DEMOCRACY SERVICES COMMITTEE, 12/11/2024

PRESENT:

Councillors:

Anne Lloyd-Jones (Chair), Stephen Churchman, Annwen Hughes, Eryl Jones-Williams, Dewi Owen, Ioan Thomas, Llio Elenid Owen, Beca Roberts, Sian Williams and Anwen Jane Davies

Officers present:

Vera Jones (Democracy and Language Services Manager), Ian Jones (Head of Corporate Services), Sioned Mai Jones (Democracy Team Leader), Catrin Love (Assistant Head of Corporate Services), Mari Edwards (Learning and Development Manager), Cara Williams (Member Development Officer) and Iwan Edwards (Democracy Services Officer).

Also present:

Councillor Menna Trenholme (Cabinet Member for Corporate Services).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Cai Larsen, Arwyn Herald Roberts, Linda Anne Jones and Edgar Wyn Owen.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received.

3. URGENT ITEMS

No urgent matters were raised.

4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee, held on 18 June 2024, as a true record.

5. THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL FOR WALES' DRAFT REPORT

DECISION
To accept the report.

The report was submitted by the Democracy and Language Services Manager, highlighting the main points in the report. It was explained that the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales had a responsibility to set a salary for Councillors across Wales. The Panel publishes a draft report annually and provides Councillors the opportunity to respond to the draft report and its content. It was noted that this was the last Panel report because its duties were transferring to the Democracy and Boundary Commission Cymru from April 2025 onwards. It was further noted that the report addressed the main changes that the panel had recommended for April 2025 onwards. It was also mentioned that the report included the payments to the co-opted members, noting that Cyngor Gwynedd implemented the new arrangement to claim payments per hour.

During the discussion, the following observations were made:

- It was asked whether the figures for the average wage were based on the average wage across the whole of the United Kingdom, Wales only, or this area. In addition, it was enquired how the average wage was calculated.
- It was explained that it was only the rate for Wales that was for the Panel's attention and that they used a specific rate to calculate the average wage. It was noted that the report explained how the average wage was calculated.

6. LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT PROVISION FOR MEMBERS

DECISION
To accept the report.
Start publishing details of the Members who had completed the core training on the website from April 2025.

The report was submitted highlighting that work had been undertaken during the past few months to raise awareness of the seven core training sessions. Referring to table 1 in the report, it was noted that the number of members who had attended the seven core titles had not reached 100%. It was explained that table 2 showed the progress in the number of members who had completed the training over this year, as well as an overview of the number of courses that had been run over the year.

It was noted that the Learning and Development service had received enquiries from Members who were governors asking whether the safeguarding training that they received in their role as governors was sufficient. It was confirmed that this training was insufficient as the governors' course did not address vulnerable adults.

It was explained that the service could not continue to constantly conduct courses that were half empty, despite the fact that the field was a priority. It was noted that the intention was to arrange that recordings were available on the Members' Intranet for members who had not attended the courses to date so that the members could watch them in their own time. It was mentioned that there was a live dashboard available to monitor who had attended the training. It was noted that many other Councils in Wales published statistics regarding the number of members who had completed training. It was explained that this was not something that Cyngor Gwynedd currently did, but there would be a discussion about changing to this direction.

Reference was made to the consultation process with the members over the past few months in the form of a Development and Needs questionnaire. The questionnaire had been open for a six-week period over the summer and the results were available and attached to the report. The Member Development Officer noted that they had categorised the questionnaire and asked the members to prioritise their learning and development needs.

