
DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE
29.05.12

Present: - Councillor Dewi Owen (Chair)

Councillors Anwen J. Davies, Lesley Day, Anne Lloyd Jones, Charles Wyn Jones, Siôn Wyn Jones, Dilwyn Morgan, Gareth Thomas, Mandy Williams-Davies and Huw Edwards (ex officio member).

Cabinet Member: Ioan C. Thomas (Cabinet Member – Customer Care)

Also in attendance:- Harry Thomas (Chief Executive), Dilys Phillips (Head of Democracy and Legal) – (For Item 5), Geraint George (Head of Strategic and Improvement Department), Arwel Ellis Jones (Senior Manager Corporate Commissioning Service), Vera Jones (Members' Manager – Democratic Service) for Items 3 and 6) and Glynda O'Brien (Members' Support and Scrutiny Officer).

Apologies: Councillors Selwyn Griffiths and June Marshall.

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

Resolved: To confirm the Council's resolution at its meeting on 17 May 2012 to elect Councillor Dewi Owen as Chair of this Committee for 2012/13.

2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

Resolved: To elect Councillor Anne Lloyd Jones as Vice-chair of this Committee for 2012/13.

3. TIME OF MEETINGS

Considered the starting time for committee meetings for the coming year.

(a) The Senior Manager – Corporate Commissioning Service reported that guidance was expected from the government regarding the best time to hold meetings. It was anticipated that every authority would consider the matter and it would be possible to conduct a survey amongst all elected members to seek their views regarding the best and most convenient time to hold meetings. It was noted that it was possible to look further at video conferencing equipment in the three areas of Arfon, Dwyfor and Meirionnydd.

(b) During the ensuing discussion the following points were highlighted by individual Members:

1. that evening meetings were more convenient for employed elected members but contrary to the considerations for mothers with young children and school hours.

2. one disadvantage of holding evening meetings was that members were expected to attend local meetings in their constituencies at those times.
 3. the importance of informing members of the dates as soon as possible in order to facilitate members' diaries.
- (c) The Members' Manager Democratic Services explained:
- (i) That it was possible for members to claim costs for child care and also that it was possible for eligible members to claim care costs for dependants who are ill.
 - (ii) That the dates of meetings would be inputted to the Information Port and meetings would be programmed internally across the Council to avoid a clashing.

Resolved: (a) To accept and note the above observations.

(b) To request that the Senior Manager Corporate Commissioning Services in accordance with the government's guidance organises a survey amongst all elected Members to seek their views regarding the best and most convenient time to hold meetings.

4. APPOINTMENT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

Submitted: The Chief Executive's report regarding the nomination of an officer to the post of Head of Democratic Services.

- (a) The Chief Executive set the background to the report and noted the need for the Council under Section 8 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, to nominate one of its officers to the new statutory post of "Head of Democratic Services". It was further noted that it was this Committee that was responsible for the appointment and that the Chief Executive, Monitoring Officer and the Chief Financial Officer could not be appointed Head of Democratic Services.
- (b) The functions of the Head of Democratic Services were elaborated upon and the division between officers supporting the Cabinet and the officers supporting backbench members, the scrutiny committees and other committees were explained following the re-structuring in order that member support duties are the responsibility of the Head of Strategic and Improvement.

It was resolved to accept and note the contents of the report and to formally appoint the Head of Strategic and Improvement to the post of "Head of Democratic Services".

5. PRESENTATION – TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

- (a) A presentation was received from the Head of Democratic Services on the work and responsibilities of this Committee to support all Council members in their work.
- (b) The Members' Manager – Democratic Services listed the support available to members be that via political groups, scrutiny committees, investigations, advice,

processing and payment of members' pay, provision of training together with the development and creating an information port to Members.

(c) Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and the relevant officers responded as follows:

- (i) that the Scrutiny Committees would choose the subjects/issues to be investigated and that the role of this Committee was to ensure that general members had sufficient resources to undertake this. Naturally, it would be necessary to see how the programmes would develop and the subjects should be considered in terms of prioritisation.
- (ii) An assurance was given that the development of Members details would be looked into together with the correct telephone and relevant numbers on the Website.

(ch) In the context of the support received by Members thus far, and their expectations in the future, the following points were highlighted:

- (i) That information regarding contact names in different Council departments would be useful and would ensure a line of communication between officers and Members especially on projects dealing with individual wards.
- (ii) The need to address without delay the official email contacts for members.
- (iii) That it would be beneficial for new Members to receive the assistance of a mentor namely an experienced Member during the first few months.
- (iv) In response, the Senior Manager Corporate Commissioning Services reported that they would contact Political Group Leaders regarding the above request to ascertain if they already had any such arrangements in place. If not, an assurance was given that arrangements could be made on their behalf.
- (v) That it would be useful to send a letter on behalf of the Chair of this Committee to all Council Members to explain the Committee's terms of reference and membership in order that fellow Members could refer issues of concern for the Committee to resolve or in consultation with the relevant officers.
- (vi) In response to a query, it was confirmed that it would be possible to consider relevant constitutional issues in the Democratic Services Committee.
- (vii) In terms of contact between this Committee and the Council the Head of Democratic Services explained that contact was vitally important and that annual reports would be submitted to the full Council on how support for Members will be developed. It was further noted that the Committee was entitled to make recommendations on issues to be resolved.
- (viii) In the context of the budget, the Head of Democratic Services explained that there were different elements to the budget and that wages and expenses were set nationally and staff support etc had been established on the basis of

savings targets as part of the cuts facing the Council over the next three years.

- (ix) In terms of resources for research stemming from the decisions of the Scrutiny Committee, the Head of Democratic Services noted that the Scrutiny Committees would have to prioritise and agree on a Work Programme. Currently, it was anticipated that one investigation could be achieved at a time by every scrutiny committee.
- (x) The importance of this Committee to monitor that sufficient resources are available for the Department to operate effectively.

(d) The Senior Manager Corporate Commissioning Services reported of the need for the Committee to prioritise issues for their programme of work and the following were suggested as initial issues for discussion in September / December / March.

1. **Information Port** – a monitoring report on the pilot scheme and implementation of the i-pads.
2. **Wages and payments** – it was noted that it was possible for the full Council to allocate a higher wage to two other posts, however, the work pressure of different posts would have to be reviewed before doing so.
3. **Training and Development Programme** – e.g. personal development programme for individual Members
4. **Information** – the importance of sharing different information effectively.

It was resolved to approve the following issues to be scheduled in consultation with the Chair, on the work programme of this Committee:

- (i) **Information Port**
- (ii) **Wages and Payments**
- (iii) **Training and Development Programme**
- (iv) **Cascading Information**

CHAIRMAN

The meeting commenced at 10.00am and concluded at 11.35am