
DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE 24/11/15

Present: Thomas G. Ellis (Chair)
Anne Lloyd Jones (Vice-Chair)

COUNCILLORS: Annwen Daniels, Gweno Glyn, E. Selwyn Griffiths, Dilwyn Morgan, Michael Sol Owen, Lesley Day, Jean Forsyth, Anwen J. Davies and Jason Humphreys

OFFICERS: Arwel Ellis Jones (Senior Manager - Democratic and Delivery), Vera Jones (Democratic Services Manager) , Lowri Haf Evans (Members and Scrutiny Support Officer)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Annwen Hughes and Sian Gwennllian, and Geraint Owen (Head of Democratic Services)

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

All Members were requested to declare an interest in item 6, Consultation by the Consultation by the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales, but it was noted that this was not a prejudicial interest

3. URGENT ITEMS

None to note

4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 29 September 2015 as a true record

5. STANDARDS COMMITTEE - REPORT ON THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE REMIT

- a) Dr Einir Young, Chair of the Standards Committee was welcomed to the Council to submit the annual report of the Standards Committee for 2014/15.

Dr Einir Young outlined the committee's main purpose and functions, namely to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by the councillors and co-opted members of Gwynedd Council and community and town councils in Gwynedd. She referred to the committee's membership, and the work that had been achieved during 2014/15. She emphasised that they measured success through encouragement and success, rather than by dealing with complaints. She thanked Gwilym Ellis Evans, who had been the committee's Chairman for 10 years, for his hard work and commitment; Sam Soysa, as Vice-chair prior to the end of his period as a committee member, and Ms Linda Byrne for her support as a committee member. She also thanked the Monitoring Officer and the other officers who had provided support to the committee.

Dr Einir Young was thanked for presenting the report.

- b) Councillor Michael Sol Owen, a Member of the Standards Committee, emphasised that their work was challenging and set firm guidance for the Council and Community Councils.
- c) In response to an observation on the need to communicate a clear message to community councils in relation to the 'declaration of interest', it was noted that a series of training courses had been held in the Autumn with community councils to promote and raise awareness about the code of conduct's meaning. A further observation was made that the community councils, in their annual meetings, received the code of conduct - which was an annual opportunity to remind them, but it was obvious that this did not happen consistently.
- d) In bearing in mind the specific role of the Committee to consider services to members, a question was raised regarding whether more could be done to provide Council members with support in the context of conduct, or was the support already sufficient.

In response, the Monitoring Officer outlined two recent developments

- Public Interest Test
- The concept of the right to free speech in political Forums, where robust discussion and criticism can take place.

He noted that it was intended to hold a training workshop in the Spring to promote these developments. In relation to the Democratic Services Committee's work, it was intended to emphasise the role of the Standards Committee, and to forge a more prominent relationship with the members by raising awareness of the work and to maintain an engagement programme to share information, to ensure that the code remained at the forefront of everyone's mind.

RESOLVED to accept the report and to thank the Chair and the Committee for their important work.

6. CONSULTATION BY THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL FOR WALES

- a) Submitted – the report of the Head of Democratic Services, to initiate a discussion on the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales' draft proposals. In relation to the background to the report, it was explained that the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales was responsible for determining salaries and costs which were payable to councillors in respect of their duties. The Panel publishes draft proposals annually for consultation, but historically, the recommendations have not given rise to much discussion, as they take a generalised view of the salaries and costs paid to each councillor. The need to give further consideration to this year's proposals was noted, and attention was drawn to the recommendations in the report - the fundamental aspect was that there would be no increase in the basic salary.
- b) In relation to the other changes, it was noted that they varied in their views, but there was a need for a discussion on the suggestion of submitting two levels to the Cabinet; a suggestion of two levels for Committee chairs and a suggestion that the leader of the largest opposition party should be set at the same level as the second level of chairs.

- c) It was noted that one matter that had caused concern this year, which the Welsh Local Government had drawn attention to, was that the Public Services Minister had written to the Panel, drawing its attention to the need to be vigilant and to reduce public expenditure. The dissatisfaction of the Local Government Association was reiterated, and it was argued that it could appear that there had been political interference with the decision. The letter was acknowledged, but the panel would make an evidence-based decision.
- d) Observations arising from the discussion:
- It was suggested that the existing arrangements were acceptable
 - Acceptance that the responsibilities of chairs varied in terms of the frequency of meetings, and it was considered that the Panel's proposal was reasonable
 - That recognition should be sought for Vice-chairs that stood in for the Chair for a period of time

RESOLVED to accept the report and to authorise the officers to convey the observations in the report to the Panel

7. MEMBERS EMAILS

- a) Submitted – the report of the Head of Democratic Services, recommending that the Committee should confirm the original vision and decision regarding Members' official e-mail addresses. Members were reminded that this vision had been adopted by the Council Board on 27.3.2012 when it was decided that it would be mandatory for Elected Members to receive and use the Council's corporate e-mail. Reference was made to the reason for using the corporate address rather than a personal e-mail address. It was noted that the use of electronic methods was the main method of communication with Members - that it was part of the Council's brand and gave Elected Members an opportunity to operate under the same banner as Council staff.
- b) It had been noted that recently a few Members had made requests to receive correspondence through personal e-mail accounts, and that this had not been approved (mainly as there was no assurance of security if personal e-mails were used). Members were also reminded that the Councillors' corporate e-mail accounts would be closed if the member did not use it within a 12-month period.
- c) A question was asked on how to contact a member who did not use e-mail, and it was explained that those who had informed us of their decision could receive the information by letter / hard copy. However, in some cases, members' e-mail accounts had been closed as they had not been used for a period of 12-months, and the Department had been unaware of the lack of use, and as a result the member had not received any correspondence. In a further response to the recent changes and restrictions on the use of e-mails on personal computers, it was noted that all members had been sent a note through Rhaeadr to address this, and that the Technology Department had responded helpfully and effectively. In the context of accessing e-mails from a mobile phone, it was noted that the Technology Department had been working on a device to enable this (an update to be submitted in February).
- d) Matters arising from the discussion
- concern that some members were unwilling to use the Council's e-mail

