
DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

TUESDAY, 15 NOVEMBER 2022

PRESENT:

Councillors:

Dewi Owen (Chair), Stephen Churchman, Anwen J. Davies, Anwen Hughes, Eryl Jones-Williams, Anne Lloyd-Jones, Linda Ann Jones, Olaf Cai Larsen, Edgar Wyn Owen, Gwynfor Owen, Llio Elenid Owen, Arwyn Herald Roberts, John Pughe, Beca Roberts and Menna Jones (Cabinet Member for Corporate Support).

Officers: Vera Jones (Democracy and Language Services Manager), Geraint Owen (Corporate Director), Ian Jones (Head of Corporate Support Department), Annes Sion (Democracy Team Leader) and Sioned Mai Jones (Democracy Services Officer)

Present for item 6: Siôn Gwynfryn Williams (Communication and Engagement Manager).

Present for item 8: Carey Cartwright (Organisational Learning and Development Manager) and Cara Williams (Member Development Officer).

1. APOLOGIES

No apologies were received.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received.

3. URGENT ITEMS

No urgent matters were raised.

4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee, held on 5 July 2022, as a true record.

5. HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

DECISION

To appoint Ian Jones, Head of Corporate Support to the statutory post of Head of Democratic Services.

The Chair of the Committee expressed his gratitude to the former Head of Democratic Services for his work over the past seven years and wished him a successful future in his new post as Corporate Director.

The Corporate Director thanked the chair for the kind words and conveyed his appreciation to both the present and past members of this Committee for the joint-working over the years. He noted his thanks to the Chairs over the years and to the Democracy and Language Services Manager and the team for their support.

It was explained that it was necessary to appoint a new Head of Democratic Services as it was a statutory role.

It was reported that Ian Jones had now been appointed as the Head of Corporate Support Department and it was proposed to accept the recommendation that Ian Jones be appointed as Head of Democratic Services. Committee members expressed their confidence that the Head of Corporate Support would undertake this function with due respect.

Following a unanimous vote, the Head of Corporate Support was welcomed to the role. He expressed his thanks for the support on his appointment as the Head of Democratic Services and reported that it was an honour to undertake the role. He reported that he looked forward to working together and support the Members in their work over the next few years.

There were no further observations.

6. SUPPORT FOR COUNCILLORS

RESOLVED:

To note the observations and accept the information.

The report was presented reporting on the results of the questionnaire that was sent to all the Members in October 2022.

It was noted that the first part of the questionnaire queried Members about the timing of Council meetings. The results were reported, noting that 42 members had answered the questionnaire in full. It was noted that the results showed a willingness to adjust some of the timings of Council meetings, such as moving the start time of the Full council from 1:00pm to 1:30pm. The results showed that members were keen to continue with the current timings of the Scrutiny Committees but some had expressed a desire to change the time of the Planning Committee to begin at 10:00am. It was added that this change could cause difficulties in conducting sites visits.

It was reported that the results would be used as the basis for the 2023/24 meetings calendar. It was confirmed that further discussions and work was required in considering the start time of the Planning Committee before reaching a conclusion. It was reported that the questionnaire had highlighted the need for a timely break during Committees; it was noted that this would be addressed and discussed with the Chairs of different Committees.

It was noted that the second part of the report referred to the Members' satisfaction with the Democracy Services team and the comments noted in the report were referred to. It was reported that the third part of the report dealt with communication matters and the unit's aim of conveying messages in a timely and convenient manner to Members. It was noted that the results were satisfactory overall.

To close, it was noted that comments had been presented such as praising the informal Women who are Councillors sessions, noting that these sessions encouraged collaboration amongst female Councillors and raised their confidence. Positive comments had been received on the training programme as well as comments on Councillors' safety.

During the discussion the following observations were made:

- A member expressed their wish to continue with the current time of the Planning Committee. It was believed that holding the Committees in the afternoon worked well and enabled site visits to easily take place on the morning of the Committee. It was noted that it would be more costly to the Council should site visits have to be conducted on another day.

- A member commented on Councillors' safety following an extraordinary meeting of the Full Council in August, and they wondered whether the Council's security arrangements needed to be reconsidered? It was reported that two Councillors had received serious threats in the aftermath of the meeting in question – it was questioned whether the Police should be present when controversial matters were discussed.
- It was believed that the political landscape had changed and there was concern that further such events would be seen in future. It was also noted that Councillors had a responsibility to be mindful of what they were conveying, and the language used.
- Members expressed appreciation that risk assessments were now being undertaken.
- It was noted that it was part of a Councillor's role to challenge, for example, members of the Scrutiny Committees and that there was responsibility to speak on behalf of the people they represented. It was added that it was important to consider the code of conduct when challenging.
- The service was thanked for its assistance.

