
DEMOCRACY SERVICES COMMITTEE, 18/06/24

PRESENT:

Councillors:

Anne Lloyd-Jones (Chair), Stephen Churchman, Anwen Hughes, Eryl Jones-Williams, Olaf Cai Larsen, Dewi Owen, Edgar Wyn Owen, Ioan Thomas, Sian Williams 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) and Sioned Mai Jones (Democracy Services Officer).

1. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

Councillor Sian Williams was elected as Vice-chair of the Democracy Services Committee for the year 2024/25.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Linda Ann Jones, Llio Elenid Owen, Arwyn Herald Roberts and Beca Roberts.

3. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received.

4. URGENT ITEMS

No urgent matters were raised.

5. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee, held on 27 February 2024, as a true record.

6. DRAFT OF THE ANNUAL REPORT BY THE HEAD OF DEMOCRACY SERVICES

DECISION

To accept the report and agree to make minor amendments for it to be recommended for adoption by the Full Council.

The report was submitted asking for the Committee to consider the content of the annual report and recommend for it to be adopted by the Full Council. It was explained that the report outlined the Head of Democracy Services' main priorities for the coming year, as well as report on the developments made during the last year. It was explained that the report was slightly different this year and pride was expressed for its content and format.

Attention was drawn to the content of the report and the fields that were prioritised in 2023/24, namely:

- Safety and Support for Councillors which included the health and well-being element.
- Training for Councillors and the personal development discussions which were held.
- Scrutiny Arrangements.
- Moving towards becoming a paperless Council.

Reference was also made in the report to the number of successes in 2023/24, for example the very positive feedback that the Democracy Team received by Councillors, the number of Committees that had been administered and the full programme of training which was held and developed.

To conclude, the Head of Democracy Services referred to the 2024/25 priorities, which included:

- Building on safety and support arrangements for Councillors
- Rationalising the training programme and the briefing programme for Councillors
- Implementing changes to Scrutiny arrangements to get the best out of them
- Highlighting the support available to Councillors.

During the discussion the following observations were made:

- It was believed that the report was very positive and factual, and the format was praised. Some observations were made about the size and colour of the font in some parts of the report, highlighting that it had been difficult to read at times.
- The Democracy and Language Services Manager, the Democracy Team and Galw Gwynedd were thanked for the specific support following a substantial deterioration in one of the Members' eyesight.
- The statement that 29 Councillors continued to receive paper copies was questioned under the paperless Council part, expressing that this number seemed to be high.
- An enquiry was made to how many Councillors had completed the core training.
- The Scrutiny arrangements were enquired and whether an arrangement would be established to monitor how much difference Scrutiny was practically making in terms of the process of making decisions in the Council. There were concerns that the Scrutiny arrangement was seen as a paper exercise and it was important to show that Scrutiny had a positive impact and was considered at Cabinet level.

In response to the observations:

- It was noted that it was possible to amend the font and the colours before submitting the report to the Full Council and the observation was welcomed.
- It was acknowledged that there was a need to reword the statement on the numbers who received paper copies of Committee agendas as the figure had now reduced further. It was agreed that there was a need to reword to highlight the substantial reduction that had been in these numbers.
- It was explained that there was a report later in the Committee on training and that report would detail the effort made to increase the numbers who completed the core training.
- It was reported that an annual Scrutiny report would be presented to the next Full Council and this report would provide detailed information on the impact of Scrutiny and give examples of the impact. It was acknowledged that this report summarised that a review had been undertaken instead of providing detail.

7. MEMBERS' TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT.

RESOLVED:

To accept the report, noting the observations submitted.

This report was submitted highlighting that seven core fields had been identified as key training for Members relating to laws. It was noted that there had been focus on core training in the previous meeting, drawing attention to the low number of Members who had completed this training. It was highlighted that attention had been given to this matter over the last few months and that there was follow-up for the Group Leaders to encourage Members to complete the core training. It was noted that no progress had been seen yet in the numbers who had completed the training as it was rather premature but many had been in contact to ask for more details.

Members of the Committee were guided through the report by drawing attention to the new format of the Members' learning programme, which was the core training, other training and personal development interviews elements. Concerns were highlighted, such as courses being run half empty because too few Members registered or turned up to events. The intention to record core titles and include them on the Members' Intranet was mentioned but it was emphasised that Members were required to inform the Learning and Development service after they completed a course.

