

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE 26/10/17

Present: Dewi Wyn Roberts (Chair)

Councillors: Dylan Bullard, Anwen J. Davies, Annwen Hughes, John Brynmor Hughes, Nia Wyn Jeffreys, Anne Lloyd Jones, Charles Wyn Jones, Linda Ann Jones, Olaf Cai Larsen, Dewi Owen and Catrin Elen Wager

OFFICERS: Vera Jones (Members Manager - Democracy Service) and Geraint Owen (Head of Corporate Support) and Siôn Owen (Members' Support Officer)

APOLOGIES: Councillors Annwen Daniels and Hefin Underwood

1. APOLOGIES

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received from any members present.

3. URGENT ITEMS

4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 11 July 2017, as a true record.

5. MATTERS RAISED BY MEMBERS

A short presentation was received from the Democratic Services Manager noting that matters had been raised by Council Members in several forums. The Committee was given an opportunity to share their comments on the matters that had arisen in their role when assisting to develop Members' services.

Meeting Venues

It was noted that comments have been received that travelling to different meetings in Caernarfon took a great deal of Members' time.

Observations arising from the discussion:-

- Encourage the use of Council meeting rooms at Penrhyndeudraeth.
- Encourage the use of technology in order to facilitate attending remote meetings, enabling Members to participate fully in the meeting.
- This Committee should also take a lead role in developing technology and the required arrangements.
- In order to ensure success, the importance of a strong broadband connection across the county was emphasised.
- That chairing a meeting with an element of remote attendance was a different experience and more difficult compared to one where all the attendees were in one room.

- That other organisations already used technology such as Skype in order to bring staff at different locations together, and consequently the organisation's culture had changed.
- It was necessary to bear in mind the requirement to web-broadcast meetings when working on remote attendance.

In response the Head of Democratic Services noted that the Council was just starting the journey in terms of using technology to facilitate conducting meetings with elements of remote attendance.

Contacting Departments, information and communication from Departments and Publishing Members' addresses on the web

It was noted that some Members were discontent as developments had occurred in their wards without the Members being informed. It was also noted that a concern had arisen regarding personal details being published on the web.

Observations arising from the discussion:-

- The importance of communication between departments and Members was highlighted, it was noted that communication needed to be developed, especially in two-member wards.
- It was noted that 'Rhaeadr' was available on the Members' Portal, and part of its purpose was to provide information to Members.
- The Contact Centre was praised for responding in a professional manner to Members' enquiries.
- That publishing personal details on the web was part of the post, and assisted the public to contact their councillor.

In response the Head of Democratic Services encouraged Members to share specific examples of their experiences of a lack of communication in order to understand the actual situation and to give further attention to the matters raised.

6. PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT INTERVIEWS

It was noted that the personal development interviews had taken place with Members in order to identify their development needs. 10 meetings had been conducted and the following matters had been highlighted:

- There was a great deal of work for new Members to become acquainted with the Council and its culture, especially the constitutional arrangements and how the Council worked.
- There was often confusion regarding the correct point of contact for matters where the Members needed to contact Council officers, and it should be ensured that the details on the Members' Portal were correct and current.
- It was necessary to continue to offer training and various opportunities for Members to develop.

Observations arising from the discussion:-

- It was necessary to be aware that Members had jobs and other commitments when organising meetings and development sessions.
- In response to an enquiry, it was noted that an element of performance appraisal was part of the personal development meetings.
- That it would be beneficial for new Members to receive assistance with Ward work, as soon as possible once they had been elected.
- That problems arose with the electronic devices distributed to Members to assist them with their work.

In response, the Democratic Services Manager noted that additional sessions to the session that took place on 10th of September would be conducted on matters concerning Committees. Personal development meetings would also continue to be offered to all Members to assist them with their personal development. The Democratic Service would look at alternative methods of conducting development sessions for Members.

The Head of Democratic Services noted that different persons learnt through different methods and this would be considered when planning future support for Members.

RESOLVED:

1 - To convene a sub-group of Members of this Committee to assist with the development of the Members' Portal and to trial alternative methods of conducting meetings and training. Councillors Annwen Hughes, Nia Jeffreys and Dewi Roberts were appointed to the sub-group.

2 - That a questionnaire be circulated to all Members to see what the problems were with the IT equipment, the results would be collated in a report to the next meeting of this Committee.

7. INDEPENDENT REMUNERATIONS PANEL FOR WALES - CONSULTATION

The joint report of the Chair of this Committee and the Democratic Services Manager was presented discussing the consultation of the Independent Remuneration Panel. The Panel's main recommendations were that the Members basic salary should increase by £200 (1.49%) in 2018/19, the removal of the two tier arrangement for Cabinet Members and Committee Chairs, and there was encouragement for those eligible to claim a reimbursement for costs associated with arranging care. The Committee's observations were invited.

Observations arising from the discussion:-

- Was there a possibility that Members would not have to vote for their own salaries?
- Would it be possible to include a specific box to claim a reimbursement for the costs of care on the relevant page within the Self-service system?

In response, the Democratic Services Manager noted that removing the two tier of higher allowances would mean that no vote would be required on the Members future salary levels. It was a decision for individual Members if they wanted to accept the salary available or part of it. The Head of Democratic Services noted that only one authority had benefited from the ability to present two tiers of higher salary. She encouraged the eligible members to claim a reimbursement for childcare costs, in order to enable them to participate fully.

RESOLVED: to accept the report's recommendations as a response to the consultation.

8. DIVERSITY DATA

Submitted - Diversity Data in accordance with the request of this Committee at its meeting on 11th July 2017. The information showed that the work of the Diversity in Democracy Sub-group had borne fruit to an extent, and that there was room for improvement.

Observations arising from the discussion:-

- In order to raise awareness amongst school pupils it was suggested that a pilot promotion event was conducted and that school pupils from Gwynedd should be invited to participate.
- It was noted that it was important to draw the community into discussions and activities.
- That there was a link between the salary available and the Members' age profile: That persons who were close to, or had retired were more likely to stand as councillors as the salary was not an essential factor for them. On the other hand, it was noted that the salary available to Members was fairly attractive to students, and that it was persons in employment or raising a family that were least likely to stand in an election.
- That the Gwynedd provision for Members appeared to be one of the best.

In response, the Head of Democratic Services reported that representatives of the Independent Remuneration Panel had recently stated that the salary of an elected Member was based on a working week of 21 hours. Reference was also made to the White Paper on Local Government being prepared by the Assembly, and specifically to the likelihood that it would include proposals to amend regulations for candidates and also the right to vote, that may possibly be a boost to increase the level of diversity in democracy.

RESOLVED

- 1. To re-convene the Diversity in Democracy Sub-group with Councillors Annwen Daniels, Olaf Cai Larsen, Anne Lloyd Jones and Catrin Wager as members.**
- 2. Organise a pilot event to promote democracy, by inviting pupils from Ysgol y Moelwyn to take part.**

The meeting commenced at 10.30 am and concluded at 12.20 pm

CHAIRMAN