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## DEMOCRACY SERVICES COMMITTEE, TUESDAY 17<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2020

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**PRESENT:**

Anne Lloyd Jones (Chair)

**Councillors:** Annwen Daniels, Annwen Davies, Anwen Hughes, Judith Humphreys, Eryl Jones-Williams, Cai Larsen, Edgar Wyn Owen, Dewi Owen and Dewi Wyn Roberts.

**OFFICERS:** Geraint Owen (Head of Corporate Support Department), Vera Jones (Democracy and Language Services Manager), Annes Sion (Democracy Team Leader), Natalie Lloyd Jones (Democracy Services Officer).

**ALSO PRESENT for Item 9:**

**Carey Cartwright, Sam Angel and Cara Williams (Learning and Development Team)**

On behalf of the committee, the Chair extended her deepest sympathies to the family of Councillor Charles Wyn Jones, who had been very active on this committee.

The news that Councillor Dylan Bullard had been appointed as a new member of this committee was welcomed.

**1. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR**

RESOLVED: To elect Councillor Dewi Owen as Vice-chair of this Committee for 2020/21.

**2. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillor Linda Ann Jones.

**3. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST**

No declarations of personal interest were received.

**4. URGENT ITEMS**

There were no urgent matters.

**5. MINUTES**

It was accepted that the minutes of the previous meeting were correct.

## 6. REMUNERATION FOR ELECTED MEMBERS

The Democracy and Language Services Manager submitted her report seeking the committee members' observations to form a response to the consultation by 23 November.

An overview of the proposed increase in elected members' basic salaries and higher salaries was provided. She noted that should members wish not to accept it they would be required to submit a written note in accordance with the usual procedure.

Attention was drawn to the main issue for discussion, namely the concern that remained regarding the low rate of members claiming the reimbursement of contributions towards necessary care of dependent children and adults. The Democratic and Language Services Manager noted that the rate was low across Wales, and the Democratic Services Committee was asked to discuss methods for promoting the reimbursement amongst members.

It was noted that steps had already been taken in removing the previous requirement to publish the names of individuals who claimed the reimbursement. It was expressed that removing this requirement encouraged diversity in democracy in the hope that more people from diverse backgrounds would stand as councillors.

The following specific points arose from the discussion:

- (a) It was suggested that new members could be made aware of the reimbursement soon after their appointment, and that existing members could be reminded through a letter.
- (b) It was discussed that it was possible that there was a stigma attached to claiming the reimbursement, and there was a need to emphasise that those claiming it would remain anonymous.
- (c) It was noted that there was a need to normalise claiming the reimbursement by promoting it on a national level.
- (d) A concern was raised that existing members who were eligible to claim were not doing so, and it was suggested that there was a need to send an appeal out for them to claim it.

## DECISION

- (a) **To accept the report.**
- (b) **It was agreed that the Chair will write a letter to the members promoting the reimbursements in an attempt to increase the number of those claiming.**

## **7. ADOPTION LEAVE**

In response to a consultation by Welsh Government, a report was submitted by the Democracy and Language Services Manager on extending the period of adoption leave to 26 weeks.

It was noted that this would ensure that elected members would receive the same rights as officers. It was expressed that this extension also encouraged diversity in democracy as people from diverse backgrounds would appreciate the flexibility associated with standing as councillor.

The following specific points arose from the discussion:

- Clarity was sought regarding maternity leave rights for members, and in response the Democracy and Language Service Manager said that these would be the same for members as they were for Officers.

## **DECISION**

**To accept the report.**

## **8. DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT FOR MEMBERS DURING THE COVID PANDEMIC AND IN FUTURE**

The Democracy and Language Services Manager reported on the developments and support for members during the Covid-19 pandemic. She said that Council members and staff had faced major changes due to Covid-19 and the lockdown restrictions. It was noted that members had been under high demand in recent times. The importance of well-being and self-care were emphasised in light of these demands.

The Democracy Team Leader presented a summary outlining the various developments that had taken place. It was noted that several members of the team's staff had transferred to the front line during the first lockdown, however they had now re-joined the democracy team. She elaborated noting that the team's working methods had been entirely transformed to facilitate remote working and holding virtual meetings and committees.

She explained further that a high number of virtual meetings had taken place. 28 formal committees had been held in the period up to the end of October, 30 informal meetings with elected members and 23 virtual training sessions with members. Also, it was noted that every elected member had by now attended a virtual meeting.

