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## DEMOCRACY SERVICES COMMITTEE, 16/3/23

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### PRESENT:

**Councillors:** Dewi Owen (Chair), Stephen Churchman, Annwen Hughes, Eryl Jones-Williams, Linda Ann Jones, Olaf Cai Larsen, Anne Lloyd-Jones, Edgar Wyn Owen, Llio Elenid Owen, Arwyn Herald Roberts and Beca Roberts.

**Officers:** Ian Jones (Head of Corporate Support Department / Head of Democracy Services), Vera Jones (Democracy and Language Services Manager), Sioned Mai Jones (Temporary Democracy Team Leader) and Eirian Roberts (Democracy Services Officer).

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

### Present for item 6:

Catrin Love (Assistant Head of Corporate Support Department).

### Present for item 7:

Carey Cartwright (Organisational Learning and Development Manager) and Cara Williams (Member Development Officer).

## 1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Anwen J. Davies, Gwynfor Owen and John Pughe.

## 2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

It was explained there was no need to declare an interest in item 9 - The Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales' Report, as there was no automatic right to continue as Chair and as the Committee elected a Chair for each year.

No declarations of personal interest were received.

## 3. URGENT ITEMS

No urgent matters were raised.

## 4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous committee meeting held on 15 November 2022, as a true record.

## 5. THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRACY SERVICES

Submitted - the draft of the annual report by the Head of Democracy Services on behalf of the Democracy Services Committee with regards to support for members. The Democracy Services Committee was asked for comments on the draft report outlining the support available for Members and what would be developed in future.

In presenting his report, the Head of Corporate Services thanked his predecessor, Geraint Owen, for the work he had completed during his time in the role. He also thanked the Democracy Service staff and the Monitoring Officer for their support.

During the discussion, the following matters were raised:-

- In response to an observation, it was noted that it could be arranged to upload a map and directions for the Council's meeting rooms on the Members' Intranet.
- In response to a question regarding the Members' questionnaire, it was noted there would be regular updates on matters raised by members. It was suggested that it would be useful to send the questionnaire to the members again this year.
- It was asked if there was a way for members to know whether an officer was working in the office or at home on a specific day, without sending an e-mail to the individual first. In response, it was noted that the Council had a duty to ensure service continuation and although the service and the managers knew who was in the office at any given time, it was not believed that this information was available for the whole Council. Enquiries could be made about this, but the members needed to make their own arrangements for the time being.

**RESOLVED to accept the report and to note the information.**

## **6. SUPPORT FOR COUNCILLORS AND COUNCILLOR SAFETY**

Submitted - a joint report by the Democracy Services and Language Manager, the Assistant Head of Corporate Support Services and the Members' Training Officer detailing the support that was available to councillors, along with councillor safety.

During the discussion, the following matters were raised:-

- It was noted that the disruption from the public gallery during the Extraordinary Council meeting in August last year, and the subsequent observations made on social media, had left members feeling threatened, and it was a comfort that the Council was taking these safety issues seriously.
- It was noted that it was very good to see more publicity given to the mental health of members and staff, and the support that was available to them.
- It was asked who carried out the risk assessments for multi-location meetings and what the guidelines were for them. In response, it was explained that the Democracy and Language Services Manager had begun the assessment and then shared the information with a team of people, giving consideration to the known potential circumstances, and what could potentially develop. It was also noted that the Health and Safety Service had been looking at the basic arrangements that should be in place. Some matters were more structural involving the meeting room, and others were matters of a more managerial nature. Members of the public were asked to leave their bags in the lockers outside Siambr Dafydd Orwig, and it was noted that more work was needed on the layout of the public gallery in the chamber. Beyond this, it would be a matter of escalating the situation as we became aware of specific threats, or if contentious matters arose, although, of course, it was not always obvious beforehand that a matter was contentious.
- It was noted that members had a responsibility to discuss sensitive matters in a sensible and moderate way, using appropriate language and to keep within the requirements of the Behaviour Code.
- The lockers outside Siambr Dafydd Orwig were welcomed, but it was noted that those members who sat in the rear row of the Chamber felt unprotected, and that a barrier more substantial than a rope was needed between the members and the public in the public gallery.

- The importance of members' personal safety out in their wards was emphasised, and it was confirmed that this was now part of the Safe Leadership training, which also addressed safety issues during the election period and in surgeries, along with practical advice regarding visiting electors' homes. It was also noted that the Wales Local Government Association had very good guidelines on personal safety, and that they were available on the 'Looking after yourself' tile on the Members' Intranet.
- Referring to the comment in paragraph 15 of the report that members should ask the Political Group Assistants, amongst others, for information on the contents of the Members' Intranet, it was noted that there were smaller groups on the Council, without political support and that they also needed the message.
- Referring to the Extraordinary Council meeting held last August, it was suggested that it had not been democratic that as few as five members of the Council had been able to call an extraordinary meeting of the Full Council and it was asked whether there should be a higher threshold. In response, it was explained that constitutional matters were being addressed at the moment, and the suggestion would be passed on to the Monitoring Officer. It was noted, however, that the assessment was taking place and that the chairs would be briefed beforehand.
- It was noted that it was important that everyone knew about the support that was available, and every member was encouraged to attend the excellent course held by the Wales Local Government Association on the subject.
- It was noted, although there was a need to be vigilant in terms of the situations that could arise in public meetings, there was a need to avoid overreacting and scaring the public.
- In response to a question regarding managing the lockers outside Siambr Dafydd Orwig, it was explained that the officers of the Democracy Service and the Health and Safety Service welcomed and guided the public into the foyer, explained the arrangements to them and asked them to keep their bags in the lockers.
- It was noted that the officers had acted very quickly at the time of the disruption from the public gallery in August, and that the safety of the officers was also important. The comment was reiterated and it was emphasised that the safety of everyone involved in the meeting was important, the members, officers, the public and members of the press.

