
DEMOCRACY SERVICES COMMITTEE, 04/11/2025

PRESENT:

Councillors:

Anne Lloyd-Jones (Chairperson), Annwen Hughes, Arwyn Herald Roberts, Eryl Jones-Williams, Dewi Owen, Ioan Thomas, Edgar Wyn Owen, Llio Elenid Owen, Beca Roberts, Cai Larsen, Sian Williams, Stephen Churchman, Anwen Jane Davies.

Officers present:

Vera Jones (Democracy and Language Service Manager), Annes Sion (Democracy Team Leader), Catrin Love (Assistant Head of Corporate Services), Mari Edwards (Learning and Development Manager), Cara Williams (Member Development Officer), and Courtney Leigh Jones (Democracy and Civic Services Officer).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Ian Jones (Head of Corporate Services).

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received.

3. URGENT ITEMS

No urgent issues were noted.

4. MINUTES

The Chair accepted the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 17 June 2025 as a true record.

5. DEMOCRACY AND BOUNDARY COMMISSION CYMRU DRAFT REPORT ON FINANCIAL REMUNERATION TO COUNCILLORS FOR 2026/27

The report was presented by the Democracy and Language Service Manager. It was explained that this was the first report by the Democracy and Boundary Commission Cymru which was now responsible for setting the level of financial remuneration for Wales's Councillors. The main issues in the report were highlighted, noting that several new principles by the Commission were included in the report. An overview of the Commission's main priorities for the future was given, setting out the work that was underway and what was being considered.

The recommendations for the 2026-27 financial year were outlined and it was explained that there was an opportunity to respond to the recommendations of the draft report by 18 November 2025. It was confirmed that there would be major changes to the framework once every electoral term, with smaller changes occurring annually. It was noted that the report focused on the fees for the year 2026-27, stating that there would be a 6.4% increase in Members' pay, bringing the basic annual salary of each councillor to £21,044.00. It was reported that the Commission intended to look at the relationship between Councillors' salaries and the annual survey of hours and earnings in Wales, and to consider whether this was the right basis for decision-making in the future.

It was confirmed that Council Members were paid on a scale of working hours equivalent to three days a week. Some Members expressed concern about Members' attendance at Council committees and meetings. In response to this, it was confirmed that there was a rule stating that Councillors had to attend meetings every six months. Members were reminded that Councillors' attendance at meetings and committees was public information on the Council's website. It was suggested that this Committee should address the issue by identifying and contacting those Members with a low level of attendance to offer support and to remind Members of the expectations of being a member of the Committees. The Democracy Services Manager confirmed that she would be adding a reminder indicating the basis equivalent of 3 working days when reporting on a final decision on the Members' pay scale for 2026/27.

Further concerns were expressed that some vacancies on committees had remained for some time. A Member mentioned that the responsibilities and personal situations of all Members needed to be recognised and taken into account, noting that this was vitally important if the Council was committed to having a diversity of Members. Members were encouraged to fill the vacancies in order to ensure full participation in democracy matters in Cyngor Gwynedd. A member asked if it was possible that the vacant seats of a political group could be offered to another group if the group was struggling to fill the seats. It was noted that this would affect the political balance but would be possible by taking the decision through the Full Council if the committee wished to make the change. It was confirmed that the democracy services team would once again correspond with the group leaders after the by-election in the Felinheli and Bethel wards.

In response to a comment regarding the accessibility of Gwynedd Councillors' contact details, it was confirmed that Councillors' e-mail addresses had been published on the Council's website. It was confirmed that general e-mail addresses were also available for the public to make contact if necessary. It was also reminded that contact could be made via Galw Gwynedd if a member of the public needed to contact a particular member. It was noted that it was hoped that the Council would provide several ways of contacting Members, in accordance with the relevant regulations and security measures. A Member noted that as part of Operation Ford training, Councillors had been clearly instructed by the Police to consider their situation seriously before publishing their personal contact details.

The recommendations in the report for Co-opted Members and Lay Members were explained in detail. The first was to ask the commission to emphasise the need to use

the hourly rate to demonstrate that County Councils were financially prudent and paid fairly for the work being carried out. It was also recommended that the commission looked at the rates of payments to lay and co-opted Members, noting that financial remuneration for these Members should also increase annually as it was difficult to attract lay Members to carry out extremely important work. It was noted that there was a recommendation that the commission made it clear what action should be taken if a member did not wish to receive payment for their work. In response to an enquiry regarding the payment of lay and co-opted Members, it was confirmed that Members were paid by the hour including hours of preparation.

