
DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE 29/09/15

Present: Councillor Tom Ellis (Chair);
Councillor Anne Lloyd Jones (Vice-Chair)

Councillors: Annwen Daniels, E. Selwyn Griffiths, Sian Gwenllian, Annwen Hughes, Charles Wyn Jones, Dilwyn Morgan, Michael Sol Owen, Lesley Day, Jean Forsyth and Jason Humphreys

Officers: Geraint Owen (Head of Democratic Services), Arwel Ellis Jones (Senior Manager, Democracy and Delivery), Vera Jones (Democratic Services Manager), Huw Ynyr (Senior Manager, Information Technology and Transformation) and Eirian Roberts (Member Support and Scrutiny Officer).

Apology: Councillor Anwen J. Davies

1. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

Councillor Lesley Day declared a personal interest in item 5 on the agenda – Consultation to the draft directions by the Welsh Government to the review by the Boundary Commission Wales – as she had a high number of students in her ward.

The member was not of the opinion that it was a prejudicial interest and she participated fully in the discussion on the item.

2. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 9 June, 2015 as a true record.

3. CONSULTATION ON THE DRAFT DIRECTIONS BY THE WELSH GOVERNMENT TO THE REVIEW BY THE BOUNDARY COMMISSION WALES

Submitted – a report by the Head of Democratic Services noting, as part of its programme of local government reform, that the Welsh Government would require the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission Wales to conduct reviews of electoral arrangements for proposed new local authority areas. The Democratic Services Committee members were asked provide their views on the Draft Directions, to be presented to the Full Council, and to encourage their fellow members to respond to the consultation.

In addition to responding to the consultation's specific questions, the proposed changes for the 2017 elections that would lead to a likely reduction in the number elected members from 75 to 66 were discussed. Some members supported this on the grounds that there was currently an imbalance between the size of the current electoral wards, the councillor to elector ratio, that the reduction had been noted as a possible cut that would be subject to public consultation, and that it would have been better if the change was partially made in 2017. However, the majority of

members were of the view that such a short-term change would be inappropriate with such a fundamental change in boundaries to follow so soon with the reorganisation.

RESOLVED to recommend to the Council:-

- (a) To submit the observations on the content of the Draft Directions to the Boundary Commission that are attached as Appendix A to these minutes.**
- (b) To write to the Welsh Government to state the view that it would be inappropriate to implement the proposed changes for the 2017 elections with such a fundamental change in the boundaries to follow so soon with the reorganisation.**

4. TECHNOLOGY UPDATE

Submitted – the report of the Senior Manager, Democracy and Delivery and the Democratic Services Manager updating Members on matters relating to information technology, including the recent changes to the Council's electronic systems, further i-pad training and Moderngov.

The Senior Manager noted that 12 members outside the Cabinet had submitted comments on the changes to the Council's electronic systems, which meant that members could only access their 'cynghorydd' e-mails through the i-pad. He suggested that he would contact those members again to establish the nature of their needs, but if they remained unhappy, that a licence should be provided for them.

The Senior Information Technology and Transformation Manager explained the user security reasons behind the changes to the electronic systems. He also explained that there would be further consideration given to mobile phone e-mail access, as it remained unclear how that could be implemented widely without breaching security rules.

During the discussion, members referred to some of the difficulties faced as a result of introducing the new arrangements, including:-

- Difficulty in responding in writing to a consultation document
- No 3G on the i-pad.
- Was the lifespan of an i-pad shorter than the lifespan of a computer?
- The continual development and evolution of the Apple and Microsoft systems.
- Difficulty in opening attachments.
- Unable to use a USB with the i-pad.
- Eye strain.

In response to a comment by a member that they had not received prior warning that the change was going to happen, the Senior Manager, Democracy and Delivery noted that two messages had been announced via Rhaeadr, the principle method of communication with members.

Some dissatisfaction was expressed that members were not allowed to use a second e-mail account on the Council's website, but the Senior Manager, Democracy and Delivery explained that this was being addressed separately, to ensure that the committee had all the relevant information to hand prior to making a decision.

The managers responded to some of the difficulties raised, and noted:-

- There had been extensive investment in training over the past months in order to extend the use of the i-pads as far as possible.
- The new Moderngov App should eradicate many of the barriers, e.g. documents would be installed directly on the machine, without needing to be downloaded.
- The i-pads would certainly remain until the end of this Council, consideration would need to be given to what would happen with the new Council in 2017.
- Although the i-pad could not do everything, it had excellent functionality.

With regard to a comment that Cabinet members were treated differently, the Senior Manager, Democracy and Delivery explained that a business case had been submitted on behalf of Cabinet members, noting that they required access and the ability to work on documents etc., due to their specific responsibilities, but that it would also be possible to respond to cases on behalf of other members.

Some members expressed their willingness to pay for a licence themselves to gain access to their e-mails from a computer, but it was explained that this would be contrary to the guidance of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales.

The Democratic Services Manager provided an update on the pilot scheme to provide further i-pad training with an external expert, and summarised the observations made by those members who had received the training.