She said that some positive notes had arisen since developing virtual meetings, emphasising that members' attendance had increased along with their willingness to convene.

More information was provided regarding arrangements for future meetings by the Head of Corporate Support Department. It was mentioned that internal discussions were already taking place and the following points were shared regarding future arrangements for officers;

- A presumption had been established among officers that they would be holding in-house meetings virtually in the future.
  - It was acknowledged that face-to-face meetings would have to happen occasionally, for example upon appointing new officers or to have a difficult conversation.
- (e) It was noted that 'hybrid' meetings were considered less favourably as it could be a second-rate experience for those joining remotely.

The discussion was opened up for committee members to voice their opinions on future circumstances for members.

The following specific points arose from the discussion:

- It was noted there was a need to strike a balance between virtual and physical meetings. It was suggested that consideration should be given to prioritising which meetings truly needed to take place in person.
- It was suggested that there was a need to set rules for how long members spent in front of a screen because of virtual meetings. It was noted that clear arrangements were needed in terms of time, posture and the position of the computer to ensure members' welfare.
- The virtual arrangement was praised by members who lived further away from Caernarfon as they were saving on the time spent travelling, it was better for the environment and it saved travelling costs for the Council. It was said that the virtual way of working enabled them to achieve more in a day as they were not travelling for extended periods of time.
- It was suggested that the virtual arrangement provided diversity in democracy as it would be easier for people who worked to undertake duties as elected members.
- Officers were thanked for adapting well to the new way of working and it was noted that they had responded quickly to enquiries and e-mails despite working from home.
- Concern was expressed that members needed to consider who was in the background whilst virtual meetings were being held and to bear security and confidentiality in mind.

## **DECISION**

- (a) To accept the report.**
- (b) It was agreed that further discussions are needed on the way forward after the members voiced their opinions on the format of meetings in**

**future.**

## **9. LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT PROVISION FOR MEMBERS**

The Learning and Development Manager submitted his report on the provision of remote training sessions.

He provided an overview of the provision, and highlighted the successes, challenges and developments the service had experienced as a result of Covid-19 restrictions. It was noted that the provision included resource packs, training videos and individual training.

It was noted that the culture of providing training had changed substantially over recent months and the old methods were now redundant. He said that more members had undertaken training sessions because they were happening virtually, and more were also contributing during the sessions.

The committee members were asked to consider the contents of the new training package and provide feedback on the method of offering virtual training.

The following specific points arose from the discussion:

- It was said that there had been more opportunity to participate with the emergence of virtual training. It was reiterated that it was a good idea to hold the sessions virtually as they were more convenient to attend without having to travel to them. It was noted that consideration should be given to holding some sessions in the evenings.
- It was noted that more members seemed to be attending the virtual sessions as opposed to sessions that involved travelling to them.
- Observations were made on the new programme noting that it was interesting and offered flexibility.

## **DECISION**

**To accept the report.**

## **10 DIVERSITY IN DEMOCRACY**

The Democracy and Language Services Manager provided an outline of the steps and the development that had taken place thus far and what was in the pipeline to promote diversity in democracy.

It was noted that today's committee had referred to several aspects that were relevant in order to promote diversity, for example in discussing care reimbursements and virtual meetings.

Reference was made to one of the target areas, namely to promote democracy among young people by establishing a project to encourage 16 and 17 year olds to register to vote.

This was reiterated and it was noted that this period had highlighted the real need for diversity so that members were able to respond to different circumstances that occurred within the community.

A member said there was a need to proceed with their attempts to attract more women, young people and disabled people to participate in elections and to stand in elections. On this note, the Committee was asked for permission to commence preparations for the 2022 Local Government elections and to support the direction of the work programme.

The following specific points arose from the discussion:

- A number of methods for communicating and promoting participation amongst the target groups were shared.
- It was expressed that the legislative change also enabled citizens from other countries to vote in elections.
- It was mentioned that it was possible to look at how Welsh Government was dealing with the challenge of promoting the elections for Senedd Cymru in 2021. The Council could then adopt the same methods for Local Government elections.
- It was proposed that there was a need to highlight that it was possible to both be a councillor and fulfil family duties or continue to work at the same time.

**DECISION:**

**To accept the report and support the direction of the work programme.**

The meeting commenced at 10:30am and concluded at 12:10pm.

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**CHAIR**

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