

## **DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE**

### **TUESDAY, 5 JULY 2022**

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#### **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, John Pughe and Beca Roberts.

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

#### **1. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR**

To elect Councillor John Pughe as Vice-chair of the Democracy Services Committee for the year 2022/23.

#### **2. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillors Arwyn Herald Roberts and Elwyn Jones (Ex-Officio Member).

#### **3. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST**

No declarations of personal interest were received.

#### **4. URGENT ITEMS**

No urgent matters were raised.

#### **5. MINUTES**

The Chair accepted the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee, held on 17 February 2022 as a true record.

#### **6. THE ROLE OF THE DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE**

##### **RESOLVED**

**To accept the information on the role of the Democratic Services Committee.**

Information was submitted by the Head of Corporate Support on the role of the Democratic Services Committee detailing on the Committee's functions. It was noted that reviewing the available support for the Head of Democratic Services to fulfil the duties of the role had been the main focus of this Committee's discussions historically.

Details were provided on the provision offered to Members over the last Council term and the developments that were fulfilled such as improvements to the Members Intranet and the work associated with virtual and hybrid meetings. The input received from Members to the

arrangements for the Election were mentioned and the welcoming arrangements for new Members before moving forward to anticipate matters that would receive attention over the next few years by the Committee. It was anticipated that the focus this year would be on the training programme and presentations in order to ensure that Members received the necessary information to fulfil their role.

Attention was drawn to the work that would continue in order to ensure the provision of hybrid meetings as well as the new requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 which placed an emphasis on web-casting meetings.

To conclude, some matters that would be discussed at the next Committee meeting in November were mentioned and the importance of maintaining a continuous dialogue with Members in order to ensure that relevant matters were addressed was emphasised. The Members were reminded that they represented the rest of Gwynedd's Councillors and were a voice for them at this Committee. Members were encouraged to present any observations or concerns between meetings.

During the discussion the following observations were made:

- A query was raised regarding point 2.10 of the report, namely the responsibility to publish a petitioning scheme. It was asked if it was possible to include this as an item on the agenda of the next Committee meeting.
- It was suggested that experienced Councillors should be included in the informal sessions for new Councillors to answer questions and act as a mentor.
- The importance of safety was highlighted, particularly amongst female Councillors.
- It was asked if it was possible to provide a report or template on how to respond to complaints effectively at the next meeting of this Committee.
- It was questioned why Members could not print from their new devices.

In response to these observations:

- It was explained that it was a requirement of the Act to publish guidelines on how to present petitions. It was noted that an operational group would be established soon to undertake this work.
- It was noted that the sessions for Councillors would be arranged under the Women in Leadership project. It was reported that a session had previously been held during the last six months, this session was led by an experienced Councillor. It was hoped that this could happen more and more in the future and it was added that if there was a demand for this, then similar sessions for men would be held.
- The observation on the importance of safety and well-being was agreed with, noting that there were current discussions being held between Welsh Local Government Association and Welsh Government on safety matters therefore the matter was receiving national attention. It was reported that there was intention for Welsh Government to establish a working group with representatives from establishments such as the Police, the Ombudsman and Elected Members to look at good practice in this context. It was added that support was already available from the Council to advise staff and Councillors on safety matters, this advice could be found on the Members Intranet. It was agreed to send a link to this information to the Members following this meeting and to build on that when the Committee would have a discussion on the matter later in the year.
- It was agreed to send a link about what was being done by the Council as a result of responding and dealing with complaints with a review or further discussion on the subject being held at the meeting in November.
- Matters regarding problems with the new devices would be discussed with the IT Unit and members were reminded to bring any matters to the Officers' attention.

## 7. REVIEW OF COUNCILLOR INDUCTION ARRANGEMENTS

### **RESOLVED:**

**To accept the report and submit observations on the induction arrangements following the Election in May 2022.**

A summary of the arrangements developed for welcoming New Councillors following the 2022 election were presented. The Members were guided through the report detailing the arrangements of the Results Day, Welcome Day and Training Programme.

