

**CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL.**

**Democratic Services Committee  
21<sup>st</sup> September, 2016**

**REPORT BY: Head of Democratic Services**

**SUBJECT: Matters relating to Democratic Services issues**

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**REPORT FOR: Decision, Information and Discussion**

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**1. Public participation at Council meetings**

At the meeting of the Committee on 4<sup>th</sup> July, 2016, Members discussed the general principles which could be used as the basis for developing a protocol for public participation at council meetings.

Following that discussion, officers have developed a draft protocol which is attached to this report for consideration. Once agreed by the Committee the protocol will be submitted to the County Council for consideration and approval.

The Committee further agreed that if the protocol was agreed by the County Council then it should be trialled at a meeting of the Council and then the process reviewed.

<b>RECOMMENDATION</b>	<b>Reason for Recommendation:</b>
(i) That the comment on the draft protocol for public participation at Council meetings. (ii) That subject to any comments received, the draft protocol be approved for submission to the County Council for approval. (iii) To the County Council that the draft protocol be approved and trialled at a meeting of the Council and then the process reviewed by the Democratic Services Committee.	To complete the process for the development of a protocol for public participation at Council meetings.

**2. Provision of the Council diary 2017 to Members**

The Committee considered this matter at a meeting in October, 2013 and agreed that a review be undertaken. Since that date there has been a significant change to the way that committee agendas are produced with the introduction of the Modern electronic system. The introduction of Modern also provides alternatives relating to the production of Members diaries. A

separate report containing the options available and recommendations is attached to this report for consideration.

<b>RECOMMENDATION</b>	<b>Reason for Recommendation:</b>
That the Committee considers the attached report and recommendations therein.	To modernise the process for the production of the Council calendar of meetings and to produce cost savings in the Members' budget

### 3. Members' Annual Reports

As the Committee is aware Councils are required to provide Members with the resources and support to produce annual reports. Reports give a snapshot of a councillor's activities over the last year including membership of committees and attendances, issues taken up on behalf of constituents, development sessions attended and other activities. The reports were first introduced in 2012-13 as part of a Welsh Government initiative to strengthen local democracy.

Officers have recently asked the Welsh Local Government Association [WLGA] for clarification in respect of the timing of Annual Reports in the year of an election, i.e. for the period 2016-17.

The following information has been received:

- Frank Cuthbert [ Welsh Government] has provided the following guidance: "Although it is not spelt out in the guidance a "year" has always been considered to be a municipal year. So local authorities should not enable publication of an annual report in the lead up to an election. Re-elected councillors could produce a report on 2016/17 in, say, June or July of 2017, for publication then. Councillors who ended their term in May 2017 would not then have a report published for their final year, unless the council felt that was for some reason worthwhile".
- Ceredigion County Council – reports are published on the Council's website each year. The links will, however, be removed preceding any Local Government Elections in order to ensure a 'level playing field' for both incumbent and prospective Councillors."

There are concerns about the risk of giving publicity and unfair electoral advantage to councillors who were standing as candidates. However, it could be argued that it could be seen to be unfair to councillors who are seeking re-election to deny them the opportunity to write a report for the 2016/17 period or to make all their reports unavailable to the public.

The options available are as follows:

- Provide Councillors with the opportunity to write a report for the period May – December 2016 to be published no later than the end February 2017. As with all reports officers will review these to ensure they do not contain political statements
- No reports will be written for the 2016-17 period
- Links to previous annual reports on the Council website will be removed.

<b>RECOMMENDATION</b>	<b>Reason for Recommendation:</b>
<p>Members' views are sought in relation to:</p> <p>(i) The preparation and publication of annual reports in the year leading up to a Council election.</p> <p>(ii) Whether links to previous annual reports should be disabled for a period prior to a Council election.</p>	<p>(i) To clarify whether annual reports should be prepared and published in the last year prior to a Council election.</p> <p>(ii) To determine whether annual reports should be available on the Council's website in the last year prior to an election.</p>

#### **4. Local Democracy Week – 10<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> October, 2016**

In preparation for Local Democracy Week in October, officers have been considering what should be the Council's focus to promote democracy during that week. As the County Council election will be taking place in May 2017, it was felt reasonable to consider that some form of awareness raising work to encourage individuals to stand for election might be the way forward.

It is accepted that generally that by this time of year prior to an election the political parties may have already selected the candidates for the various electoral divisions in the County. However, there is a role of the Council's Returning Officer to try to promote the opportunity for individuals to stand for election should they wish to do so. Local Democracy Week in October provided the ideal platform for the Council to undertake some promotional activity.

A discussion relating to what activities were being undertaken by other Councils during Local Democracy Week revealed little information as to what was planned elsewhere. In addition it was clear from early discussion between officers that the Council wished to undertake a greater level of activity during that week, earlier planning was required. This is something that the Council can consider in the future.

Therefore the discussion amongst officers has been around how this awareness raising campaign, commencing during Local Democracy Week should be developed.

As a starting point the Council's Chief Executive as the Returning Officer has agreed to prepare a video blog which can be publicised on the Council's website. This blog will focus on the following:

- Why is democracy important;
- Why become a councillor – what does being a councillor involve;
- What do Councils do;
- Information about Powys County Council;
- What do councillors do;

- How does someone stand for election.

It is then intended to reinforce this initial message with further information and reference material on the Council's website and in the press from October until the date of closure of nominations to stand for election.

<b>RECOMMENDATION</b>	<b>Reason for Recommendation:</b>
That the Committee endorses and supports the awareness raising being undertaken by the Council commencing during Local democracy Week in October, 2016.	To fulfil the role of the Returning Officer in promoting democratic involvement.

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