In response to the observations:

- It was added that further considerations would be made in producing the 2023/24 meetings calendar and that reporting on the questionnaire's results was only the initial step. It was noted that consideration would be given to the suggestion of sending a further questionnaire to the Planning Committee members.
- The officer thanked members for their comments on staff and Councillors' safety and reported that specific steps had been taken since the meeting in August. It was reported that risk assessments were now undertaken before every hybrid Committee in order to avoid disruption of meetings and to reduce the risk to Members, the public and the Council's officers. It was added that the risk assessments were only one step, and that much work took place jointly with the Health and Safety Unit.
- It was reported that it would be reasonable to report on the progress with implementing risk assessments and to include it as an item for this Committee in future, so that the Members could see the progress made.

7. LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND ELECTIONS (WALES) ACT 2021

RESOLVED:

- a) To accept the report and to note the observations on the Petitions Scheme which will be recommended to the Cabinet.**
- b) To identify Councillors Dewi Owen, Beca Roberts and Stephen Churchman as members to assist with the work of developing a 'Research Support and Services for Councillors' protocol.**

The item was presented, setting out the context of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. It was explained that the report referred to three elements of the Act and provided the Committee with an update on the relevant actions and the work that had been carried out to date in accordance with the requirements of the Act. It was noted that an operational team from the Democracy and Language Services and the Legal Services had been established to undertake the work.

It was reported that the Act required Local Authorities to publish a Participation Strategy to identify the ways in which local people were encouraged to participate in the Council's decision-making process. It was noted that the operational team had been developing a draft strategy and that the strategy would be developed over time as good practices emerged. It was added that they were required to conduct a public consultation on the Strategy, and it was aimed to present the findings of the consultation in the final version of the strategy to the Full Council in March.

It was noted that another requirement in the Act was to produce and publish a Petitions Scheme. It was noted that this was nothing new to the Council, but there were no specific guidelines in place at present setting out the steps. It was added that the Scheme had been included in the report as an appendix, and after receiving the Committee's observations today the Scheme would be submitted to the Cabinet at the end of November, to be recommended for adoption by the Full Council in December. It was added that the Officers would be grateful to receive any comments by the Committee.

The final requirement was to address the guidelines on Research Support and Services for Councillors. It was noted that the document stated that every Member should be able to access a variety of information and advice; this protocol was currently being developed. It was noted that the Committee was required to identify three Members to assist with this work so as to ensure input from Members.

During the discussion the following observations were made:

- Clarity was sought regarding the possibility of submitting a paper petition rather than on e-mail, and around the number of signatories on the petition. Concern was expressed that petitions with fewer than 100 names would be rejected, and it was believed that this would affect matters in small villages. A member asked that the wording be reconsidered.
- A member sought clarity regarding the point about members of the public being allowed to ask a question in the Full Council, and asked whether this necessitated a change to the Constitution?
- Reference was made to two cases where a Member had asked two Heads of Department for information; they had received a satisfactory from one Head, but believed that the response from the other Head was disappointing.
- It was questioned how useful petitions were, and noted that over 100 signatures could be collected easily – the member was concerned what topics could be brought forward. It was believed that it was important to be able to filter the petitions and to have robust guidelines in place regarding what was acceptable.
- The Petitions Scheme was welcomed which would give an explanation of the process to the public.
- Three names were proposed to assist with the work of Research Support and Services for Councillors.

In response to the observations:

- The officer thanked the members for their fair comments on the Petitions Scheme and noted that the relevant changes would be made in order to be clearer and more specific in the Plan. It was confirmed that the Council would have discretion to accept petitions with fewer than 100 signatories and that they would be considered.
- It was confirmed that the Constitution already referred to the right of members of the public to ask a question in the Full Council, and the aim was to highlight this right to the public. It was noted that there was a specific arrangement in place which included being notified in advance of the question.
- The comments and responses to Members' enquiries were welcomed, and the Members were encouraged to discuss individual examples with the Corporate Director who led the work of looking at how the Council responded to Members' enquiries.
- It was reported that there were different ways of responding to petitions - these included a direct response by the Cabinet Member or a discussion in the Cabinet or in a Scrutiny Committee. It was added that the Scheme would explain the procedure of submitting a petition to the Council as the public might possibly not be aware at present because there were no clear guidelines.

8. LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT PROVISION FOR MEMBERS

RESOLVED:

To accept the report, noting the observations submitted.

An overview of the Learning and Development Provision for Members was presented, highlighting successes, challenges and developments. It was reported that a choice of virtual and face-to-face training was offered in order to offer variety to the Members, but also to encourage less travelling.

It was added that the Learning and Development Unit would be grateful to receive comments on the provision so they could adapt and improve to try to respond to Members' requirements. It was noted that the Elected Member Development Programme was evolving, and was a combination of requests from the Council Officers and Members. The Members were encouraged to give their opinion on what they wished to see in the Programme.