Gratitude was expressed for the report and there was agreement with the report's recommendations. It was noted that Community Councillors should be encouraged to claim the pay they are owed for their work in the community. It was expressed that there were many hidden costs for Community Councillors so their work should not be taken for granted. It was noted that it was important to ensure that there was a financial incentive attached to the role to encourage new Members to take up the role when Community Councillors retired. It was mentioned that Community Councillors were very valuable and vital to the future prosperity of Gwynedd's communities. It was agreed that a clause would be added to the recommendation to promote the financial remuneration of Community Councillors and encourage them to claim it. It was confirmed that Members were happy to accept the report and support the recommendations.

DECISION

To accept the report on the condition that a clause to encourage community councils to take their payment was added.

6. WELSH GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION ON EXTENDING THE DUTY ON LOCAL AUTHORITIES TO BROADCAST MEETINGS

The report was presented by the Democracy Services Team Leader.

It was explained that the Service already provided a webcast service for meetings of the Full Council, the Cabinet, Planning and Scrutiny Committees. It was explained that this already went beyond the statutory requirement, which stated that only Full Council meetings needed to be webcast. It was explained that the consultation suggested extending the webcasting requirement to include the Standards Committee, Democracy Services committee, Licensing Committees and Governance and Audit Committee in addition to the committees noted above. It was noted that there would be resource and cost implications if the decision was made to adopt the proposal as there would be a need to expand the resource provision. It was explained that the equipment would also need to be upgraded to improve the webcast provision if the need arose to increase the use of it. It was explained that there was agreement with the proposal in principle but that there was a need to be aware of the cost and staffing constraints. Observations were welcomed from Members.

Democracy Services staff were thanked for their work. It was expressed that every opportunity should be sought to encourage public interest and involvement in the work of local government. It was noted that a webcast provision provided valuable insight into the important work of Councillors and gave a taste of the decisions that Members are responsible for taking. A Member noted that the webcasting provision was also an effective means of promoting the Welsh language and its use in the work of local government. It was agreed that staffing and resource costs remained the biggest barrier, and therefore it was agreed that the report and draft response should be accepted.

DECISION

To accept the report and the draft response.

7. LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT PROVISION FOR MEMBERS

The report was presented by the Learning and Development Manager. An overview of the department's priorities was given as it continued to respond to the outcomes of the Learning and Development Needs questionnaire. It was explained that the latest training programme was available to Members and continuously evolved. It was confirmed that the programme would be updated as necessary through consultation with Heads of Departments and Officers as well as the inclusion of titles at the request of Members. Suggestions for additional training needs at the request of Members would be welcomed in the form of a questionnaire or via the Members Development Officer. It was confirmed that the department would be appointing a new Members Development Officer shortly.

The Eight Core Areas that had been identified for Members were discussed in detail. It was explained that the core courses provision was available online for Members to access at their convenience and Members were welcome to get in touch at any time if there were problems. It was noted that 12 Members had completed all training courses, and it was confirmed that six Members had not completed any of the modules. Disappointment was expressed that six Members had not completed any of the training, especially the Code of Conduct field. The importance of completing the core courses was emphasised, as these were vital to their role as Councillors. There had been a particular emphasis on the importance of the Code of Conduct, Corporate Parenting and Violence Against Women courses.

In response to the concerns, it was confirmed that there was constant encouragement for Members to complete core training, including regular reminders from the Members Development Officer. It was noted that the Leaders of the political groups encouraged and reminded Members to complete the training regularly in group meetings. It was elaborated that the provision of the courses by the Learning and Development service was accessible as they were available online for completion at any time. Consideration was given to adapting the title of the core fields to indicate that they were mandatory fields to encourage more Members to complete them. It was explained that the number of courses completed by Members was now public information on the Council's website.

It was noted that various personal development courses were now available to all members, which gave them an opportunity to reflect on their role and consider any areas of interest they would like to develop. It was noted that it was possible to formulate a Personal Development Programme to meet their needs. It was explained that several cabinet members had attended these and that they were now available to all Members.

The development of Operation Ford by North Wales Police which was delivered through the Defending Democracy Policing Protocol, was focused upon. It was noted that safety briefings were available to Members, which provided advice on personal safety. Further sessions were offered to Members before the end of the year and Members were encouraged to contact the service to indicate what date was convenient for them to complete the training.

The report was appreciated, and staff were thanked for their work in putting the resources together. The development of the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence course was praised, noting that it was a very valuable course.

It was mentioned that Training for Mentors was a new offer in the pipeline which was currently being developed. It was noted that the intention of the offer was to support the work of Members by encouraging Members to become Mentors or to identify Members who would benefit from being mentored. It was stated that the aim was to develop the plan by the 2027 Elections period, to assist newly-elected Members.

DECISION

To accept the report.

The meeting started at 10.00am and ended at 12.00pm.