
DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE 9/04/19

Present: Anne Lloyd Jones (Vice-Chair)

Councillors: Annwen Hughes, John Brynmor Hughes, Charles Wyn Jones, Olaf Cai Larsen, Judith Mary Humphreys and Edgar Wyn Owen

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

APOLOGIES: Councillors Annwen Daniels, Anwen J. Davies, Linda Ann Jones, Dewi Owen, Dewi Wyn Roberts and Eryl Jones-Williams

1. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received.

2. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 12 February 2019 as a true record.

3. FINANCIAL REMUNERATION FOR ELECTED MEMBERS

Submitted - the report of the Democratic Services Manager noting the final recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales, and members were reminded that the Panel's draft proposals had been presented to the committee at its meeting on 25 October 2018. She added that the Panel had decided not to set different levels of remuneration now, as no authorities used these different levels. It was noted that there had been an increase of £268 (1.97%) in the basic salary for Members with an increase of £800 in the salaries of the Leader, Deputy Leader and Executive Members inclusive of the £268 increase in basic salary. The other senior salaries payable would receive the increase as per the basic salary increase only. The Panel had noted that the number claiming reimbursement for the costs of care had remained low, and encouraged those eligible to claim it. It was emphasised that any member could refuse the salary increase by informing the Head of Democratic Service in writing.

Observations from the discussion:

- That it was important that everyone was aware that the Panel was responsible for setting the salary level, not the Council.
- That promoting the reimbursement of the costs of care for those eligible was not an easy task. Nevertheless, it was important for the availability of the reimbursement to be promoted prior to the elections in order to encourage diversity among candidates.
- That the fact that the salary of the Council Chair had been increased to the same level as the chairs of other Council Committees was a positive development, following the Panel's decision not to give a choice in terms of salary levels.

In response, the Democratic Services Manager noted that claims for reimbursements for the costs of care had been reported individually in the past, but the Panel had allowed

councils to publish the total of the claims in order to prevent the stigmatisation of those claiming it. As 2018/19 was the first reporting cycle since the Panel introduced the change, it was too early to see whether the change had had an effect in increasing the low number who had claimed a reimbursement of the costs of care. It was added that arrangements would be made for a leaflet to be sent to all members to promote the reimbursement.

4. DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME 2019/20

Submitted - the report of the Head of Democratic Services presented by the Democratic Services Manager, noting that the work programme was submitted following a request in the discussions on rationalising the number of meetings at the 2 February 2018 meeting of this Committee. As the number of Committee meetings had been rationalised, it was important to use the time available for the Committee effectively. It was added that the work programme remained dependent on the input of members in proposing items, as much if not more than officers' input.

Observations from the discussion:

- That there was a need to find ways of increasing the number of members on the Members' Portal.
- That the Portal was very useful, but that it was difficult to access it and it was difficult to understand why a password was needed to access the information on it.
- That the proposed work programme was very light, and that discussing the Council's Committees Calendar at the April meeting would likely be too late in the year.

In response, the Democratic Services Manager stated that the Members' Portal had been created following feedback from members in the period leading up to the 2017 election in order provide information more effectively. It was acknowledged that the number of users had been low, and though the feedback received about the Portal noted that the information provided was useful, it was difficult to use. Internal discussions had been held in order to improve the platform which provided the Portal and that reducing the number of log-in pages to the minimum to comply with security guidelines was part of the work. A report on work progress would be presented at the November 2019 meeting of this Committee.

5. HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES' ANNUAL REPORT

The Head of Democratic Services submitted the report which was to be submitted to the Council at its meeting on 2 May 2019. He noted that it was an attempt at creating a more concise report, focusing on the developments of the year. He added that technological developments were likely to be an unavoidable part of the Committee's work, given the pace of developments in the field. He also referred to low attendance level of members at information sharing sessions. The Democratic Service also intended to assist the sub-group of this Committee to re-visit the Diversity in Democracy work. He also emphasised the need to hold a continuous dialogue between elected members and officers in order to create a service which met their needs.

Observations from the discussion:

- Following the reference to members' attendance at information sharing meetings, a member asked whether any research had been undertaken to analyse the situation.
- Were there any grounds to the feeling that some meetings were being held because they had been scheduled rather than because important matters needed to be discussed?

- That there was a role for the political groups to ensure a better attendance level.
- That there was a risk of causing conflict between encouraging or forcing members to attend meetings and the Committee's diversity in democracy objectives, which meant that it was much easier for individuals who were nearing retirement age to attend meetings as they had fewer work and family responsibilities to deal with.
- Was the timing of meetings affecting attendance levels?
- Was there a pattern in terms of attending committee meetings when elections were in the pipeline?
- Was it possible to impose rules in terms of membership of committee on members?

In response, the Head of Democratic Services noted that members' attendance had been referred to at a working group discussing the Scrutiny procedure, and that we would need to experiment in order to find effective methods of sharing information with the members. He added that members' ability to attend meetings was a matter that the Diversity in Democracy sub-group should be aware of in doing its work, in order to consider any possible solutions.

The Democratic Services Manager stated that it was not statutorily possible to force members to be members of committees, but that it was possible to offer encouragement and that the matter had been raised at the Council's Business Group. It was intended to move towards a system of holding informal meetings which would report back to formal committee meetings.

The meeting commenced at 10.30 am and concluded at 11.20 am

CHAIRMAN