

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Democratic Services Committee held in Conference Room 1a, County Hall, Ruthin on Friday, 29 March 2019 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Alan James (Chair), Huw Jones, Gwyneth Kensler and Graham Timms

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor Mark Young (Lead Member for Corporate Standards)

Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services (GW) and Democratic Services Manager (SP)

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Hugh Irving, Christine Marston, Andrew Thomas and Joe Welch.

The Democratic Services Manager informed the Committee that the meeting was not quorate. The Committee **agreed** to continue with the business on an informal basis.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services confirmed that all members present would have a personal interest in agenda item 5 – Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales Annual Report 2019 / 2020, but this was not regarded as being a prejudicial interest under the Code of Conduct.

3 URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

4 MINUTES

The draft minutes of the Democratic Services Committee's meeting held on the 19th October 2018 (previously circulated) were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Democratic Services Committee's meeting held on the 19th October 2018 be confirmed as a correct record.

5 INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL FOR WALES ANNUAL REPORT 2019 / 2020

The Democratic Services Manager introduced a report (previously circulated) in respect of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales' (IRPW) annual report for 2019 / 20.

Members were advised that the IRPW's annual reports had previously been taken to full Council, but the IRPW had recently confirmed that this was not required as the Panel itself set the determinations (decisions) rather than the local authorities.

The Democratic Services Manager (DSM) outlined the remit of the IRPW in setting the levels that members of principal councils, such as Denbighshire, as well as some other public bodies, were paid for undertaking various duties and responsibilities. He advised that the IRPW was required to produce an annual report and for 2019 / 2020 the IRPW was providing a £268 or 1.97% increment in members' basic salaries as well as a £532 increment to Cabinet members' senior salaries, with a full summary of the changes shown in the Committee's report.

Councillor Graham Timms referred to the IRPW's letter to Denbighshire County Council in respect of a proposal to increase the salary of one of the Council's chief officers. The letter appended to the IRPW's annual report had been superseded by a subsequent letter from the IRPW but, being part of the annual report, meant that the original letter was the version still in public circulation.

The Committee discussed the IRPW's role in regards to chief officers' salaries. The Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services advised that the Welsh Government had added chief executive and chief officer pay issues to the IRPW's functions. The IRPW could therefore take a view and make recommendations on proposed changes to those salaries (unless the changes were also being applied to other officers of the authority). The authority was legally obliged to have regard to recommendations made by the IRPW but was not obliged to implement them.

The Committee expressed concern that letters concerning an ongoing issue were being appended to the annual reports and agreed that the Welsh Government should be asked to consider removing the IRPW's role relating to officer pay.

The Committee discussed the IRPW's aim of encouraging diversity in local government council chambers, which it supported. The use of member salaries and cost of care allowances to assist those who would not be able to afford to put themselves forward was welcomed, but it was acknowledged that the payments could negatively affect the public's perception of elected members.

Members discussed the IRPW's previous decisions to allow local authorities to decide between a series of payment level options for certain roles. The Committee supported the principle of decision making on members' allowances being taken out of the hands of local authorities, and recommended to the IRPW that options on payment levels should not be given. The Committee noted that the IRPW had responded to similar feedback from councils by removing those choices from the new annual report.

RESOLVED – that the Democratic Services Committee:

(i) Endorses the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales' aims to make available acceptable and affordable levels of member payments that will contribute to enhancing diversity in local government;

(ii) Expresses its concern to the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales that letters concerning on-going matters relating to officer pay were being appended to the annual reports;

(iii) Recommends to the Welsh Government that the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales' role in relation to officer pay be re-considered; and

(iv) Supports the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales' removal of decisions on the payment levels for certain roles from local authorities in the 2019 / 2020 Annual Report.

6 MEMBER TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

The Democratic Services Manager (DSM) introduced a report on member training and development (previously circulated) which sought the views of the Committee on the content and direction of the training and development programme.

The DSO reminded the Committee that in September 2018 the Council had agreed its mandatory training requirements for members which were:

- Code of Conduct - once a term, and all members had attended this training.
- Planning – two training events each year (for Planning Committee Members)
- Licensing - two training events each year (for Licensing Committee Members)
- Data Protection and GDPR – annual training
- Local Government Finance - once a term
- Safeguarding - once a term.
- Corporate Parenting – once a term.

The DSM advised that annual training for councillors on data protection and GDPR issues was more than was required for the Council's officers. He reported that the Council's data protection officers thought this frequency of training for members was not required and sustaining annual training for all members would divert their resources.

The Committee agreed that data protection training should remain as mandatory training but should be required once a Council term, rather than annually.

Members also made the following points regarding training:

- Offering new councillors half day sessions with each department would help them learn about the Council's services and their role in shaping and supporting them.
- Training on prioritising workloads had been offered previously and could be a useful and popular addition to the training programme.

- Training for new members on the Council's standing orders and familiarity of taking part in webcast meetings would be welcomed. The Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services (HLHRDS) confirmed that all members had been invited to a training session last December aimed at being effective in their roles, and this had included Council processes and standing orders.

The Committee agreed that more training for members on their ICT equipment was required, particularly for new members. Councillor Timms had found that iPads were not appropriate devices for undertaking the range of duties expected of councillors and training on using iPads to organise information and records would have been welcomed.

The HLHRDS informed the Committee of the process used to choose the ICT equipment for the new Council after the 2017 elections. He advised that shortly before the elections, a group of members had trialled a range of devices. The Council had previously used iPads and existing members' familiarity proved to be part of their appeal. In addition though, the trial group had found that the iPads' 4G mobile connectivity and longer battery life (than the other trial devices) led them to recommend iPads for the new Council term.

The DSM referred to the Council's statutory obligation to offer members a Personal Development Review. The Reviews were a way for a member and the Council to mutually assess a member's personal development needs. The review would be set within the context of the role of the member, their aspirations for what they hoped to achieve, the purpose and aspirations of the Authority and the needs of the community. They were not performance appraisals.

The DSM reported that members had last year been invited to take part in a Review but there had been little interest at that time and information would be re-issued for this year.

RESOLVED – that the Democratic Services Committee:

(i) Recommends to Council that the mandatory Data Protection and GDPR training be required once a Council term instead of once a year; and

(ii) That information on Personal Development Reviews be circulated to the political groups.

7 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Democratic Services Manager (DSM) introduced a verbal report on the Committee's forward work programme.

He advised that the Committee's next meeting was scheduled for October 2019 and potential topics for that meeting were:

- An update on member training and development
- Personal safety arrangements for councillors
- An update on Joint Scrutiny of the Public Services Board

- Scrutiny arrangements for the North Wales Economic Ambition Board
- Arrangements to encourage a diverse and representative range of candidates for local government election

RESOLVED that the report be noted.