
DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE, TUESDAY 19 NOVEMBER 2019

PRESENT:

Anne Lloyd Jones (Vice-chair)

Councillors: Annwen Hughes, Charles Wyn Jones, Linda Ann Jones, Edgar Wyn Owen, Eryl Jones-Williams and Mair Rowlands

OFFICERS: Geraint Owen (Head of Corporate Support), Vera Jones (Democracy and Language Service Manager) and Sian Ellis Williams (Civic and Democratic Services Officer)

ALSO PRESENT for Items 10 and 11

Carey Cartwright, Nia Meleri Edwards, Sam Angel and Cara Williams (Learning and Development Team)

1. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

RESOLVED: To elect Councillor Anne Lloyd Jones as vice-chair of this Committee for the year 2019/20.

2. APOLOGIES

Councillors Annwen Daniels, Anwen Davies, John Brynmor Hughes, Judith Humphreys and Dewi Owen.

3. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received.

4. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items

5. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 4 April 2019 as a true record.

6. ELECTED MEMBERS' REMUNERATION

The Democracy and Language Service Manager presented her report, and noted that the Annual Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (February 2020) had been published in draft form on 15 October 2019. She asked the Democratic Services Committee to submit observations upon which to form a response to the draft

consultation by the Panel. There was a need to respond to the consultation by 10 December 2019.

The following specific points arose from the discussion:

- It was important that everyone was aware that the Panel was responsible for setting the salary level, not the Council.
- They were in keeping with the level of increase noted in the draft report.
- That promoting the reimbursement of care costs for those eligible was not an easy task, and it was recognised that it would take time to raise awareness, and that it would not happen immediately. Nevertheless, it was important for the availability of the reimbursement to be promoted prior to the elections in order to encourage diversity among candidates. It was noted that this was a national problem, and was not unique to Gwynedd. Officers were asked to consider different methods of raising awareness of the care reimbursement among members.

The report was accepted.

7. COMMUNICATION AND TECHNOLOGY

The Democracy and Language Service Manager presented a report that had been jointly submitted by her and the Senior Information Technology Manager.

She reported that the Council had made progress with its use of technology, but there was room for further improvement, and the Democratic Services Committee had a specific function in assisting with this.

It was noted that it would be necessary to consider the bigger picture when identifying the way forward, and to approach this in a rational way that was in keeping with relevant developments. To this end, a joint project Group between the Finance Department and the Corporate Support Department had recently been established to take this work forward. It was noted that the project Group would provide an update report to the Democratic Services Committee in due course.

It was reported that improvements would continue to be sought within the current provision in the meantime, including trialling the use of video conferencing and Skype, gathering evidence about user experience, and endeavouring to eliminate barriers to making the best use of the current provision.

Furthermore, work would be undertaken with the Learning and Development Service to develop training for chairing such meetings, and similar work in other Councils would be examined in order to learn from their experiences.

It was also noted that the members' portal had been given attention over recent months, and it was reported that many comments had been submitted on the practicality of the portal, and ideas had been put forward. In short, the portal could be made more user-friendly, but it contained very useful information - especially for new Members. These comments had led to the development of the 'new look' portal, which was far easier to use and had been constructed from the perspective of the members who used it, rather than the staff who designed it. A pilot site had been created, with the aim of sharing the portal with all members soon. The Democratic Services Committee was requested to identify three or four members who would be willing to be introduced to the portal and to use it for a period of time in order to feed comments back to the officers.

This way forward was approved, and Councillors Anne Lloyd-Jones, Charles Wyn Jones

and Mair Rowlands were nominated to assist with trialling the new look Members' Porth.

8. ELECTED MEMBERS' ANNUAL REPORTS 2018/19

The Democracy and Language Service Manager reported that local authorities, under the provisions of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, must make arrangements for:

- each person who is a member of the authority to make an annual report about the person's activities as a member of the authority during the year to which the report relates,
- each person who is a member of the authority's executive to make an annual report about the person's activities as a member of the executive during the year to which the report relates, and
- the authority to publish all annual reports produced by its members and by the members of its executive.

