
DEMOCRACY SERVICES COMMITTEE, 14/11/23

PRESENT:

Councillors: Dewi Owen (Chair), Anwen J. Davies, Annwen Hughes, Eryl Jones-Williams, Linda Ann Jones, Olaf Cai Larsen, Anne Lloyd-Jones, Edgar Wyn Owen, Gwynfor Owen, Llio Elenid Owen and Beca Roberts.

Officers: Ian Jones (Head of Corporate Support Department / Head of Democracy Services), Vera Jones (Democracy and Language Services Manager), Catrin Love (Assistant Head of Corporate Support), Cara Williams (Member Development Officer), Annes Sion (Democracy Team Leader) and Ffion Elain Evans (Democracy Services Officer).

Also in attendance: Councillor Menna Trenholme (Cabinet Member for Corporate Support).

At the beginning of the meeting, the Chair extended condolences on behalf of the committee to the family and colleagues of Carey Cartwright, Learning and Development Service Manager, who regularly attended the meetings of this committee.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Stephen Churchman and Councillor Arwyn Herald Roberts.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received.

3. URGENT ITEMS

No urgent items were raised.

4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting, held on 15 June 2023, as a true record.

5. THE FINANCIAL REMUNERATION PANEL FOR WALES' DRAFT REPORT

The Democracy and Language Services Manager presented the report by explaining that the panel were the ones responsible for setting the financial remuneration level for councillors. It was noted that their role was completely independent and that they published a report annually in October to outline the proposal for the subsequent financial year. For the 2024/25 financial year, it was explained that the panel had not suggested any significant changes but that they proposed increasing the basic allowance offered to Councillors and that it would be payable from April 2024 onwards. There would be an increase in the sum offered to the Councillors who received senior salaries as well.

It was explained that the other main change was that the panel addressed matters relating to payments for co-opted members. It was explained that the current arrangements noted that co-opted members should receive financial remuneration based on a full-day or half-day. But due to changes to work practices, such as more frequent on-line briefing

meetings etc., it was explained that the panel considered offering flexibility when paying co-opted members, including hourly rate payments.

The Democracy and Language Service Manager explained that six questions were included in the consultation and asked whether it would be possible for the committee to provide comments on the different aspects per question in order to use the comments to prepare a response to the panel's consultation.

- *Question 1: Balance between affordability and sufficient financial remuneration for representatives?*
 - o It was noted that the panel's proposals seemed affordable enough compared to the Council's budget as a whole and therefore seemed fair enough.
- *Question 2: Opinion on the flexibility of payments to Co-opted Members?*
 - o The Members agreed that the reasoning behind the change to the way Co-opted Members were paid made sense considering the change to the work circumstances and that it happened in a more fragmented and consistent way by now.
 - o The system's flexibility and the way that it could be changed when new circumstances arose was praised.
- *Question 3: Good practice in terms of using the Panel's powers to encourage more sustainable travel amongst Members?*
 - o It was noted that the option of hybrid working had now led to more sustainable working and that providing Councillors with the choice was a good way forward.
 - o Questions were asked relating to the situation regarding insurance if sharing a car with another Councillor to attend meetings. In response, it was confirmed that there would need to change the insurance to a policy that covered business trips to be able to use it by virtue of the post.
 - o Attention was drawn to the fact that travelling costs were significantly higher if one did ward work when living in a rural ward compared to an urban ward and that no recognition was given to that issue.
- *Question 4: Awareness of the Councillors' rights for reimbursements and the steps to improve that.*
 - o The Democracy and Language Services Manager noted that information regarding the Councillor's rights was available on the Members Intranet and in the Democracy Services Committee meetings. It was enquired what further steps could be taken to raise the Councillors awareness regarding their rights?
 - o In response, it was noted that although some Councillors were not aware of all their rights, they knew who to contact if a problem did arise and that there would be officers available to answer any question.
 - o Attention was drawn to the fact that a large proportion of the information was provided all together for the Councillors at the start of the period following the election and that it could be quite overwhelming. It was noted that sending the information again to remind the Councillors would be beneficial.
 - o The Democracy and Language Services Manager agreed that sending the information once again would be beneficial, but she encouraged the members to make use of the weekly Bulletin for Members since it included a lot of information.
- It was decided not to ask the members for their opinion on question 5 since it was more relevant to Town and Community Council members.

- *Question 6: Opinion on reports for the future to combine Members' travel and subsistence costs instead of per individual?*
 - o It was explained that the panel had suggested reporting on members' travel and subsistence costs as a lump sum per Council for the future instead of per member as was currently done.
 - o In response, it was noted that providing the information per individual member meant that those members who lived the furthest away from Caernarfon would be associated with high travel costs.
 - o If the intention was to ensure that individual members were not associated with high travel costs, support was expressed for the change since reporting information per individual member could be unfair to those who had to travel furthest.

