
DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE, 09.06.15

Present: Councillor Tom Ellis (Chair)

Councillors: Annwen Davies, Lesley Day, Jean Forsyth, E. Selwyn Griffiths, Sian Gwenllian, Annwen Hughes, Jason Humphreys, Anne Lloyd Jones, Siôn Wyn Jones, Dilwyn Morgan, and Michael Sol Owen.

Officers: Geraint Owen (Head of Democratic Services), Arwel Ellis Jones (Senior Manager – Democracy and Delivery), Vera Jones (Democratic Services Manager), and Glynda O'Brien (Members' Support and Scrutiny Officer).

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

It was resolved to confirm the Council's resolution at its meeting on 14 May 2015, to elect Councillor Tom Ellis as Chair of this Committee for 2015/16.

The Chair thanked Councillor Lesley Day for her work and commitment as Chair to this Committee over the last two years.

2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

It was resolved to elect Councillor Anne Lloyd Jones as Vice-chair of this Committee for 2015/16.

3. WELCOME

A welcome was extended to Mr Geraint Owen, who had recently been appointed to the post of Head of Democratic Services and best wishes were given to him in his new post.

4. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

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

5. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 10 March 2015, as a true record.

6. ANNUAL REPORTS BY MEMBERS

(a) A report was submitted by the Senior Manager – Democracy and Delivery and the Democratic Services Manager regarding producing annual reports to include factual information of activities, if Members so wished.

(b) It was noted that there was a suggestion in the white paper on changing the status of annual reports to be statutory with statistics of members' attendance in meetings / training to be included as public information rather than only in the annual reports. Reference was made to the template in Appendix 1 to be sent to Members, in accordance with the procedure implemented last year, with some information already prepared for them

to submit their reports by the end of June. The Committee's comments/views on the proposals were requested.

- (c) The following points were highlighted by individual Members:
- (i) That some members did not see that producing an annual report was beneficial and if support was received from the Council then producing a circular to include work undertaken by elected Members in their wards would be much more effective.
 - (ii) It was disappointing that only 26 Members had produced an annual report last year and more Members should be encouraged to produce them via discussions with the Political Groups. <<
 - (iii) It was pleasing that there was an increase in the numbers compared to the previous year (8) and it was a very useful tool for Members and there was evidence that a great deal of individuals read the annual reports.
 - (iv) That members had less opportunity than others to serve the county as they wished as they had not been chosen to sit on external bodies.
 - (v) It was suggested, where reference was made to absences in attending committees, that it would be useful to create an additional box for Members to be able to give the reasons why they could not attend as usually they had other commitments on behalf of the Council e.g. in the role of Champions.

(ch) The above observations were welcomed and it was stressed that the annual reports were seen as a minimum requirement and that anything Members produce above this was to be welcomed, but unfortunately it would not be possible for the Council to agree and commit to support anything further in the current financial climate.

Resolved: To accept and note the contents of the report and approve the format of the template subject to having an additional box to state the reasons for absence from committees.

7. MEMBERS' ATTENDANCE AND ALLOWANCES

- (a) A report was submitted by the Senior Manager - Democracy and Delivery and the Democratic Services Manager updating Members on the requirements to publish and report on attendance and allowances.
- (b) It was noted that it was necessary for the Council to publish information about the salaries proposed to be paid to Members for 2015/16 together with information about salaries and expenses paid to them during 2014/15. This year it was proposed to publish the information on the Council's website as well as in 'Newyddion Gwynedd'.
- (c) During the ensuing discussion the following points were highlighted:
 - (i) In terms of care allowance, that clarification should be included on members' rights to care allowance be that child care or a dependent as members had been criticised for receiving this in the past.
 - (ii) It should be noted that the Chair / Vice-chair of this Committee do not receive an allowance for the office, in order to give the public the full picture.
 - (iii) That some Members had the role of a Champion for special areas which entailed a great deal of additional travelling and in order to give a full picture that there should be an explanation to explain the miles travelled for the additional work compared to other members.

- (iv) That various Members served on the Council's behalf on other external bodies such as the National Park, Fire Service, Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd and they attended many meetings that meant a great deal of travelling hours.
 - (v) That the sample diary of a Member's work published last year was very interesting and useful to the public where their duties were noted and how many committees they attended.
 - (vi) In terms of the attendance of Members at meetings, some discontent was expressed that some Members did not attend regularly and this was an insult to the Council and their electors and they did not undertake their duties to the utmost.
 - (vii) Following on from the above, it was expressed that some Members did not feel that there was any value to attend committees as they could not make resolutions.
 - (viii) Percentages were not a fair reflection of attendance for those who serve on fewer committees.
 - (ix) In the context of attending courses/training, that is would be useful if the provision could be offered in the evening or on-line in order to facilitate this for those who work from 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.
 - (x) It was suggested that it may be beneficial to produce an hours sheet for Members to complete to justify the hours spent in meetings/local work etc.
- (ch) The officers responded to the above comments as follows:
- (a) that an explanation could be presented regarding the additional responsibilities of Members who have to travel a great deal more miles compared with other Members, this would be different to last year
 - (b) in terms of the sample diary, it was suggested that it may be possible to submit an article to 'Newyddion Gwynedd' based on questions and answers to address issues such as allowances, travelling, care allowances and attendance at meetings.
 - (c) obviously Members were anxious to change the regulations regarding attendance at meetings and it was suggested further that attendance percentages for every quarter could be published in 'Rhaeadr'.