Attention was drawn to other matters, such as the work on the Support for Councillors' Self-evaluation Framework which would begin in the next few months and the questionnaire that was to be sent to Members over the Summer about the content of the training programme. To conclude, reference was made to part 2.17 of the report, noting one correction which was that Councillors should refer specific examples of lack of response to enquiries from Council Officers to Geraint Owen, Corporate Director instead of the Chief Executive. It was noted that this was Geraint Owen's responsibility due to his background in the field following concerns from many members being highlighted on the matter of a lack of response to their enquiries from Council Officers.

During the discussion the following observations were made:

- The members expressed their gratitude for the report, noting that many important matters had been included.
- The importance of Members turning up to courses was highlighted, referring to a specific example where 4 out of 11 Members turned up which was a waste of resources and Officers' time.
- It was expressed that the Chairing Skills course was excellent and Members were encouraged to take advantage of the courses available.
- Reference was made to the 'teatime chats' for female Councillors, noting that they were valuable, especially for new Members.
- The statistics of the number of Members who had completed the core training was enquired.
- It was asked whether more Members would turn up to the training being held bilingually instead of Welsh-only sessions.
- An observation was made regarding reporting on apologies when there was a clash e.g. The Council's Committee and an External Body meeting held at the same time and an enquiry was made whether there was an update on this matter.

In response to the observations:

- It was reiterated that Members who had not turned up to training were absorbing the Council's Main Officers' time and resources.
- It was noted that the statistics on the number of Members who had completed the core training could be provided. It was reported that any updates would be circulated to the Members. It was noted that the information had been included in the February report of this Committee and, as there was not much change to the figures, the details had not been included in this report.

- It was believed that the data showed that the language of the training did not have an impact on attendees and that courses were held in Welsh or bilingually and that a translator was present if anyone needed to listen to the English version.
- It was noted that there was no update to the way that apologies were recorded in meetings but it was emphasised that the Democracy Team were doing their best to avoid clashes and discuss with the Learning and Development team, as well as external organisations such as the Park and the Police Authority. It was highlighted that there were over 50 External Bodies and that it was impossible to avoid clashes in every case. It was added, when an opportunity arose, that the Team wished to address how apologies and absences were recorded on the system.

8. FINANCIAL REMUNERATION

RESOLVED:

To accept the report.

The report was submitted, which provided the latest information to Members on financial remuneration for 2024/25. It was explained that the Democracy and Language Services Manager and the Democracy Team had received enquiries recently on financial remuneration and there was concern that information was not conveyed or that Members' attention needed to be drawn to a few matters. The current basic financial remuneration (salary) was highlighted for the Members, which was £18,666 per year. It was explained that this was an increase of just over £1,000 on the 2023/24 financial remuneration. It was added that Members should contact their Political Group Assistants for questions regarding their P60.

It was noted that this information had already been communicated through the Members' Intranet through the weekly Members' Bulletin. To conclude, it was noted that the intention of the report was to raise awareness of the financial situation and the support available for Members.

During the discussion the following observations were made:

- It was expressed that the phone numbers of Committee Chairs should be available e.g. if a member of the public or another Councillor had a question for the Chair of the Care Scrutiny Committee. There was concern that Chairs were not available to respond to calls and it was believed that they should be available.
- It was added that it was difficult to contact Cyngor Gwynedd Members who had been appointed to External Bodies or Boards. It was highlighted that this was frustrating when people wanted information about a specific matter.
- A standpoint was expressed that Members should not be forced to share their phone numbers, noting that many would be less likely to release them recently because of safety matters and that many tended to use e-mails as a convenient way of contacting.
- An enquiry was made regarding the payment of electric vehicle costs, which cost less to run than traditional fuel vehicles but receive the same travel costs rate as traditional cars.

In response to the observations:

- It was reiterated that Councillors' e-mail addresses were included on the Council's website but that it was not a requirement to publish their address or phone numbers. It was highlighted that the Democracy Services Officers' phone numbers were on Committees' Forward Programmes and that those officers would pass any relevant enquiry on to the Committee Chairs.
- It was reported that the majority of External Bodies did not pay the Members and that some meetings were closed due to commercial sensitivity and that Members must

respect these rules as long as they were reasonable rules. It was noted that the majority of External Bodies matters were open.

- It was confirmed that there were no changes to the travel costs payments and that electric cars rates were the same as diesel/petrol cars. It was explained that this was mainly due to the acknowledgement that the maintenance costs of electric cars tended to be higher although the running costs were lower. It was acknowledged that national arrangements were currently being followed and there may be changes in the future when the technology became more popular.
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The meeting commenced at 13:00 and concluded at 14:05.

CHAIR