider whether the changes have adequately addressed issues raised on local and national studies on governance produced by Wales Audit Office.

4 KEY ISSUES

- 4.1 The Democratic Services Committee is ideally placed to ensure that the authority has arrangements in place to take informed and transparent decisions which are subject to effective scrutiny. This is the process of 'how' we make decisions.
- 4.2 The Committee also has a role in ensuring that the authority has effective scrutiny arrangements and is able to challenge and evaluate the decisions that have been made and ensure that the authority learns from them. This about ensuring that decisions have the desired impact.
- 4.3 The approval of a Corporate Plan setting out an ambitious programme of work means that members and officers have clarity on the areas that the organisation will be focusing on over the next four-and-a-half years. Much of the detail still needs to be worked up and subject to scrutiny and decision-making. This is coupled with continuing financial pressures and mean that the pace of change will be relentless with members expected to consider an increasing amount of decisions with more pressing timescales. These decisions could become more complex, generating considerable

interest amongst local people with the need to involve people and ensure transparency and accountability is paramount.

- 4.4 Wales Audit Office have carried out local and national studies on governance. The detailed proposals from these are overseen by Audit Committee. The local study was published in March 2017 and concluded that “The council has a clear strategic approach for significant service changes, although, better information would help Members when deciding the future shape of the council.” Specific proposals for improvement included: Updating the constitution; improving the quality of options appraisals; ensuring that service change reports better reflect stakeholder views to inform decision-making; setting out at the point of decision-making how the impact is going to be measured and monitored and keeping decision-making under review. These were broadly similar to the issues identified across Wales in the national report. These are summarised at appendix 1.
- 4.5 Since the local elections, and the creation of Cabinet portfolio for governance, there have been a number of changes to the report templates used for Council and Cabinet decisions. These now include a specific options appraisal section, an evaluation pro-forma and a clear expectation that officers not only list who has been consulted but also the outcome of that consultation.
- 4.6 Business Support Officers that provide administrative support to senior management team have recently begun to work more closely with Democratic Services Officers using a single planner across the whole organisation to improve clarity and visibility of proposals being discussed at Directorate Management Teams before they enter the member decision-making process. This should also make co-ordination easier allowing select committees to plan scrutiny at an earlier opportunity and prioritise their work programme accordingly. The system included a log of when evaluations will be completed so that these can be examined by the decision-makers and made available to select committees.
- 4.7 Changes that still need to be fully embedded include earlier completion of the Future Generations evaluation template that accompanies reports. These ensure that proposals take account of the council’s well-being objectives and the sustainable development principle and that they fully consider the impact on groups with protected characteristics as outlined in the Equality Act 2010 and put in place actions to address these.
- 4.8 A further change that has been made is the use of member workshops alongside seminars as a way to ensure that emerging issues are not only communicated, but that councillors can engage with them in a more hands-on way.

5. REASONS

- 5.1 To ensure that the organisation has effective governance arrangements in place providing transparency on the way in which decisions are made and evaluated.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 None

7. FUTURE GENERATIONS ASSESSEMENT INCLUDING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS:

7.1 This report does not propose any change in policy or service and so no assessment has been completed.

8. SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS

None

9. AUTHOR

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Good governance when determining significant service changes

This Wales Audit Office Report is available at <http://www.audit.wales/publication/good-governance-when-determining-significant-service-changes>

1. Councils need to better articulate how they will approach making significant changes to services to meet financial and other challenges in the medium term
2. Councils should set out clear governance arrangements for determining significant service changes
3. Councils should consider a range of options for significant service changes supported by appropriate evidence to inform decisions
4. Councils should consult stakeholders on significant service changes and the importance of proactively engaging stakeholders in the development of future service change proposals is likely to increase
5. Councils should develop arrangements to systematically monitor the impact of making significant changes to services
6. Councils should routinely review their decision-making arrangements and make changes to service change decision-making processes where appropriate