The number of Elected Members who chose to publish annual reports over recent years was noted:

2012/13	8 reports (pilot arrangements)
2013/14	26 reports (using the template for the first time)
2014/15	39 reports
2015/16	29 reports
2016/17	No reports were produced
2017/18	16 reports
2018/19	17 reports

It was reported that Members of the Democratic Services Committee has discussed the annual reports on many occasions, with the continuing aim of producing reports which were visually attractive, trying to simplify the process by which they were produced, whilst keeping within the guidelines for the reports.

This year's timetable was much tighter than it had been in the past, with the aim of ensuring that reports were published bilingually on the website before the summer. It had been decided to further simplify the process, by asking Elected Members to answer two questions via e-mail, as follows:

- What were your main electoral and community activities during the period 4 May 2018 to 3 May 2019?
- Which meetings did you attend during the period 4 May 2018 to 2 May 2019 in addition to those noted in your attendance statistics on the website?

The process of producing the 2018/19 reports this year had been far smoother for Members and Officers. It was believed that the reasons for this were:

- There was no template to complete, instead two questions needed the attention of the Members
- There was no work in transferring from one computer programme to another
- Many unnecessary steps were deleted from the background processes, steps that did not add value
- The work was prioritised by officers so that it could be completed in a timely manner

The value of publishing the annual reports was questioned, and the Manager agreed to look at the numbers reading / viewing the reports on the website. She suspected that

those figures increased during an election period. It was also reported that there would be an imminent amendment to the Local Government Measure, and that it was expected that this would include an update on the annual reports.

The report was accepted.

9. DIVERSITY SUB-GROUP

It was reported that the sub-group had recommenced its work over recent months, and had been pleased to welcome new members to the group. Progress had been made in three specific areas: raising awareness of unconscious bias, undertaking a pilot event to increase awareness of democracy arrangements among young people, and establishing a further work programme.

The committee noted that "Unconscious Bias" - training that arose originally as a request from the Democratic Services Committee had been extremely successful and everyone was encouraged to attend the course.

It was reported that a group of 85 young people from six primary schools in the Dyffryn Nantlle catchment area visited the Council Chamber in July this year. The purpose of the session was to try to raise the children's awareness of the Council's democracy arrangements. They experienced a discussion in the Chamber and they were given an opportunity to question some Councillors on different topics.

In approving the work programme, it was noted that the impact of extending the vote to 16-17 year olds needed to be added to the terms of reference and work programme when the measure came into force.

The proposal to establish a national fund to assist disabled people who needed practical help to stand in elections was welcomed.

10. LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT PROVISION FOR MEMBERS

The Organisational Learning and Development Manager presented his report, noting that a comprehensive development programme was offered, which included 'traditional' face-to-face training, and elements such as workshops, coaching and e-learning. Also, a programme was provided to develop Leadership.

It was reported that the programme included key/core titles (which were identified by Officers mainly) and developmental titles which provided Members with an opportunity to consider their own personal learning and development needs and take increasing responsibility for the content of the programme.

The Committee noted that there was a need to consider how to ensure that all members attended relevant training.

The Committee was invited to consider the current programme and to contact the Learning and Development Team to suggest additional areas/titles for inclusion.

The report was accepted.

11. INTIMIDATING BEHAVIOUR AGAINST COUNCILLORS

The Democracy and Language Service Manager presented a report that had been jointly submitted by her and the Communications Officer - Members and Staff.

It was reported that an increasing number of people involved in democracy (at a national or local level) noted that they had suffered intimidation, and that the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) had updated its guides for Councillors. They included practical steps that Councillors and candidates could consider for their personal safety.

The Head of Democratic Services noted that the good practice guidelines for Council staff were also relevant to Members, and that arrangements would be made to ensure that they were easily accessible to Members.

Two main points arose from the discussion:

technology – relating to security on social media e.g. releasing addresses, e-mail addresses and personal telephone numbers on websites and social media

and

personal resilience – given the traditional perception and expectation that politicians in public roles should expect and accept some comments and disagreement from people, the guidelines should consider how to cope mentally with such incidents.

It was agreed that training for the two areas outlined above should be considered.

The meeting commenced at 10:30 and concluded at 12:10

CHAIR