RESOLVED

- (a) Members should be provided with access to their e-mails from a personal computer or laptop (but not from a mobile phone) if required, and a note would be placed on Rhaeadr with this information.**
- (b) To contact the 12 members who had submitted comments on the changes to the Council's electronic systems, and respond to any further comments submitted by members, in order to establish the nature of their needs, and if they remained unhappy, to provide them with access to their e-mails from a personal computer or laptop (but not from a mobile phone).**
- (c) To develop the i-pad training by**
 - **Offering another formal course for other members;**
 - **Developing a team of members who can offer training and advice to their fellow members;**
 - **Consider offering 'pages' to those who had seen the app, and who were certain that they would use it;**
 - **Providing information sheets to members on how to make best use of the i-pad.**

5. DIVERSITY SUB-GROUP

Submitted – a report by the Democratic Services Manager updating members on the work of this Sub-group and the next steps. It was noted that the sub-group would meet soon to consider how to act locally on the national recommendations made in this field.

RESOLVED to accept and note the contents of the report.

6. MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES

Submitted – a report by the Head of Democratic Services providing an update to members on the decisions regarding the publication of the members' remuneration table for 2014/15.

A question was raised regarding whether the Chair's permission had been sought when acting contrary to the committee's decision at its last meeting to submit information regarding allowances in *Newyddion Gwynedd*. The Senior Manager, Democracy and Delivery responded by explaining that an editorial decision had been taken not to include the information this time in order to prioritise the Gwynedd Challenge.

RESOLVED to accept and note the contents of the report.

7. MEMBERS' ANNUAL REPORTS 2014/15

Submitted – a report by the Head of Democratic Services providing an update to members about the reports published in 2014/15. He noted that he had hoped to hold a discussion at this meeting about the obstacles and opportunities in order to facilitate the arrangements for 2015/16, but due to a lack of time, he suggested that the matter should be presented at the next meeting.

RESOLVED to hold a discussion at the next meeting on the obstacles and opportunities in relation to members' annual reports in 2015/16.

8. DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

Submitted – the committee's work programme.

RESOLVED to note and approve the work programme.

The meeting commenced at 10.30am and concluded at 12.45pm.

Appendix AQuestion 1:Do you think the suggested ratio provides for effective and convenient local government?

No. The ratio is totally inappropriate for a rural and dispersed area. Currently, Gwynedd's ratio as a county is 1,089 with Gwynedd's wards comprising of between 480 and 2,428 and the two largest wards having 2 members.

A method that uses a simple ratio based on the number of electors is a matter of concern. This does not acknowledge the workload faced by local councillors due to students who are not registered as electors, and the seasonal population due to the visitor industry and second homes.

It is also entirely contrary to the Welsh Government's direction, and its consultation document "Reforming Local Government – Power to Local People" which refers to the importance of "Member-led community governance". It is difficult to see how councillors could cope with this challenging role in addition to their institutional responsibilities as committee members etc. if they serve such large wards.

If such a move occurred, it would be necessary to change to full-time councillor arrangements in order to cope with the workload.

Question 2: Do you think there is a minimum number of councillors required to ensure the effective and democratic working of a local authority? If so, what is it and why?

A minimum number is required for effective democracy, but the types of figures noted are far too low. Within the Cabinet system, with the need for around 10 members in a cabinet, leaving the remainder of the Council's work (Scrutiny, Planning, Licensing etc.) to such a low number of councillors would place an unreasonable workload upon them. The minimum number should be at least 45-50 members.

The above observations are based on a view on the existing workload of councils. This would evidently increase significantly following reorganisation in fields such as Planning and Licensing, with an increase in the number of applications requiring attention.

The other matter that should be considered would be the increased complexity in the allocation of seats to political groups with fewer members within the council. It could be more difficult to fill seats, and the burden placed upon a small number of councillors would increase.

Question 3: Do you think a minimum number of elected members per local authority should be specified in the Draft Directions?

Yes, as explained in the answer to question 2. The Draft Directions should acknowledge the governance requirements of running a modern council. However, once this has taken place, each council should be considered separately, and each individual council's situation should be examined. Travelling distances should be considered (travelling to meetings as well as travelling to electors within the ward), in addition to the need to have wards are representative of natural communities.

Question 4: Do you think that there should be a cap on the maximum number of elected members per local authority? If so, what do you think the maximum number should be and why?

It is probably sensible to impose a cap, but this should reflect the individual council's area.

Question 5: Do you agree that each ward within a local authority area should have roughly the same number of electors per elected member?

No. The nature of individual wards, even within the area of one council area are so varied. Therefore it would not make any sense to do this. It is entirely appropriate to determine a range in relation to the Boundary Commission's work, but the Commission should have the freedom to make exceptions if the character of a natural community means that it makes no sense to combine it with another area.

On a related point, it is recommended that multi-member wards should be avoided as having a single member for each ward simplifies matters for residents and councillors.

Question 6: What effect should the particular characteristics of an area have on the number of councillors needed to represent the population?

These should be the main considerations and they should be very influential. If councils are truly representative of their areas, all the area's features (population, travelling distances, the character of natural communities etc.) should influence the decision.

Question 7: Do you agree that commonly used Welsh language names for wards do not also need an English language equivalent? If not, do you think that each ward should have an English and Welsh name?

Agree that there is no need for an English language equivalent for wards with commonly used Welsh language names.