

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE 16 NOVEMBER 2021

Present:

Councillors:

Anne Lloyd Jones (Chair), Annwen Daniels, Judith Humphreys, Eryl Jones-Williams, Cai Larsen, Linda Ann Jones, Edgar Wyn Owen, Gwynfor Owen, Robert Dewi Owen, Dewi Wyn Roberts, Mair Rowlands.

Officers: Geraint Owen (Head of Corporate Support Department), Iwan Evans (Head of Legal Services), Vera Jones (Democracy and Language Services Manager), Annes Sion (Democracy Team Leader) and Natalie Lloyd Jones (Democracy Services Officers).

Also in attendance:

Councillor Dyfrig Siencyn (Council Leader)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Anwen Hughes.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

None to note.

3. URGENT ITEMS

None to note.

4. MINUTES

It was agreed that the minutes of the previous committee meeting held on 29 June 2021 were accurate.

5. MEETINGS FRAMEWORK

DECISION

To approve the Committee Framework to be submitted before the Full Council in December.

The report was presented by the Head of Corporate Support Department who noted that there had been several discussions about the meetings framework for the future. He explained that the Full Council had agreed on interim arrangements and that it was intended to present this report to the Full Council on 2 December, 2021.

The Democracy and Language Services Manager noted that the report was a foundation for the future to ensure a sustainable framework for the Committees. The Committee was reminded of the period when it was established which committees should be webcast, namely based on the meetings that were of most interest to the public and, therefore, the same principle was used in order to choose the hybrid and virtual only Committees.

It was noted that the Full Council, Cabinet, Planning Committee and Scrutiny Committee would be held as hybrid meetings. It was explained that all other Committees and meetings would be virtual only.

The Head of Legal Services added that, statutorily, there were only two choices, namely meetings that are virtual only, hybrid or a combination of both. He added that it was a matter of deciding the best procedure in order to ensure access for the public and to promote democracy.

During the discussion the following observations were made:

- Members agreed with the report and it was noted that they understood the logic and the principles. However, from experience, it was noted that hybrid meetings could be frustrating for example they could be difficult to chair.
- It was asked whether resources would be available for councillors to attend virtually from Council offices if they happened to be there for other meetings.
- It was agreed that the standard of hardware may be high, however, it was noted that the standard of internet connection right across Gwynedd was not good. A member added that technical problems could affect the timing of meetings.
- A comment was added that the arrangements allowed councillors from areas a considerable distance from Caernarfon to spend more times on ward matters and less time travelling to Committees.
- Concern was expressed regarding the arrangements of hybrid meetings in terms of chairing and fairness for members.
- There was agreement regarding the good practice of starting meeting earlier so that all members could ensure they could connect to the technology.
- It was suggested that meetings should be started earlier in order to give time to resolve technical problems.
- It was accepted that hybrid methods resulted in a wider representation amongst councillors.
- A question was asked about the procedure for closed Committees e.g. Licensing

The Head of Corporate Support Department responded to the above as follows:

- It had been ensured that there was provision for members to access an office to be a part of a virtual meeting
- The Democracy and Language Services Manager added that the service was looking at the provision for new members from 2022.
- She added that the Hybrid experience was very different to the old video-conferencing system.
- It was noted that initial piloting tests had been successful with the chair joining virtually and in the chamber.
- In response to the question regarding closed Committees, it was noted that the Licensing Committee had not been identified as one which would be held as hybrid.
- The Head of Legal Services added that, statutorily, only two types of meetings existed by now, namely either hybrid or virtual. He added that every member had a right to attend remotely.

- He also added that the right to attend remotely did not differentiate based on role, therefore a Chair could attend remotely also.
- The Committee was thanked for its support.

6. ELECTIONS - MAY 2022

DECISION

- a) To accept the report.
- b) Establish an Elections Sub-group with five members of the Committee.

The report was presented by the Democracy Team Leader to update the members regarding the work of the Democracy team in preparing for the 2022 elections.

An overview of the democracy week which had been held to raise awareness on social media was given, and it was added that the Council would continue to share messages over the coming weeks and months.

She added that a question and answer session had been held and that another one would be held in January with the support of the elections team.

It was asked whether it would be possible to create an election sub-group to give opinion on matters such as the intranet, an information booklet for councillors, and the training schedule.

Members' attention was drawn to the members intranet as several updates had been made to it.

During the discussion the following observations were made:

- A comment was made that details of which officers to contact for various matters should be provided.
- The following members agreed to be a part of the members sub-group: Councillors Dewi Roberts, Gwynfor Owen, Anne Lloyd Jones, Mair Rowlands, Dewi Owen.

7. GWYNEDD COUNCIL DIVERSITY STATEMENT

DECISION

To accept the report and support the Diversity Statement and recommend it to the Full Council meeting on 2 December, 2021.

The report was presented for information by the Democracy and Language Services Manager, and members were reminded that the committee had already adopted the statement at the full Council meeting.

A work programme to fulfil the statement was presented.

No further observations were received from members.

8. DRAFT REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL FOR WALES

DECISION

To accept the report and note the observations received.

The Democracy and Language Services Manager presented the report, which involved assisting with planning a response to the draft consultation. It was noted that the main decisions had been outlined within the report.

It was added that a decision had been made this year to recommend bringing the salary level of Elected Members to the level they should be. Consequently, it was noted that the proposed salary increase to £16,800 from 2022 onwards for elected Members.

Further observations were given by the Council Leader outlining the Members' experience during the Covid-19 period which had showed that the work of local councils was critically important to our communities.

He added that Local Government should be considered as equal in terms of the role within society as any other tier of Government whether central or local Government.

In relation to the salary increases for members, he noted that the salary was to allow people without another source of income to stand as Councillor.

During the discussion the following observations were made:

- There was agreement with the Leader's comments, and reference was made to a point in the report involving Community councils, that is, that it was not fair for anyone to have to vote on their own salary.
- The point was raised that Chairs worked very hard and that they had additional work; however, this may not be public knowledge and that the public's attention should be drawn to this work.
- Concern was expressed that people would think that councillors were increasing their own salaries whereas it was an independent panel making the decision.
- It was noted that though many councillors were retired and did not depend on the income, offering an equal salary would ensure that there would be an opportunity for more people to stand for election.
- In relation to the discussion on diversity in democracy, it was noted that it was difficult to do the job of a Councillor properly if an individual works as well. It was added that young people could not afford to be a full-time councillor only without having a job on the side.
- The Committee's attention was drawn to the care cost allocation as very few claimed this despite it being anonymous.
- It was asked what the procedure was if a Councillor wished to refuse the salary increase.

In response the Democracy and Language Services Manager noted that an individual member would need to write to the Head of Democracy Services to refuse the salary increase if that was their wish.

9. MEMBER SATISFACTION SURVEY

DECISION:

To accept the report and note the observations received.

The Democracy Team Leader presented the report and responses following the questionnaire were shared.

She noted that the team was eager to improve the service provided and had therefore asked Members about their opinions.

The data gathered and comments received were shared.

During the discussion the following observations were made:

- A member noted that if a Councillor did not respond that this showed that they were satisfied with the service received.
- A member added that he was pleased that the officers had contacted him to discuss the comments in order resolve matters quickly.

The meeting commenced at 14:00 and concluded at 15:40

CHAIR