During the discussion the following observations were made:

- It was expressed that the Covid period had changed lives and that the offer of virtual training was beneficial to many as it saved travel time for Councillors and saved money for the Council.
- The standard of the training was believed to be very good.
- A member expressed their view that the virtual courses or training were more difficult to understand and remember compared with those that were held face-to-face where Members could discuss and talk together. The member believed that these were more effective.
- The above opinion was reiterated, noting that face-to-face training was more interesting.
- It was noted that it would be interesting to see a list of which training the Members had attended and were required to attend, especially with mandatory training.
- It was reported that the Council used to offer training on how to deal with the press e.g. television or radio interviews, and this training was commended. It was asked whether something similar would be offered during the coming months.
- Another member supported the above observation regarding the benefit of receiving training on dealing with the press as well as an element of training on public speaking.
- A member enquired about the procedure of providing feedback after attending training.
- A comment was made that more training relating to Acts and the legal side would be beneficial, in order to have better clarity of these matters.
- The Learning and Development Unit were thanked for their work.

In response to the observations:

- It was expressed that it was important to offer a variety of virtual and face-to-face training and that the unit was attempting to strike the right balance.
- It was noted that members could see a list of which training individual Members had attended on the Staff Development Module under My Training Record. The Member Development Officer could send an e-mail to the Members explaining where to find this record.
- It was reported that a training session on dealing with the press could be arranged should the Members so wish. It was added that historically, this training was offered to Cabinet Members or Chairs, but it was agreed that it should be offered more widely. It was noted that the sessions for Cabinet Members had been arranged for the beginning of 2023; the unit would discuss when would be timely to offer the training to the remaining Members.

- The officer took the opportunity to refer to the Personal Development Review that was available to every Member which was an opportunity to have an individual conversation with the Learning and Development Unit to identify different fields, opportunities or priorities to be included in their personal development programme.
- It was confirmed that a feedback form was sent to Members following the training.
- It was confirmed that there was more training to come, including training relating to Acts. It was noted that the unit had focused on the mandatory training mainly since the Elections in May 2022. Softer training, for example Quick Reading would be offered over the next few years.

9. THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL FOR WALES'S DRAFT REPORT

RESOLVED:

To accept the report noting the Committee's observations for formulating a response to the Independent Remuneration Panel's consultation on the draft report and on the arrangements for reviewing senior salaries.

The report was submitted which recommended increasing Councillors' basic salary to £17,600, which was a 4.76% increase. Observations were requested to enable the Council to formulate a response to the Independent Remuneration Panel's draft report consultation which outlined the changes proposed for the 2023/24 financial year. It was explained that the Panel's responsibility was to set the salary levels of Wales's Councillors, and that their role was fully independent.

It was added that Members were not obliged to accept the salary, they were entitled to surrender the salary and would have to do so in writing to the Head of Democratic Services.

It was reported that the maximum number of senior salaries that could be paid was 18, and the report detailed recommendations from the Panel's perspective. It was added that 17 of the 18 senior salaries had been allocated for 2022/23, as a result of the changes in appointing a Lay Member as Chair of the Governance and Audit Committee. The Committee was requested to review the situation for 2023/24. It was added that a list of the senior salaries could be seen in paragraph 17 of the report.

It was noted that the report referred to reviewing the responsibilities of Committee Chairs, therefore the Democracy team would try to assess the work pressures and responsibilities on the Chairs over the coming months. The results would be reported at the next meeting of the Democracy Services Committee in March 2023, in order to draw up a recommendation for the annual meeting of the Full Council in May.

During the discussion the following observations were made:

- A comment was made that Members had already been criticised for accepting a salary increase.
- It was noted that Members could claim care costs reimbursements to assist them with childcare and that they were entitled to maternity leave and it was questioned whether all Members were aware of this.
- It was added that this also applied to carers with dependants, and that it was important to promote the support that was available.
- Disappointment was expressed that there was no difference in the Salaries of Town Councillors and Councillors of rural areas. It was added that Councillors in urban areas did not need to use their cars or pay to hire rooms for holding surgeries, meaning that they saved a lot of money compared with Councillors in rural wards. It

was believed that the lack of consideration to the added costs for rural Councillors was unfair.

- It was reiterated that the fairest way of determining which Committee Chairs should receive the senior salary would be to look at their individual role and workload.

In response to the observations:

- It was noted that the Service was continuing to take steps to raise awareness of what was available to Members in terms of reimbursement of care costs. Reference was made to the Members' Handbook which referred to what was available.
- It was noted that all the information was available in the full report by the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales, and the Democracy and Language Services Manager could send a copy of the full report to the Members should they wish.
- It was added that the Service could arrange to include the information in a more obvious place on the Members' Intranet.
- It was added that Officers would question Committee Chairs about their responsibilities and the demands there were on them as Committee Chairs in order to receive their comments for further consideration during the March meeting of this Committee.

The meeting commenced at 13:00 and concluded at 14:50.

CHAIR