

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Democratic Services Committee held in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Ruthin and video conference on Friday, 20 September 2024 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Karen Edwards, Justine Evans, Martyn Hogg (Chair), Brian Jones, Cheryl Williams and Elfed Williams

ALSO PRESENT

Head of Corporate Support Services – People (Catrin Roberts); Democratic Services Manager (Steve Price); Zoom Host (Rhodri Tomos-Jones); and Committee Administrator (Sharon Walker).

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Michelle Blakeley-Walker, Ellie Chard, Hugh Evans and Delyth Jones.

2 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

The Chair, Councillor Martyn Hogg, requested nominations for the appointment of the new Vice-Chair of the Democratic Services Committee for the 2024-2025 municipal year.

Councillor Cheryl Williams proposed Councillor Elfed Williams, Seconded by Councillor Martyn Hogg.

No further nominations were proposed.

All members present affirmed their assent to the appointment of Councillor Elfed Williams.

Councillor Williams thanked everyone for voting him to be Vice-Chair.

RESOLVED that Councillor Elfed Williams be appointed as Vice-Chair of the Democratic Services Committee for the 2024-2025 municipal year.

3 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

None.

4 URGENT MATTERS

No items of an urgent nature had been raised with the Chair prior to the commencement of the meeting.

5 MINUTES

The minutes of the Democratic Services Committee meeting held on the 22 March 2024 were submitted.

Accuracy –

No issues relating to the accuracy of the minutes were raised.

Matters arising –

Page 11 – Regional Scrutiny Arrangements – the Democratic Services Manager confirmed that Internal Audit were scheduled to report to the Governance and Audit Committee next week on the Council's partnership arrangements. Members were advised that the formation of a regional scrutiny committee for the North Wales Corporate Joint Committee had not yet been agreed.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 22 March 2024 be received and approved as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

6 PETITION SCHEME

The Head of Corporate Support Services – People introduced the Petition Scheme report (previously circulated) for members to discuss the draft Petition Scheme attached in Appendix A.

Under Section 42 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 it required councils to make and publish a petition scheme setting out how the council intended to handle and respond to petitions including electronic petitions.

The purpose of presenting the Petition Scheme to the Democratic Services Committee was to allow members to provide comments and suggestions to recommend to Full Council for adoption. Once the Scheme was adopted, work would take place to ensure information was clear and easily accessible on the website. Guidance would also be required for both councillors and staff if a petition was received.

A suggestion was made that a further step be added to the guidance that the relevant Department be contacted prior to the petition stage so the issue could be looked into rather than it becoming serious enough for someone to put forward a petition. It was confirmed that it would be included in the guidance and it would be positive for residents to engage with the Authority.

Confirmation was also given that within the Scheme it was stated that a minimum of 100 people would be required to sign the petition, but the council would have the discretion to consider petitions of less than 100. For example, if a minority group of only 25 members put forward a petition, it could be considered.

RESOLVED that, subject to the above, the draft Petition Scheme be recommended for adoption by Denbighshire County Council.

7 A BRIEFING ON LOCAL DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND ELECTORAL LEGISLATIVE DEVELOPMENTS

The Democratic Services Manager (DSM) introduced the Briefing on Local Democratic Governance and Electoral Legislative Developments report (previously attached) and gave a summary of the report to the Committee.

The report provided an overview of the following:

- The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 – The DSM reported that this Act included provisions for voter registration, electoral cycles confirming the use 5 year local government elections, choices for voting systems, the promotion of public participation strategies and petition schemes, confirmation of remote attendance provisions, and changes to group leaders' roles to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by members of their groups.
- The Elections Act 2022 – Members were advised that the 2022 Act related to 'reserved' elections in Wales; namely those for the UK Parliament and the Police and Crime Commissioner. The Act's provisions included the introduction of photographic ID for voting in polling stations, restricted the handling of postal votes, enabled online postal vote applications and brought in changes to EU citizens voting and candidacy rights and scrapped the '15-year rule' for British citizens living overseas.
- 2023 UK Parliamentary Boundary Review – The DSM reported that July's UK Parliamentary elections had been contested on the new boundaries brought in by the boundary review. The aim of the boundary review was to redistribute electors so that each member of the UK Parliament represented roughly the same number of electors. As a consequence, the number of UK Parliamentary constituencies in Wales had been reduced from 40 to 32.
- The Senedd Cymru (Members and Elections) Act 2024 – Members were advised that this Act was part of the Senedd's programme of electoral reform and aimed to support more inclusive elections and a more representative Senedd. Under the 2024 Act, the Senedd would increase from 60 to 96 members, elected using a fully proportional, closed list system. For the 2026 Senedd elections the 32 UK Parliament constituencies would be paired to create 16 Senedd constituencies, each electing 6 Senedd members and Senedd elections would be held every 4 years. A further boundary review was expected to review the Senedd constituency boundaries for elections after 2026.
- Elections and Elected Bodies (Wales) Act 2024 – The Committee was informed that this Act made provisions for enabling voter registration without application, known as automatic voter registration. It placed a duty on Welsh Ministers to put schemes in place to support people from underrepresented groups to stand for election and encouraged the publishing of diversity information on Senedd candidates.

- The Senedd Cymru (Electoral Candidate Lists) Bill - The Bill was introduced to the Senedd earlier in the year and was now progressing through Senedd scrutiny. The changes proposed by the Bill were intended to be implemented for the 2030 Senedd elections. The proposals included political parties who put forward more than one candidate in a constituency at a Senedd election being required to ensure women make up at least half of their candidate list, and political parties would need to place women at the top of at least half of their constituency candidate lists.

RESOLVED that Democratic Services Committee considered and noted the legislative changes and proposals summarised in the report.

8 ARCHIVE FOR WEBCASTS

The Democratic Services Manager (DSM) introduced the verbal report on an Archive for Webcasts.

The DSM reported that webcasts were kept for six months on the Denbighshire website but there were occasional requests to view older webcasts. Members were advised that older webcasts could be temporarily republished though this did involve staff time and a small charge from the webcasting service provider. Older webcasts could also be shared electronically, but again this required staff time and arrangements for transferring the large video files. The permanent retention of webcasts i.e., so public access was not removed after 6 months, was possible but would require an on-going increase in the licence fee paid for by the Council to the webcasting service provider.

The DSM advised that the Council was investigating the archiving of webcasts to the Council's YouTube channel, where they would be permanently available for public viewing.

RESOLVED that an update on the archiving of webcasts be presented at the March 2025 Democratic Services Committee meeting.

9 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Democratic Services Manager presented the Forward Work Programme for consideration.

Items to be added to the 14 March 2025 forward work programme –

- (i) Archive for Webcasts;
- (ii) Single Transferable Vote – Public Consultation;
- (iii) Group Leaders – process of members conduct;

Members were encouraged to contact the Democratic Services Manager if there were any items they wished to be considered for the Forward Work Programme.

RESOLVED that, subject to the above, the Democratic Services Committee Forward Work Programme be approved.

The meeting concluded at 10.55 am.