- address
- difficult to understand how a Councillor can operate effectively without using / receiving information through e-mail
- corporate e-mail accounts ensure that communication is fair and accurate
- accept that there is a robust and secure framework in place

RESOLVED to again confirm the Council's original decision regarding the vision and Members' official e-mail accounts:

- **emphasise that the small number who do not use their corporate e-mail account should use it, and**
- **encourage those who have decided not to use the technology to reconsider their decision**

8. WEBCASTING

- a) Submitted – the report by the Head of Democratic Services, to provide information on the use of the web-casting system which had been operational since 2015. It was noted that the Council had web-casted 23 meetings, with a total number of viewers of around 3400. It was reported that it was now appropriate to assess to what extent the Council wished to continue with the system from next year onwards. It was noted that the viewing figures were comparatively small, when compared with other Councils, with obvious differences between certain Meetings. It also appeared, from the analysis of the figures per meeting, that the 'subject area' was the driver for the viewing figures, and therefore, if it were to continue, that much could be done to raise awareness and increase interest.
- b) It was added that the system had been grant funded and that this grant was coming to an end. Following a recent survey, it was noted that some councils had voiced differing opinions regarding continuing with the provision, at a time when service cuts were a contentious issue. In Gwynedd, it was noted that there was an opportunity to improve the link between the video-conferencing provision and remote attendance that could save costs for the Council by redirecting existing resource to continue with the web-casting service.
- c) In response to a question regarding the cost of the system, it was noted that one company provided the service for the majority of Councils, and that it was possible to negotiate a price for the service.
- d) Matters arising from the discussion
 - support for the need to continue, but concerns about the cost
 - need to raise awareness and interest
 - the process was only in its infancy, and therefore to propose a further investment for at least another year

RESOLVED to continue with the Council's Web-casting Service, to hold price negotiations on the costs, and further discussions on how to increase interest.

9. MEMBERS ANNUAL REPORTS 2014-15

- a) Submitted – a report by the Head of Democratic Services providing an update to members on the number of annual reports published in 2014/2015, and a request for observations to facilitate the arrangements for 2015/2016.

It was noted that the number of elected Members who had published an annual report had increased of past years, with 39 having completed one this year.

- b) In response to the report, it was noted there was a need to ensure that the report was a factual report about the Councillor. To ensure this, the legal guidelines had to be followed, to avoid the possibility of having to edit its content and what should be omitted. It was also proposed that the guidelines should be distributed with the template in order to make the arrangements easier. It was added, although the report could appear rather bland, that it was the Council's publication on the work of the Councillor, and that nothing prevented a councillor from publishing his or her own report, on social media for example.
- c) Matters arising from the discussion
- need to outline more of the context
 - need to re-examine the attendance percentages
 - a proposal to illustrate the number of meetings a year vs attendance
 - had any observations / responses been received from the public
 - would it be possible to include reasons for non-attendance?

In response to the observations, it was noted that no responses had been received from the public, but it could be possible to make further enquiries. In relation to attendance, it was noted that the *Mod Gov* system also recorded attendance percentages that were published on its website – it would be possible to include reasons for non-attendance on the template but not on the *Mod Gov* system.

RESOLVED to amend the template to address the above observations and to distribute the guidance with the template.

10. DIVERSITY SUB-GROUP

- a) Submitted – the report by the Chair of the Diversity Sub-group on the recent work undertaken by the sub-group and the information that has been collected to form a programme of work. Members were reminded that the Sub-group had been established in February 2015 in response to a national report and guidance in the Local Government Act 2012 to seek to increase diversity in local government.
- b) It was noted that the sub-group had been considering the current situation in Gwynedd, and had compared the profiles of Gwynedd's elected members with the profiles of the county's residents – statistics relating to age, sex, ethnic background and disability had been examined. Following an analysis of the situation, a work programme had been produced with the intention of delivering a change for the 2017 Elections.
- c) The work programme was discussed per heading.
- d) Observations arising from the discussion
- An opportunity here to promote / encourage / share information / train the County's young people through Youth Clubs, Young Farmers etc.
 - Need to promote good practice
 - Introduce people to specific subject areas to encourage their interest
 - A suggestion to encourage visits to Committees / watch web-casts
 - School Councils – accept that they are important but a need to increase their knowledge of Democracy
 - Encourage employers to be flexible in releasing individual who are

- considering a career in politics
 - A suggestion to consider evening meetings
 - A suggestion to offer training to those who are considering becoming councillors
- e) In response, it was noted that the Government had identified a lack of flexibility by employers as a barrier, and in the context of evening meetings, the Council would consult on this annually.

Resolved to approve the proposed work programme.

11. MEMBERS CHARTER - JOB DESCRIPTIONS

- a) Submitted, for information, the report by the Head of Democratic Services providing an update on the progress towards achieving the Members Charter. It was recommended to proceed in two steps. The first step would be for officers to ensure clarity of the current situation and the second step would be for the Democratic Services Committee to establish a small group of Councillors to look at the work of achieving the Charter for Gwynedd Council commencing with the work on the job descriptions.

Resolved to accept the report and to suggest that work should progress to seek to achieve the Wales Charter for Member Support and Development.

The meeting commenced at 10:00am and concluded at 12:00pm

CHAIRMAN