RESOLVED to accept the report and present the committee's observations to formulate a response to the Independent Remuneration Panel's draft report consultation.

6. PRIORITIES OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRACY SERVICES - UPDATE

The Head of Democracy Services presented the report, reminding the committee that there were four priority fields outlined to receive attention during 2023/24 namely safety and support for Councillors; personal development discussions; review of scrutiny arrangements and a paperless Council.

In terms of the safety and councillor support aspect, it was explained that information regarding health and well-being matters would be provided on the Members' Intranet and regular updates were given on the field in the Members' Bulletin. It was noted that not many Councillors were aware of the bulletin and that it would be useful to have the committee members' opinion on how to ensure better use of the Members' Intranet and weekly bulletin to communicate important key information.

It was explained that every member had received an invitation to take advantage of a Consultation Session which was an informal discussion with a specialist from the Learning and Development field to discuss their role as a member. It was noted that up until now they were rarely used and so the members were reminded that they would have to contact the Members Development Officer to arrange a session.

In the context of the shift to become a paperless Council, it was explained that there had been developments over the summer. Recognition was given to the fact that it had not been an easy shift and the members were thanked for their cooperation on the matter. The members were reminded that it would be possible for them to get in touch if they needed an additional screen or to arrange a 1:1 training slot to understand the equipment.

In terms of other developments, it was explained that changes were made to the sound system in Siambr Hywel Dda following observations from the Councillors. An overview of the training opportunities given to members was given also.

Matters raised during the discussion:

- The department was thanked for the support.
- Regarding the shift to become a paperless Council, appreciation was expressed of the fact that the department had held individual discussion with those who continued to receive paper copies.

- Attention was drawn to the fact that there were reception problems in some rural areas in Gwynedd and that it could be problematic when trying to read documents on-line.
- It was noted that the safety and support to Councillors was important and that being proactive was necessary when ensuring priority for the field. The Head of Democracy Services confirmed that the matter would be a priority area for quite some time.
- Astonishment was expressed regarding the low number of members who attended training and it was questioned whether the training provided covered what Councillors needed?
 - o In response, it was noted that that the department understood that the Councillors' time was in demand but that they were encouraged to attend the training sessions.
 - o Attention was drawn to the fact that one of the Council's new priorities was increasing the Council's diversity and that meant more Councillors had other responsibilities by now such as a full-time job and childcare responsibilities. It was noted that this needed to be kept in mind when considering the numbers attending training.
- It was asked whether there had been a reduction in the numbers attending training over the years and how this compared to other authorities?
 - o The Member Development Officer noted that she held regular meetings with Anglesey and Conwy Councils and she believed that Gwynedd were doing quite well in terms of training.
 - o It was noted that Gwynedd had many experienced members who did not see the need to attend further training and that there was a need to focus on the new councillors.
 - o It was explained that the training was categorised on the Intranet as core titles etc. and that work was being undertaken to prepare a booklet that would further simplify this.
- The public speaking training was praised, noting that it had been very beneficial.
- Attention was drawn to the fact that, in the past, some members were used to meeting as a group of councillors who were women and that had been beneficial.
 - o The Democracy and Language Services Manager explained that those meetings had ended due to a lack of resources, however, there was an intention to re-start those sessions.
 - o It was suggested that it may have been possible to hold sessions for Councillors who were women and new Councillors for them to have an opportunity to discuss different matters in a more informal manner.

RESOLVED to accept the report and the information.

7. SUPPORT FRAMEWORK FOR MEMBERS

The report was presented by explaining that ensuring support for Councillors had been key in Cyngor Gwynedd for quite a while. With the support of Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), the Council collaborated and compared with other local authorities, learning and benefiting from their experiences. It was explained that by now, the WLGA had developed a voluntary Self-assessment Framework that offered different areas for the Councils to concentrate on to self-evaluate their performance. It was noted that an advisory document had been developed by the association and that Cyngor Gwynedd had ensured opportunity to present observations in response to the advisory document.

It was explained that Cyngor Gwynedd were eager to plan to proceed with the work following the approval of the final framework. It was recommended that a small group of

the Democracy Services Committee's members met to assess the following from the final framework:

- Is the Council responsible for the field or not?
- The Council's current performance against the framework's expectations.
- Is it a priority of the Council?
- Are there any potential improvement steps?

It was explained that the above steps could be used to create a work programme of improvements by using the framework as grounds to identify matters to prioritise. It was noted that it would be an effective starting point, but it was emphasised that the framework must be used wisely whilst considering the resources available to the Council.

Matters raised during the discussion: -

- In terms of creating a small group, it was explained that the Democracy and Language Service Manager would contact the representatives as soon as possible after the framework would be finalised.
- It was proposed that the Councillor Dewi Owen, Beca Roberts, Anne Lloyd-Jones and Cai Larsen would form the group.

RESOLVED to accept the report and the information.

The meeting commenced at 1:00pm and concluded at 2:20pm.