During the discussion, the following observations were made:

- A member thanked for the support that he had received since losing his eyesight but, unfortunately, it was explained that he was having trouble seeing recordings clearly. It was asked whether it would be possible to receive the information on paper. The Member Development Officer confirmed that she would contact the member to discuss the matter further.
- It was noted that there was inconsistency between the members' learning programme and learning record and an explanation was requested. The Chair reiterated that she had attended seven core training sessions but that these did not show on her learning programme. It was explained that 'my learning record' listed the courses that members had attended and that 'my learning programme' also included e-learning modules. It was explained that the e-learning modules were in addition to the core training.
- It was questioned how many members had completed the seven core training sessions. It was replied that ten members had completed the seven core titles.
- It was expressed that there was no objection to publishing statistics on the members who had completed the core training.
- The Head of Corporate Services reported that the training statistics were public information in other Councils and that some authorities went a step further and included information on every training offered to Members. It was expressed that it was good practice and beneficial, because the service had already started to receive requests regarding this type of information. It was noted that the intention was to aim to start publishing these statistics in April 2025.
- It was proposed that the statistics would be published from April 2025 onwards and this was accepted by the Committee.

7. INFORMATION FOR COUNCILLORS

DECISION
To accept the report, noting the observations submitted.

The report was submitted highlighting the developments that had taken place when trying to rationalise information and the briefing programme for Councillors. Attention was drawn to Councillors' worries and that they had noted that they were drowning as a result of all the demand/offers for briefing sessions, training and information. It was noted that an attempt had been made to take a step back and consider how to improve the situation. In addition, it was noted that there was an attempt to try to rationalise the additional applications that arose over the year, applications that could not be anticipated at the start of the year, but briefing sessions had to be conducted for the members. It was explained that the intention was to have a better order on the briefing sessions and use them when there were matters across the County common to every Councillor. In addition, it was noted that better use had to be made of the Area Forums and it was suggested to use them to present relevant information to specific areas, where the discussion would vary from area to area.

During the discussion, the following observations were made:

- Frustration was expressed that information was published by the press about areas that the Councillor represented but the information was not shared with the Councillor beforehand. It was asked for any information shared with the press to also be shared with the Councillors.
- The observation that the Councillors were 'drowning' as a result of all the requirements for training sessions was reiterated and agreed on. It was noted that they received many e-mails

regarding all the courses held which created a problem filtering through all the e-mails.

8. WALES COUNCILLOR SUPPORT SELF-EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

DECISION
To accept the report.

The report was submitted providing an update on the work that had been undertaken on the Wales Councillor Support Self-Evaluation Framework. It was explained that the new Framework reflected a more progressive approach to assisting and supporting Councillors. It was reported that the Framework had been divided into three different work streams to ensure that every work stream and role was addressed.

An initial meeting had been held in September with representatives from the Democracy Services Committee to share opinions, comments and ideas about the current Learning and Development provision. It was noted that it had been a very useful meeting for officers of the Democracy service and the Learning and Development service to understand the Councillors' problems regarding the Learning and Development provision and also to remind members of the information available and how to reach this information.

It was mentioned that another meeting had been arranged for 3 December to discuss Democracy matters and it was hoped to report on the observations of that meeting at the next Democracy Services Committee meeting. It was noted that any member was welcome to join the meeting if they felt strongly or had an opinion to share on the element of Democracy support.

During the discussion, the following observations were made:

- The members expressed their thanks for the report, welcoming the observations and ideas noted.
- Reference was made to page 7 and 8 of the report's appendix, noting the opinion that the legislation regarding the research facilities was discriminatory. It was mentioned that local authorities were only permitted to appoint three political assistants which placed smaller groups at a disadvantage and created problems. In addition, it was believed that these assistants wrote correspondence on behalf of members which placed a further disadvantage to the members who did not receive this support. It was questioned whether there was a definition of groups without sufficient representation.
- In response, the observation was accepted regarding the political assistants that some groups could take advantage of them, and others could not. However, it was mentioned that support was also available from the Learning and Development team and the Democracy service, and that this was aligned to bring the provision together.
- It was noted that it was a decision for every individual local authority to decide what use they made of the framework and that it was important to set its context first. It was explained that there was support in the framework to identify what Cyngor Gwynedd and Gwynedd Councillors wanted as support and the questions that should be asked when considering the framework and any future developments.
- It was explained that there was no definition of the groups without sufficient representation, but the next steps would consider this. In addition, it was explained that no resources were available for some groups as the Council was bound to the legislative guidelines which meant that some groups required 10% of the membership to be able to have a group assistant.

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