It was reported that positive comments had been received on a whole with some lessons learnt for the future. It was explained that two welcome days were held on the 10th and 11th of May with 5 Members joining virtually over both days. Positive comments were received on these arrangements. It was succeeded in presenting the main necessary information to the Members by distributing a Booklet that was developed by the Democracy and Language Service as a directory resource and organising IT provision for all Members. It was acknowledged that challenges had arisen during the first welcome day due to a wi-fi connection problem in a meeting room. Despite this the arrangements were adapted by the second day where IT equipment had been provided for the Members without any delays.

Details were provided by every Head of Department on the virtual sessions held which gave an opportunity for Members to receive a presentation on the work of the Departments as well as an opportunity to ask questions. It was added that these sessions had been recorded and were available on the Members' Intranet.

It was added that the timetable had been challenging between the results day and the Welcome Day/first Council Meeting with lots of work to be done and it was assumed that this element would need to be adapted for the future. It was also believed that there would be a need to determine a day or specific days for IT matters namely choosing, receiving and setting up equipment.

During the discussion the following observations were made:

- Thanks were expressed for the work of preparing Members and the efforts made by the Officers to enable Members to attend meetings virtually, which had saved travelling time.
- An observation was made that the Results Day was brilliant with plenty of information provided to Members without overloading and positive observations were expressed on the Welcome Day.
- What was noted in the report on the delay with the IT provision during the first Welcome Day was reiterated and it was assumed that this element should be held on a separate day.
- Appreciation was expressed that the Head of department sessions were recorded. A few observations were made that the sessions that were held at 4pm had worked better compared to the sessions held in the morning.
- An observation was made that a certain ward's results box seemed to be counted slowly and it was felt that counting could have been commenced earlier in this instance. It was suggested that there should be more flexibility in terms of counting on Results Day in the future.
- It was noted that there was a feeling that the voting cards had been sent out prematurely and should have waited until after the nomination period in order to save money and avoid confusion amongst members of the public who didn't have an election in their ward.
- A request was made for details regarding the arrangements for Councillors who had lost their seats or Councillors who had not re-sat the Election, i.e. badges, e-mails and ongoing ward work.
- It was felt that training on the new IT equipment should be offered to Members and to also consider offering IT sessions. One Member expressed that they had already received one to one training and they praised this support.

- It was believed there insufficient information had been shared on how to claim costs during the Welcome Day. A request was made for an e-mail to be sent to all new Members with guidelines on how to complete the cost claiming / allowances forms.
- Frustration was expressed on the lack of communication from the National Park noting that no e-mails had been sent to a Member with their ward within the Park's boundaries.
- The paper form with the contact details of the Council's Main Officers was commended but it was questioned whether it was possible to update this form when people moved jobs. It was believed that Members should be updated when duties / staff changed in order for them to adapt their paper form.
- It was questioned when the screens to accompany the new laptops would be distributed to Members. The problem of downloading documents from the new devices was also mentioned.

In response to these observations:

- It was noted that the Democracy Service would forward the Members' observations to the Elections team for consideration by the next Election to see what would be possible. It was added that maybe some things had to be done in a certain way to follow processes and legal requirements.
- It was added that the confidence level and the ability of Members varied especially if they had received new and different equipment; the Members were encouraged to contact Cara Williams or Ken Richardson for further training sessions. It was added that Ken offered one-to-one sessions.
- It was noted that an e-mail had been sent to every Councillor that was standing for re-election to explain what would happen as a result of wages arrangements and IT accounts if they would lose their seat. It was acknowledged that this message had not been clear enough for Members and therefore was something further for the Service to look at in the future when anyone's period would come to an end. It was added that work was going on in the background to collect the IT provision back from the previous members.
- It was reported that instructions on claiming travelling costs were noted in the Members' Handbook. It was noted that a session could be held before the next full Council meeting in the Autumn if the Members wished in order to have the opportunity to go through such matters.
- It was noted that the Democracy and Language Service Manager was contacting the Park's Officer to make enquiries and would welcome a discussion outside of this meeting with the Member.
- It was reported that the Members received a weekly bulletin which included information if there were any changes amongst the Council's Managers. It was explained that arrangements were ongoing for the communication team to contact Members to notify them if there were any change in duties within the Council to ensure that the Members received an update. Members were also reminded to keep an eye on the Members' Intranet.
- It was explained that the additional monitors had been ordered before the Election but the IT Unit had not received them yet. Officers from the IT service would be in touch soon.