**RESOLVED to accept the report for information.**

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

Submitted – the report of the Learning and Organisational Development Manager providing an update of the Learning and Development provision for members highlighting successes, challenges and developments. The Committee was invited to consider the training arrangements and the proposed steps and approve them.

During the discussion, the following matters were raised:-

- It was noted that it was difficult to get people to attend training sessions during the day, especially brief sessions that lasted for only an hour, as people were not able to take an hour off from their work, and it was asked if it would be better to combine more than one session to fill an entire morning or afternoon. In response, it was noted that the Service had experimented with holding some training sessions in the evening, but it had not been a success in terms of the attendance numbers. It was noted further that the Service was open to the idea of combining training, or any other suggestions members had to offer.
- Concern was expressed there were only five members present in a recent Equality training session, and the importance of matters such as equality and prejudice was

emphasised. It was noted, however, that many of the members who had been on the Council before May 2022 had attended the training in the past.

- It was noted that some training sessions were popular, and others were not, and it was suggested there was a need to place more emphasis on the method of promoting some opportunities.
- It was enquired whether it would be possible to upload a recording of every training session on-line so that members could watch it at a time that was convenient for them. In response, it was explained that sessions were recorded wherever possible and were then available on the Organisation's Learning and Development page following the event. However, if no non-Welsh speaking members attended the sessions, it would not be possible to obtain an English recording. However, if a request was made for an English recording, the capacity of the Translation Team to translate the session and upload it onto the Intranet would need to be assessed. It was also noted that viewing the recording was not valid proof that the member had completed the training, especially core titles, and members are therefore urged to make every effort to attend the core titles.
- It was suggested, that although the need to record attendance in mandatory courses was accepted, that this might not be that important in terms of optional titles.

The Democracy and Language Manager noted that following the success of the Mental Health First Aid course that had been held in January, that requests had been received to hold a further two-day course, and the members' support was sought to consider whether it would be practical to hold the course during the last two days of the summer half-term (1-2) June as no committee meetings were to be held that week.

It was agreed to look into this option.

**RESOLVED to approve the training arrangements and the proposed steps.**

## **8. SUPPORT FOR COUNCILLORS – PERFORMANCE OF THE DEMOCRACY SERVICES TEAM**

Submitted - the joint report of the Democracy and Language Services Manager and the Temporary Democracy Team Leader outlining some of the themes and issue that had been highlighted during a series of conversations with individual councillors to seek their opinion on the support provided to members and what could be done to assist councillors in their role.

During the discussion, the following matters were raised:-

- It was enquired whether it would be possible to provide an office as a quiet workspace for members, as was the case some years ago before Council meetings. In response, it was noted that by now very few meetings were being held in the offices, and the practice of offering rooms for the political groups to meet on the morning of the Full Council meeting continued. It was agreed to look into this, but it was emphasised that no promises could be made on this.
- It was noted that the Democracy Services Team provided an excellent service, and everyone was very willing to provide assistance and support.
- Reference was made to difficulties in contacting some Council officers on the phone. In response, every officer had a responsibility to ensure that their phone number was correct on the internal directory, and that work was ongoing in the Information Technology Service to ensure that the numbers were still current. It was also noted that it was important that teams used a system where a call was transferred to someone else if the officer was not available. The member was asked to contact the Service if he had any specific examples of the problem.

**RESOLVED to note the observations and accept the report.**

## **9. THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL FOR WALES' REPORT**

Submitted - the report of the Democracy and Language Service Manager inviting the committee to form a recommendation for 2023/23 senior salaries to be submitted to the Full Council on 4 May 2023.

Further to the content of the report, the Democracy and Language Service Manager noted that an information sheet noting the changes would be posted on the Members' Intranet and would be shared as part of the weekly Bulletin for Members.

During the discussion, the following matters were raised:-

- It was noted, in light of changes with appointing a lay member to the Chairpersonship of the Governance and Audit Committee, that 1 of the 18 senior salaries had not been allocated, and it was proposed that that senior salary should be paid to the Chair of this Committee based on the workload associated with the role, and would be likely to increase in future. In response, it was noted that the recommendation had been formed on the basis of the responsibilities listed in the appendix to the report, and it would be a requirement to secure the necessary evidence to identify the 18th salary. It was also explained, that although no senior salaries had been allocated to the Chair of the Governance and Audit Committee, that the Council paid a lay member fee to the individual for their work.
- It was suggested that we should correspond with other councils to gain an understanding of the situation in each authority.
- It was noted that although it was important to know what other authorities were doing, that it was more important to have an understanding of what other Gwynedd chairs were doing, and the allowance should be paid to the chairs with the greatest workload.
- As a way forward, it was suggested that the Committee should ask for additional information in terms of the responsibilities and workload of the Chair of this Committee, including a comparison with the situation in other counties, and recommending to the Full Council that a senior salary should be paid to the chair of this Committee, if the additional information merited this.

### **RESOLVED**

- 1. To recommend that the Full Council adopts the senior salaries list for 2023/24 and for the future (as seen in paragraph 14 of the report to the committee).**
- 2. To note that the Committee has requested additional information in relation to the responsibilities and workload of the Chair of the Democracy Services Committee, including a comparison with the situation in other counties, and a wish to recommend to the Full Council that a senior salary should be paid to the Chair of the Democracy Services Committee, if the additional information merits this.**

The meeting commenced at 2.00pm and concluded at 3.45pm.