

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE, 27/02/24

PRESENT:

Councillors:

Dewi Owen (Chair), Stephen Churchman, Anwen Hughes, Elwyn Jones, Anne Lloyd-Jones, Olaf Cai Larsen, Edgar Wyn Owen, Gwynfor Owen, Llio Elenid Owen, Beca Roberts and Menna Trenholme (Cabinet Member for Corporate Support).

Officers: Vera Jones (Democracy and Language Services Manager), Ian Jones (Head of Corporate Support Department), Annes Sion (Democracy Team Leader), Catrin Love (Assistant Head of Corporate Support), Cara Williams (Members' Development Officer) and Sioned Mai Jones (Democracy Services Officer).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors, Linda Ann Jones, Eryl Jones-Williams and Arwyn Herald Roberts.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received.

3. URGENT ITEMS

No urgent matters were raised.

4. MINUTES

The Chair accepted the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee, held on 14 November 2023, as a true record.

5. 2024/25 COMMITTEES' CALENDAR

DECISION

To accept the report and recommend the Committees' Calendar for 2024/25 to the Full Council meeting on 7 March 2024, for adoption.

The report was submitted, and it sought the Committee's views on the 2024/25 Committees' Calendar before being submitted to the Council meeting next week. It was reported that consultations had been taking place with the Council's internal officers as well as the National Park Authority, to avoid clashes with other meetings. In addition, it was noted that every effort had been made to avoid clashes with the meetings of the North Wales Economic Ambition Board and North Wales Corporate Joint Committee.

It was highlighted that the Council's first meeting had been moved to 9 May 2024 because the Police and Crime Commissioner Elections were being held on 2 May. It was reported that a reserve date had been earmarked in the calendar for an Extraordinary Meeting of the Council for September 2024, to hold potential discussions on the Single Transferable Vote systems.

During the discussion the following observations were made:

- It was pointed out that neither the meetings of the Pension Board, nor training days, had been noted on the Calendar. An enquiry was made about the possibility of including Councillor training days on the Calendar.
- A member asked whether it was possible to consult with the Fire Authority to avoid clashes. It was noted that five Councillors were members of the Fire Authority and there had been clashes in the past between the dates of Council meetings and Fire Authority meetings.
- Discontent was expressed that Councillors' inability to attend a committee as they were representing the Council on another Committee that was being held at the same time, was being recorded as an 'Apology' or 'Absent'. It was believed that there was a need to look at this system.
- It was asked why the Full Council's meeting time had changed to 1:30pm and whether it was possible to change it back to 1:00pm. It was believed that this would benefit Councillors who lived far from Caernarfon and needed to travel home after the meeting, as well as improve attendance for the entire meeting.

In response to the observations:

- It was noted that the Pension Board's meetings were not usually included in the Committee's Calendar as only two Councillors attended them. Nevertheless, reassurances were given that the Democracy team was making every effort to avoid clashes. It was reported that the team was looking into training dates at present, and the possibility of including them on the Calendar; this could be looked at next year.
- Reassurances were given that the Fire Authority would be consulted when the 2025/26 Committees Calendar was created, and from now on.
- It was noted that the Democracy Team would investigate the way that Apologies and Absences were being recorded as a result of clashes due to Councillors' roles.
- Members were reminded that the Full Council meeting time had changed to 1:30pm following the response received to a questionnaire sent to the Councillors in 2022. It was noted that one of the main reasons was to ensure that sufficient time was available to hold the Group meetings in the morning. It was added that the Democracy team also needed time to prepare the Chamber for the Council meeting. It was noted that there was no intention to re-consult this term, unless many voiced the same opinions regarding the Council's meeting time. It was reiterated that Members were able to join meetings virtually in order to avoid long journeys.

6. SUPPORT FOR COUNCILLORS

RESOLVED:

To note the observations and accept the report.

Submitted - the report on the results of the questionnaire that was sent to all the Members in January 2024, asking for their views on the service available from the Democracy team.

It was noted that 31 Councillors had completed the questionnaire. It was reported that 91% had noted that the standard of the service was Good or Very Good, with one Member noting Satisfactory and two had not responded. It was noted that the Member who had noted Satisfactory had given observations about another Council Department and so the team leader would contact the Member in question to obtain views on the service being offered by the Democracy team.

It was reported that one Member had expressed discontent regarding the steps to become paperless. It was noted that the Democracy team was collaborating with the Members in an attempt to support this change. Attention was drawn to other observations made, such as the challenges associated with a Councillor's role and the importance of treating Members with respect. The importance for every Member to complete the questionnaire was reiterated, to

ensure that the service available to Councillors was sufficient and met the needs and all Members were encouraged to complete the questionnaire in the future.