Resolved:

- (a) To accept and note the contents of the report.**
- (b) To request that the Democratic Services Manager**

(i) to submit information to 'Newyddion Gwynedd':

- **based on a question and answer article to ensure clarity regarding the duties of Members as outlined in (a) and (b) above.**
- **To address if a Member had produced an Annual Report in the form of ✓ / x**

(ii) To publish the attendance percentages of Members at committees in 'Rhaeadr'

(iii) To note the possibility of specifying a minimum attendance level and send an e-mail to Members who fall below the specified level, for further consideration.

8. TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS

(A) Provision of Electronic Tablets

The report of the Senior Manager, Democracy and Delivery and the Democratic Services Manager was submitted updating Members on Information Technology issues.

It was noted that a pilot session had been organised for eight members on 26 June 2015 to improve their skills when using i-Pads. Dependent on the feedback from this session, they would proceed to continue with other small groups.

(a) During the ensuing discussion the following points were highlighted: by individual Members:

- (i) The i-pad software (Apple) was not compatible with the corporate computer system (Microsoft).
- (ii) That further training was a waste of time and having more software on the tablets would be more useful
- (iii) It was disappointing that the training was in Welsh only and some Members found it difficult to follow and every Member was not so computer literate
- (iv) That too much use of the i-pad caused eye problems
- (v) Difficulties to open some appendices

The Senior Information Technology Manager responded to the above observations as follows:

- (a) That many of the members were aware of the basic functions of i-pads but were eager to be more confident in their use. It was further noted that no decision had been made regarding additional software.
- (b) That the IT Unit could not support different types of software only the standard i-pad software.
- (c) That the use of tablets was more for reading and responding to e-mails and if work was required with spreadsheets, letters etc. then this should be undertaken on a personal computer.
- (ch) That training would be useful to justify screen brightness, font size, checking unfortunate incidents when vocabulary was changed.
- (d) It was suggested that any Member experiencing difficulties to open appendices should forward this information to the IT Unit in order to further investigate the problem.

Resolved: To approve to proceed with the pilot training programme and report back with the feedback to the next Committee meeting.

(B) Modern Gov

It was reported for information, by the Senior Manager Democracy and Delivery, regarding the above electronic committee management system that offered more flexibility and was a way of publishing material on the Council's new website. The system would enable:

- more effective administration of committees
- placing agendas more conveniently on members' tablets
- to merge with the Council's web-casting system
- a convenient way of collection of data on attendance etc.

It was trusted that the system would be installed in July, with training for Members on 25 November 2015. Further information would be shared in 'Rhaeadr' once the system had been installed.

The Senior IT Manager gave an undertaking to investigate further into the weakness of the tablets to search the new website in accordance with a Member's request.

Resolved: To accept and note the above information.

(D) << Town and Community Councils Websites

Members were reminded of the grant provision of £500 made available in 2013/14 for Town and Community Councils to establish a website and 48 councils in Gwynedd had benefited from the grant. The IT Unit invited expressions of interest from suitable companies to design and establish a joint website for Town and Community Councils, however, unfortunately the quotation received was not within £500. It was noted that the grant had by now ended.

In response to enquiries from individual Members, the Senior IT Manager noted as follows:

- (i) He would investigate the grant guidance further for Town / Community Councils that had not completed the work of establishing a website by March 2015.
- (ii) In terms of the exact information to be provided on the website, Unllais Cymru should be asked for guidance
- (iii) It was not possible for the Council's IT Unit to create a website for Town / Community Councils due to the lack of resources, however, information could be shared with them of the companies available on the market.

Resolved: **(a) To accept and note the above.**
 (b) To request that the Democratic Services Manager / Senior IT Manager checks the grant guidance regarding declaring interests on the website and forwards a guidance to Committee Members.

9. PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT INTERVIEWS

- (a) A report was submitted by the Senior Manager - Democracy and Delivery and the Democratic Services Manager updating the Members on the Council's arrangements regarding personal development interviews.
- (b) It was noted that Members had been offered an opportunity to have a discussion regarding their needs in order to feed these into their training programme. <26 members had been part of the process and their views were sought on how they had benefited from being part of this. A response had been received from a small number with varied comments – some saw a huge benefit to the process and other saw none. It was proposed to conduct a series of meetings from September to December and the next steps were expanded upon within the report.
- (c) Members were requested for their views regarding continuing with the round of interviews and / or give an opportunity for those who had not previously been interviewed to have an opportunity during September to December.
- (ch) In response, the Member noted that training was extremely important and it was not possible to have too much. It was further suggested that implementing a rolling programme of interviews every two years would be beneficial.

Resolved: **(a) To accept and note the contents of the report.**
 (b) To approve to offer interviews to those Members who did not have an opportunity in the last round, to be interviewed during the Autumn and to implement a rolling programme of interviews thereafter every two years.

10. WORK PROGRAMME

- (a) A draft work programme was submitted for the Committee's consideration in order to forward plan the year's work.
- (b) The views of the Committee were requested on the draft programme framework drawing specific attention to the items listed.
- (c) The draft work programme was welcomed and especially the opportunity to hold a dialogue with the Chair of the Standards Committee in order to understand the terms of reference of that committee and the relationship between both committees.
- (ch) The Head of Democratic Services took the opportunity to address the Committee by stating that the Democratic Services Teams, Members' Support, Cabinet, Political Groups and the Translators ensured support for the democratic process and were experienced in the field. It was recognised that more on-line training needed to be considered and that a great deal of work occurred via the E-learning field. Whilst accepting that members had different expertise, he stressed the need to work together in order to enable Members to undertake effective scrutiny in committees.

Resolved: To accept, note and approve the draft work programme as a basic framework together with any matters that will arise requiring attention.

The meeting commenced at 10.30 am and concluded at 12.35 pm.