

DEMOCRACY SERVICES COMMITTEE THURSDAY, 17 FEBRUARY 2022

PRESENT:

Councillors:

Anne Lloyd Jones (Chair), Gwynfor Owen, Annwen Hughes, Olaf Cai Larsen, Edgar Wyn Owen, Linda Ann Jones, Judith Mary Humphreys, Eryl Jones-Williams, Hefin Underwood, Anwen J Davies and Dewi Owen.

Officers: Iwan Evans (Head of Legal Services), Vera Jones (Democracy and Language Services Manager), Annes Sion (Democracy Team Leader), Sioned Mai Jones (Democracy Services Officer) and Ffion Bryn Jones (Democracy Services Officer).

1. APOLOGIES

An apology had been received from Geraint Owen (Head of Corporate Support Department).

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

There were no declarations of personal interest.

3. URGENT ITEMS

No urgent items were raised.

4. MINUTES

The Chair accepted the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee, held on 16 November 2021, as a true record.

5. UPDATE ON THE MAY 2022 ELECTIONS

RESOLVED:

To accept the report and to note the information.

The item was presented by the Democracy Service Team Leader.

It was noted that a lot of organising and planning had been happening behind the scenes for around a year in preparation for the May 2022 Elections. She announced that information sessions for prospective councillors would be held virtually on 28 February and on 7 March. It was explained that these sessions would be a good opportunity for applicants to have an opportunity to ask any questions that concerned them and to share relevant information.

She went on to explain that preparations were in place for the welcome and induction days for the councillors that would be elected in the elections. It was explained that the plans for the welcome days this year were in line with the comments and feedback received following the 2017 elections. It was noted as a part of these plans that arrangements were being made for members of the democracy team to update the website with the election results efficiently on results day.

During the discussion the following observations were made:

- Enquiries were made about the guidance being provided to applicants before the election. It was explained that the electoral period would begin on 18 March, and would end on 5 April. It was noted that robust guidance would be given in the information sessions and this guidance would be placed on the website as soon as it was finalised.
- It was asked whether there was an intention for the election plans to be adapted as had been done with the Senedd Elections in 2021, in compliance with the Covid-19 regulations. In response, it was noted that the Elections Team would be making these arrangements and publishing them once finalised, ensuring that the Covid arrangements were taken into account. It was also noted that a system of confirming the election results on-line within minutes of their announcement would reduce the number of people who needed to be in the election halls.
- Following the changes to the wards, it was asked whether the electoral roll and polling stations had been adapted. It was noted that work was currently being done to adapt the electoral roll along with arrangements for new locations for polling stations.

6. DIVERSITY IN DEMOCRACY

RESOLVED:

- a) To accept the report, noting the observations made during the meeting.**
- b) To establish formal arrangements for Female Councillors following the May 2022 Election.**

An update was received from the Democracy and Language Service Manager on the actions taken by the Council in an attempt to encourage more diversity in Democracy. It was explained that Gwynedd Council's Diversity Statement had been published in October 2021, before a work programme had been adopted by the Full Council at its meeting on 2 December 2021.

The Committee's attention was drawn to the recent Statement that had been signed by all Welsh Council Leaders to hold a fair and respectful electoral campaign. It was believed that this would encourage diversity in Democracy and that it would add to this Council's work programme. As a result of the Statement, everyone who campaigned for the election were asked to treat each other with respect and courtesy.

It was added that the feedback that had been received in the form of questionnaires about the Women who are Councillors sessions had been very positive to date.

During the discussion the following observations were made:

- Pride was expressed about the Statement on a fair and respectful campaign and its importance was acknowledged.
- It was believed that a proportional voting system was needed and that this would attract new candidates as it made it easier for them to put their names forward.
- A comment was made that the number of Councillors should be reduced further, thus making the post a full-time one, in order to promote diversity.
- The Council's actions in this respect were accepted.

- It was expressed that the Women who are Councillors sessions had been beneficial and had given members an opportunity to discuss openly and informally and share experiences. It was believed that they were particularly useful for new Councillors.
- It was suggested that similar sessions for Men who are Councillors could be arranged should members so wish.

7. UPDATE ON HYBRID MEETINGS

RESOLVED:

To accept the report and to note the information.

The item was presented by the Democracy and Language Service Manager.

The Committee was given an update about the arrangements for hybrid meetings. It was noted that the Full Council had decided which committees would be held as hybrid meetings within the committees calendar - namely the Full Council, Cabinet, Scrutiny Committees, as well as the Planning Committee.

It was explained that the Welsh Government's Covid regulations had slowed down the opportunities to develop the arrangements for hybrid meetings. However, it was noted that there had been opportunities to test the system and that the Head of Corporate Support had approved it.