## **8. MULTI-LOCATION MEETINGS**

### **RESOLVED:**

**To accept the update on practical developments in relation to conducting hybrid meetings.**

The item providing an update for Members on the developments in terms of holding hybrid meetings was presented by detailing the four meetings that would be held as hybrid or multi-location meetings as a result of the full Council's decision in December 2021. It was noted that

these were the meetings identified as those of a high public interest. It was added that the rest of the meetings would continue to be held virtually in accordance with the decision of the Full Council.

Details were provided on the work that had now been completed in both Chambers in order to hold hybrid meetings and the new provision that was in place. It was reported that some meetings had already been held as hybrid recently and on a whole had been successful. The Scrutiny Committees would be held as hybrid meetings over the next two weeks.

Reference was made to the work that would take place over the Summer to prepare other meeting rooms within the Council to be able to hold hybrid meetings. It was noted that this work was led by the IT Unit.

During the discussion the following observations were made:

- Reference was made to the echo that was heard in Siambr Hywel Dda which had been highlighted during hybrid meetings.
- It was enquired whether the Members were allowed to use the conference rooms in Pwllheli and Dolgellau.
- A comment was made that there were two meeting rooms in Penrhyneddraeth; it was asked if there were considerations to provide the technology to enable conference calls in the building. It was felt that better use could be done of this asset in order to save travelling time and costs.
- Thanks were expressed for the hybrid meetings that were already being held. It was asked whether this meeting amongst others would continue to be virtual or were there plans to hold more hybrid meetings.
- It was felt that there were positive and negative features associated with hybrid meetings. It was believed that it was good to convey information but not as effective to hold discussions.
- It was believed that the Employment Appeals Committee should be held face-to-face and it was questioned whether this would be considered.
- It was questioned how the meetings would work practically if the hybrid provision was in place in various locations i.e. ensuring availability and booking rooms in more than one location. It was foreseen that this would create problems for the Democracy team.

In response to these observations:

- It was reported that it was essential for those joining from home to wear headphones with an attached microphone especially for meetings that would be held from Siambr Hywel Dda. This would reduce the echo and make the sound clearer. It was added that Bluetooth headphones were currently being trialled for Members with an iPad and who, as a result, could not use the traditional headphones. An update would be provided on this soon.
- It was noted that there was a programme to update 17 of the Council's meeting rooms across the County in order to hold hybrid meetings. It was hoped that an update would be provided in September regarding Pwllheli, Dolgellau and Penrhyneddraeth meeting rooms.
- It was explained that the arrangements regarding what meetings would be held as hybrid would be reviewed. It was added that the final decision was in the hands of the Members but the Council was asked to hold a full cycle of meetings before reaching a conclusion. It would then be possible to re-visit but the present decision was to continue with the four hybrid meetings. It was ensured that the situation would be reviewed regularly.
- It was expressed that there was an option to hold the Employment Appeals Committee face-to-face if the individuals who were appealing wished to do so. This would be

considered as well as the Members observations. It was added that training was being held on Friday for Members of the Employment Appeals Committee and they could give further consideration to the matter at that time.

- It was explained that a Chamber had been identified when holding hybrid/multi-location meetings in order to allow access for the public if they wished to attend. It was acknowledged that there was a possibility of challenges when ensuring the availability of a number of meeting rooms at the same time, but if the other meeting rooms were not available across the County, then the option of joining from home or virtually would be available for Members.

The meeting commenced at 14:00 and concluded at 15:30.

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**CHAIR**