

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Democratic Services Committee held in Council Chamber, County Hall, Ruthin and by video conference on Friday, 24 March 2023 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Ellie Chard, Karen Edwards, Hugh Evans, Justine Evans, Martyn Hogg (Chair), Delyth Jones, Cheryl Williams and Elfed Williams

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor Julie Matthews, lead member for Corporate Strategy, Policy and Equalities.

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted by Councillors Michelle Blakeley-Walker, Chris Evans and Cheryl Williams.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3 APPOINTMENT OF A CHAIR FOR TODAY'S MEETING

The Democratic Services Manager reported that this agenda item was no longer required. He reminded the committee that the chair of the Democratic Services Committee was appointed by full Council, and Council had appointed Councillor Martyn Hogg.

The agenda item had been added following a change to the political balance of the committee, as a result of a by-election, which had temporarily resulted in the chair losing his seat on the committee. However, with Councillor Hogg's return as a member of the committee, he was able to continue in his role as the committee's chair.

4 URGENT MATTERS

There were no urgent matters.

5 APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIR

The chair of the committee, Councillor Martyn Hogg, invited nominations for the appointment of a vice chair of the committee.

In the absence of any proposals, the Democratic Services Manager advised the committee that a vice chair could be appointed at a subsequent meeting.

RESOLVED – that the appointment of the vice chair of the Democratic Services Committee be deferred for consideration at a subsequent meeting.

6 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Democratic Services Committee held on the 30 September 2022 were submitted.

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting of the Democratic Services Committee held on the 30 September 2022 be confirmed as a correct record.

7 INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL FOR WALES ANNUAL REPORT 2023 - 2024

The Lead Member for Corporate Strategy, Policy and Equalities, Councillor Julie Matthews, introduced this item on the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales Annual Report 2023 – 2024.

The committee was informed that the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (IRPW) was a body established by the Welsh Government which sets out decisions and certain options for councils' policies of payments and support to elected and lay-members. The previous month the Panel had published its Annual Report for the new financial year which started in April.

The committee was reminded of the IRPW's designation of roles that were remunerated by basic, senior and civic salaries, and the rules around the payment of these salaries such as the council size groupings which the IRPW used to set payment levels.

Members were advised that:

- Councillors would receive an increase of 4.76% in their basic allowances, which increased basic salaries by £800 to £17,600.
- The senior salaries for the Cabinet have received the full 4.76% increase, that is that both the basic salary and the senior salary for Cabinet duties elements have been increased by that amount.
- The role element for committee chairs and the leader of the largest opposition group have been increased by 3.15% as has the Civic Salary element for the Chair of Council.
- The civic salary for the Vice Chair of Council had received only the increase to the basic salary.

In terms of the lay or co-opted members, the committee was advised that the IRPW had not changed the rules or the amounts payable. The Democratic Services Manager outlined that:

- Co-opted voting members received a set daily or half daily fee according to the time commitment involved.
- Meetings eligible for the payment of a fee included committee meetings, working groups, briefings and training to which co-opted members had been requested to attend.
- The Panel allowed reasonable preparation time and any travel time to be claimed.
- The Council could decide on the maximum number of days for which co-opted members may be paid in any one year.
- The Panel allowed each council to decide on what was reasonable in determining what a full-day rate covered.
- Denbighshire had not set a cap on the number of days that could be claimed for payment, but it did use a single 'full day' rate to be the maximum that could be claimed for a single meeting or event attended, which included any preparation and travel time.
- The half daily fee was paid for any eligible time commitment of up to 4 hours.

The Democratic Services Manager reported that the committee's views were sought on whether the council should retain or change its approach (within the parameters allowed by the IRPW) to the payment of the full-day rate to co-opted members.

Members focussed their discussion on the issue of payments to co-opted members, particularly in respect of the following points:

- The Council's approach to co-opted members' payments should not be a barrier to recruiting and retaining effective voting co-opted members.
- The voting co-opted members covered the Standards Committee, the Governance and Audit Committee, the Scrutiny committees and sat on some internal panels. Given the range of duties being undertaken it could be worth exploring whether the Council could vary the half and full day payments according to the demands of the duties, committee or panel.
- The effect on the Council's finances from any changes being proposed would need to be considered.
- The Committee agreed that it wanted the Council's approach to co-opted members' remuneration to be fair and to accord with the spirit of the IRPW's Annual Reports. Surveying the co-opted members for their views and experiences of their duties could provide useful information.

RESOLVED – that the committee recommends that a survey of the views and experiences of the co-opted members be undertaken prior to future consideration by the committee of the Council’s approach to the remuneration of voting co-opted members.

8 RESOURCES FOR SCRUTINY

The Democratic Services Manager (DSM) introduced a report (previously circulated) that outlined the changes to the support arrangements for the Scrutiny function.

The DSM reported that under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 the Committee has a role in reviewing the adequacy of provision by the authority of staff, accommodation, and other resources to discharge democratic services functions. These complemented the Head of Democratic Services’ roles in promoting and supporting the role of the Scrutiny committees.

Members were advised that:

- The Council had previously employed 2 Scrutiny Officers, but this was reduced to 1 officer following a ‘Democratic Services Efficiency Review’. This led to a rationing of Scrutiny activities so that they focussed on the main committee meetings to a much greater extent than before.
- In 2018 report the Wales Audit Office reviewed Denbighshire’s Scrutiny function. In their report ‘Overview and Scrutiny – fit for the future? – Denbighshire County Council’ they praised the quality of the Scrutiny provision but were aware that it did not have the capacity to cover what should be expected of it.
- The Wales Audit Officer therefore recommended that the Council ‘Review the adequacy of support arrangements, in terms of both the amount and type of support that overview and scrutiny committees may need’.
- An important area that required more support was the use of Scrutiny task and finish groups for complex issues that could not be tackled by the routine ‘report to committee’ approach. This lack of capacity to support member working groups had caused increasing difficulties recently.
- Increasingly, the Council’s Scrutiny function also needed to be able to scrutinise the developing and often complex joint and regional governance arrangements that affected the county.
- The Council had recognised the need to return to having 2 scrutiny officers and this had now been achieved following a successful recruitment exercise.
- A report to the committee outlining the position in respect of the scrutiny arrangements for joint and regional governance arrangements was requested.

RESOLVED – that the committee notes the report and requests a future report outlining the position in respect of the scrutiny arrangements for joint and regional governance arrangements.

9 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Democratic Services Manager (DSM) introduced the Forward Work Programme (previously circulated). He reminded the committee that the information in paragraphs 4.1 to 4.3 of the report in respect of the chairing of the committee had been resolved. The report also summarised the findings of the councillor survey on the timing of meetings and a Local Government Association webinar in February on personal safety for councillors that had been made available to members of the council to join.

The DSM referred to a special meeting of the committee that was being arranged for the 9 June 2023, particularly to facilitate the discussion of member training and personal development review issues.

The committee agreed for items on tackling intimidatory behaviour against members and on single transferable vote provisions to be added to the forward work programme for the September meeting of the committee.

RESOLVED – that, subject to the above amendments, the committee’s forward work programme be approved.