

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Democratic Services Committee held in CONFERENCE ROOM 1A, COUNTY HALL, RUTHIN on Friday, 20 October 2017 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Joan Butterfield, Rachel Flynn, Hugh Irving, Alan James (Chair), Gwyneth Kensler, Christine Marston, Graham Timms and Joe Welch

Observers - Councillor Tony Thomas and Councillor Emrys Wynne

ALSO PRESENT

Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services (Gary Williams), Democratic Services Manager (Steve Price), Scrutiny Co-Ordinator (Rhian Evans) and Committee Administrator (Stephanie Jones).

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Huw Jones and Andrew Thomas

2 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillors Rachel Flynn, Hugh Irving, Alan James, Graham Timms, Gwyneth Kensler, Christine Marston, Joan Butterfield and Joe Welch declared a personal interest in agenda item 5 – Independent Remuneration panel for Wales' draft annual report 2018/19.

3 URGENT ITEMS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

No urgent items.

4 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the Democratic Services Committee held on the 31 March 2017 were submitted.

***RESOLVED**, that the minutes of the Democratic Services Committee's meeting held on the 31 March 2017 be confirmed as a correct record.*

5 INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL FOR WALES' DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2018/19

The Democratic Service Manager (DSM) introduced the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales Annual report 2018/19 (previously circulated).

The Panel was required to produce an annual report setting out the levels at which members were paid for various duties and responsibilities for the municipal year. The draft report was presented to the Committee for comments.

The Panel have decided to propose an increase the basic annual allowance for members to £13,600 for the 2018 / 2019 municipal year.

Members' views were sought on the Draft annual report and the committee response to the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales' consultation exercise.

During discussion, the following points were raised:

- Phone support- rural areas had difficulty receiving mobile signal so had to rely on landline telephones. Members noted that there was a variety of widely available packages for both mobile phones and landlines which enabled free calls or text messages sufficient for use by members on Council and constituency business at no additional costs to members. The Committee therefore felt that mobile phones supplied by Denbighshire County Council were not required.
- Increase to Town/City and Community councillors' allowance – Many small community councils had a small budget. Members felt that an increase to allowance would in some cases represent a large portion of some small councils' precepts and add pressure to local councils. However, the Committee acknowledged that this should be a matter for the town and community councils.
- Training provided to members- Members discussed training led by external and internal officers, benefits from receiving both types of training was observed. Training was seen as a vital element for County Councillors.
- Difference of opinion was observed from members with regard to the Panel's proposed increase in the basic salary for members.

In response to the committee's discussion, the DSM informed members that a reply to the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales' draft report and consultation would be formed to include the key points raised. Included in this would be the Committee's difference of opinion with the Panel regarding the provision of telephone support by the Council and the mixed views within the Committee with regard to the increase in the basic salaries. The final Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales report would be published in early 2018 with a report presented to Council.

RESOLVED that the Democratic Service Committee:

- (a) *Notes the draft determinations in the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales' draft annual report for the 2018-2019 municipal year;*
- (b) *Informs the Panel as part of its consultation on the draft determinations of the Committee's views on the appropriate level of Council provided telephony provision for members as outlined in the minutes above; and*
- (c) *Informs the Panel of the views expressed by the Committee in relation to the proposed increase in the basic salary level.*

6 FUTURE SCRUTINY OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE BOARD

The Democratic Service Manager (DSM) introduced the report (previously circulated).

The DSM informed the Committee that a version of this report was presented to the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs Group on the 12 October. Members of the Group had expressed a range of opinions on the merits of forming a Joint Scrutiny Committee with Conwy County Borough Council to scrutinise the Public Service Board (PSB). The DSM explained the report was to discuss the opinions of members prior to developing proposals to establish a joint scrutiny committee. He advised that establishing a joint committee would be a decision for full Council.

The Head of HR, Legal and Democratic Services informed members the joint committee would be an agreement reached between both Denbighshire and Conwy.

Members raised the following queries during discussion:

- Attendance at PSB meetings - members were informed that the next PSB meeting would be open to the public following a decision by the PSB in September to hold open meetings and allow access to all non-confidential PSB meeting documents. The Chair encouraged members to attend if available.
- Size of the Committee - the DSM explained that the size of a joint scrutiny committee would be an issue to be agreed between Denbighshire and Conwy.
- Timescale - Members were concerned that a decision would have to be made swiftly. The DSM ensured members that there was no timescale and no duty to agree to a joint Committee. The Council was currently complying with statutory requirements for scrutinising the PSB.

The DSM enquired if members felt more investigation would be beneficial. Work would be done towards a proposal to report to full Council if the proposal appeared to have the support of the elected members. An update report would be presented at the March meeting of Democratic Services.

The Chair thanked the DSM and scrutiny co-ordinator for the report and explanation to members concerns.

RESOLVED that the Democratic Service Committee:

- (a) *Receives the report, notes its contents and endorses the undertaking of further exploratory work on establishing a joint scrutiny committee; and*
- (b) *An update report be included in the Forward Work Programme to be presented to the Committee at the March 2018 meeting.*

7 ELECTORAL REFORM CONSULTATION

The Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services (HLHRDS) guided members through the report (previously circulated).

The HLHRDS explained to members the Wales Act 2017 provisions on electoral and registration matters that were due to come into force in 2018.

During discussion the following points were raised:

- Method of voting - ideas put forward to change the way individuals could vote including electronic voting. Electronic voting was discussed as work was being done to look at in the future. Members discussed the importance of keeping the integrity of the vote a priority.
- The requirement for ID to be shown when voting - concerns were raised that this may cause a decline in the number of individuals voting as some may not have a valid form of identification. The HLHRDS informed the Committee a trial introduction of requesting ID would be conducted in England in 2018.
- Automatic registration to vote at the age of 16 - It was felt that at the age of 16 when individuals received their National Insurance number, automatic registration simultaneously to vote would be advantageous.

The Chair thanked the HLHRDS for providing detailed information regarding the Electoral Reform Consultation.

RESOLVED that, the Democratic Service Committee receive the Electoral Reform Consultation report and note its contents.

8 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Democratic Services Manager introduced the Forward Work Programme.

He informed Members if they needed items adding to the Forward Work Programme, to contact him directly.

RESOLVED that Members noted the Forward Work Programme.

The meeting concluded at 12:15p.m.