Gratitude was expressed to the workforce of the Democracy and Language service for playing their part in the development of the system by conducting regular exercises and tests in order to identify any weak spots. It was noted that the Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer would be trialling this system soon.

It was expressed that training and guidance would be held for Councillors on attending hybrid meetings, and training for Committee Chairs in particular. It was explained that protocols would be developed for such meetings.

During the discussion, the following observations were noted:

- Pride was expressed in seeing the progress in the development of the hybrid meetings - it was asked whether it would be possible to support Community Councils and Governing Bodies to enable them to conduct their meetings as hybrid meetings. In response, it was noted that the chamber's system had been installed, but that there were no mobile systems. It was noted that the translation team had been assisting some community councils on how to obtain an on-line translation system.
- It was asked whether it would be possible to have guidelines and a clear point of contact for those members who were having difficulties joining meetings, as it was not possible for committee members to be aware of their difficulties and their attendance status. It was noted that having a contact number on the front page of agendas was unsuitable as this contact was usually taking minutes at the meeting. It was explained that it was possible to contact the generic Democratic Service e-mail address.
- It was expressed that better training was needed on how to use devices and join meetings. It was noted that training was available to anyone, at any time they needed it.
- Confirmation was sought on whether the development of hybrid meetings would be shared with the information about elections, as this could attract a variety of people to stand as councillors. It was confirmed that this was most definitely being noted and that further information would be shared at the information sessions.

8. CALENDAR OF MEETINGS

RESOLVED:

To accept the report and support the Committees Calendar for 2022/23 and recommend it to the Full Council meeting on 3 March 2022.

The Meetings Calendar for the 2022/23 Committee year was presented. It was explained that the Calendar had been developed jointly with the Council's Departments in order to ensure that Committees were being held in a timely way. It was added that the time of the Committees would be confirmed with members after the election, after confirming what times would be most convenient.

There were no further comments and members were happy with the dates and they recommended the Calendar to the Full Council.

9. FINANCIAL REMUNERATION AND SENIOR SALARIES

DECISION

- a) **To accept the report that notes which roles will receive senior salaries for 2022/23 and recommend it to the Full Council.**
- b) **To review the list for 2023/24.**

The Democracy and Language Services Manager noted that she was awaiting a final report from the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales by the end of the month. It was expressed that the information would be outlined in the Democracy Services Committee's bulletin.

It was noted that the main point to draw attention to was the recommendation to reduce the number of members on higher salaries from 18 to 17, by removing the Governance and Audit Committee from the list of chairpersons on a higher salary. It was explained that the Council was expected, in line with the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, to appoint the Chair of the Governance and Audit Committee from amongst the Lay Members from May 2022 onwards. It was explained that it would be sensible for the Democracy Services Committee to review the list of higher salary posts in full during 2022/23 to ensure that the correct roles continued to receive the higher financial remuneration.

Observations arising from the discussion:

- It was noted that the Chair of the Democratic Services Committee should receive remuneration in the form of a higher salary since it came with quite a responsibility. It was noted, in line with the recommendation, that the responsibilities of all Committee Chairs could be assessed, but that this could not be done before May.
- It was asked whether all Council committees were statutory, however, it was noted that they were not and rather they were appointed as required by the Local Authority. Consequently, it was expressed that there was room for new Councillors to assess the current structure and make a recommendation for 2023/24.
- It was expressed that this report was being presented at the wrong time, considering that many families were in financial difficulties, whilst the Council was proposing to distribute more money.

10. THE DEMOCRACY SERVICES TEAM'S PERFORMANCE REPORT

DECISION

To accept the report, noting the observations made during the meeting.

A report was submitted on the performance of the Democracy Services Team. It was noted that the team already reported to the Departmental performance challenging process but it was believed that it would also be beneficial for this Committee to receive an update and have an opportunity to express an opinion on the team's work.

Reference was made to the questionnaires that were completed by Members twice a year about the team's performance, as well as the 1:1 conversations with Members that had now commenced. It was intended to hold these conversations regularly and that this work would continue over the coming months. It was added that the Democracy Services team also received comments from the public; further details on this feedback could be seen in the report.

To close, it was noted that a report on the Democracy team would be submitted to every Democratic Services Committee meeting in the future, so that Members received regular information about the team's work.

During the discussion the following observations were made:

- A comment was made that the public should be given an opportunity to convey their feelings about how Council Members acted on their behalf and on behalf of the Council. For the 2022/23 Committee year, it was suggested that this Committee should ask and receive information about specific problems by the public and discuss them at the meetings. It was suggested that providing a questionnaire for the public would be a way of ascertaining this information.

The meeting commenced at 14:00 and concluded at 15:10

CHAIR