During the discussion the following observations were made:

- A view was expressed stating that a Councillor's role was currently more challenging than it used to be due to the political climate and its associated challenges, such as the cost-of-living and the lack of Housing.
- An observation was made regarding clause 7 of the report, noting that there was incomplete information on the Council's website regarding the appointment of Councillors to External Bodies. It was also noted that there was a need to review the membership of the Task Group in order to ensure that it was current.
- It was asked whether the Democracy team asked Members for suggestions on how to improve the service available to them.
- It was also asked whether information about the support available with childcare for Councillors was being shared with female Councillors. It was emphasised that it was essential to attract women to undertake the role of a Councillor.

In response to the observations:

- It was acknowledged that there was a need to regularly update the information about External Bodies and it was reported that arrangements were in the pipeline to undertake the work over the coming months.
- It was noted that the questionnaire included a question on how the Democracy team could develop the service available to Members as well as a question about any further comments. It was believed that the questionnaire gave Members ample opportunities to voice their opinions and make suggestions.
- It was confirmed that the information about the support available in terms of childcare had already been shared with Councillors during the Welcome Days as part of the induction process and it was also available on the Members' Intranet. It was noted that it may be possible to circulate the information by including it in the Members' Bulletin so that it was highlighted further over the coming weeks.

7. LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT PROVISION FOR MEMBERS

RESOLVED:

To accept the report, noting the observations submitted.

The report on the Learning and Development provision and the training opportunities available to Members, was submitted. It was noted that the report was slightly different this time to highlight the challenges associated with delivering the programme.

Reference was made to the consultation process with Heads and Officers which was already in the pipeline to create the 2024/25 training programme. It was noted that those elements of the 2024/25 programme which had already been populated, could be seen in the report. It was reported that the service was receiving many requests for new training and were attempting to prioritise them. The previous comments made by some Members that the programme had developed to be a heavy programme in terms of its content, were reflected upon.

It was highlighted that key titles identified as core fields were listed in the report. It was emphasised that it was essential for Members to complete these, and it was noted that many had not completed the titles. Attention was drawn to the figures in the table in part 2.4 of the report.

It was added that some of the core titles had been running for some time and that the numbers attending the sessions were problematic. It was noted that holding half-empty training sessions, in terms of attendance, did not provide the best value for money and led to having to re-conduct the same training many times. It was noted that this hindered officers' ability to move forward with the broader training programme since the core titles would need to be re-visited in 2024/25. Concern was highlighted that the Members who had not attended the core training did not have the background or required knowledge for their role.

During the discussion the following observations were made:

- Praise was expressed for the high quality of training, noting that it was useful, and gratitude was expressed for the work of the Learning and Development service.
- Concern and disappointment was expressed as so many Members had not attended the core training and it was asked what steps were in the pipeline to ensure that everyone attended the mandatory titles.
- Enquiries were made about a forward plan and whether it could be circulated. It was believed that obtaining a forward plan of the dates would benefit Members so that they could plan and leave time free for the various headings.
- It was acknowledged that it was difficult to attend training due to Members' time constraints since some had full calendars, and many had other responsibilities such as a career or children. Gratitude was expressed for the steps already taken to improve the number of attendees.
- Enquiries were made on the possibility of watching recorded sessions and whether Members could do so in their own time. It was asked whether this would count as if they had attended the session.
- A suggestion was made to contact the Political Group Leaders so that they could draw attention to the matter formally within the Groups and highlight the most essential training. It was reiterated that there was now a responsibility on Group Leaders to ensure that Members attended training.
- The need for Members to re-do training if it had already been completed, e.g., during the previous Council (2017-22), or via another organisation, was questioned.
- It was highlighted that many sessions were cancelled due to lack of numbers or sickness, and some had not been rearranged. Particular reference was made to the sessions with Welsh Women's Aid, which was cancelled on 9 February.

In response to the observations:

- It was reported that the service had been focusing on reminding Members about the need to attend core titles and re-offer sessions, as well as offer sessions at different times, e.g., in the evening. In addition, it was noted that the Member Development Officer targeted individuals who did not attend and reminded them. Further suggestions from the Members were welcomed.
- It was noted that extensive information about the titles could be found on the Members' Intranet and that a lot of information was being shared in the Members Bulletin every week, as well as a link to the Intranet. It was highlighted that a copy of the forward plan could be seen on the Members' Intranet. It was added that efforts had been made to avoid clashes between training days and the Council's Committees.
- It was noted that recordings of some training sessions were uploaded on the Members' Intranet. Members were asked to contact the Member Development Officer to confirm after watching a recording, otherwise the service would not be aware of this.
- It was agreed that the service contact the Political Group Leaders as soon as possible so that they encourage Members to attend core titles.
- It was noted that there were often updates in titles, such as the Code of Conduct and Safe Leadership and Personal Safety, therefore Members were encouraged to re-attend if it was timely for them to do so.

- It was confirmed that a further session with Welsh Women's Aid would be rearranged in April, and a new date would be proposed as soon as possible.

The meeting commenced at 13:00 and concluded at 13:55

CHAIR