

## **DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE**

Minutes of a meeting of the Democratic Services Committee held in Conference Room 1b, County Hall, Ruthin, LL15 1YN on Thursday, 14 November 2013 at 2.00 pm.

### **PRESENT**

Councillors Bill Cowie, Martyn Holland, Gwyneth Kensler, Barry Mellor (Chair) and Gareth Sandilands

Observer: Councillor Brian Blakeley

### **ALSO PRESENT**

Head of Legal & Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer (GW), Democratic Services Manager (SP) and Committee Administrator (SLW)

Observers: Scrutiny Co-ordinator (RE) and Democratic Services Officer (KAE).

#### **1 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bob Murray and Arwel Roberts

#### **2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillors Bill Cowie, Martyn Holland, Gwyneth Kensler, Barry Mellor and Gareth Sandilands declared a personal interest regarding Agenda Item 9, the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales Draft Annual Report 2014/2015.

#### **3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR**

There were no urgent matters.

#### **4 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

The minutes of the Democratic Services Committee meeting held on 15 February, 2013 were submitted.

***RESOLVED*** *that the minutes be received and approved as a correct record.*

#### **5 CONSULTATION ON A DESIGNATED PERSONS ORDER**

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services presented the report (previously circulated) to consider a response to the Welsh Government's consultation on extending Scrutiny Committee powers to designated public service providers.

The Measure set out criteria for those bodies which may be designated. They were bodies which:

- provided the public (or a section of the public) with services, goods or facilities of any description (whether on payment or not);
- provided those services, goods or facilities in the exercise of functions of a public nature; and
- were wholly or partly funded by public money
- were not a local authority (meaning a county or county borough council).

The bodies that were being suggested for designation within the consultation document were:

- Local Health Boards
- NHS Trusts
- Fire and Rescue Authorities
- National Park Authorities

Following further discussion it was agreed that the following bodies also be included in the response to the consultation for designation:

- Registered Social Landlords
- National Resources Wales
- Third sector organisations.

The Committee was not convinced that designating Town and Community Councils would be necessary at this time and could result in duplication of democratic accountability (Town and Community Councils being democratic bodies). The small scale and resources of most of these councils wold be unlikely to promote using scarce scrutiny resources.

***RESOLVED that the Members noted the contents of the consultation papers and agreed that the following bodies be included in the response to the consultation for designation:***

- *Local Health Boards*
- *NHS Trusts*
- *Fire and Rescue Authorities*
- *National Park Authorities*
- *Registered Social Landlords*
- *Third sector organisations that are delivering services to the public, and*
- *National Resources Wales.*

## 6 ANNUAL REPORTS BY MEMBERS

The Democratic Services Manager presented the report (previously circulated) to outline progress on the process and publication of members' annual reports.

The Local Government (Wales) Measure required each Local Authority to have in place arrangements to enable every Member to complete an annual report on activities in their role as Councillor and for the annual reports to be published on the Council's website.

The Statutory Guidance placed restrictions on the contents of the reports which were to be factual and centred on meetings, events, conferences, training and development. A template of an Annual Report had been prepared and circulated to all Members.

There were limitations as to what could be included within the annual report, therefore, a review or editing stage prior to publication would be in place, to ensure that the contents conformed to Statutory Guidance and any restrictions placed by the Council.

The Democratic Services Manager clarified that completion of the annual report was not mandatory for Members but it was mandatory for the Council to have arrangements in place for annual reports to be completed.

14 annual reports had been received to date and Committee agreed that a further reminder be sent to all Members to request completion of the annual report.

Thanks were extended to Karen Evans, Democratic Services Officer, for all the work she had done on this process.

***RESOLVED*** that the Democratic Services Committee Members noted the report and agreed that a further reminder would be emailed to Members and group leaders requesting completion of their Annual Reports.

## 7 WEBCASTING OF COUNCIL MEETINGS

The Democratic Services Manager presented the report (previously circulated) to update the Committee on the development of the project.

Earlier this year the Welsh Government informed Local Authorities there would be £1.2 million available by way of grants in order to assist in the implementation of council meeting webcasting.

Each Local Authority would be able to accept a grant of £40,000 towards the cost of introduction of webcasting and “remote attendance”. Numerous technical and administrative problems had been identified relating to remote attendance.

The Welsh Government had not committed itself to repeating the grant funding in future years.

A demonstration of webcasting had been held for Members on 15 May and in July 2013.

Denbighshire had since developed and issued its webcasting specifications to allow webcasting suppliers to tender for a contract. The closing date for receipt of tenders was Friday 15 November.

Discussion took place and all Members agreed webcasting was the way forward for the Council.

***RESOLVED*** that the Democratic Services Committee considered the report and agreed to the arrangements in respect of webcasting of meetings in 2014.

## **8 FAMILY ABSENCE FOR MEMBERS REGULATIONS**

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services presented the report (previously circulated) for Members to consider the implications of the draft regulations and statutory guidance.

Following a brief discussion, all Members agreed to the draft regulations and statutory guidance and review of the Constitution.

***RESOLVED*** that:

- *Members noted the draft Family Absence for Members of Local Authorities (Wales) Regulations 2013 and the Statutory Guidance produced to accompany them, and*
- *Members recommended that the Regulations and Guidance be taken into account when reviewing the Council's Constitution.*

## **9 INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL FOR WALES DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT 2014/2015**

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services presented the report (previously circulated) to seek Members' views on the draft report in order that the Council's views could be fed back to the Panel.

Much discussion took place regarding the draft Annual Report 2014/15.

The Panel had refined its determinations taking account of various points from the 2013 consultation.

A majority of Members of the Democratic Services Committee were in agreement that no additional senior salary payment should be made to anyone appointed Chair of a Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee if that member were already in receipt of a senior salary.

There was support from members of the committee to the determination of Band 3 committee chair salaries by the Panel as introducing local determination from one of three levels would lead to inconsistency and politicising the decisions which the Panel had stated it would attempt to avoid.

Both Councillors Martyn Holland and Gareth Sandilands wished it to be noted that their individual point of view was that Vice-Chairs of Scrutiny Committees should be in receipt of an additional payment for holding the post of Vice-Chair. Councillors Barry Mellor, Bill Cowie, and Gwyneth Kensler disagreed with the recommendation.

***RESOLVED*** that the Committee's comments be conveyed to the Independent Remuneration Panel.

## **10 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME**

The Democratic Services Manager requested items for discussion for future Democratic Services Committee meetings.

Councillor Martyn Holland requested “Webcasting Update” be added to the next meeting.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services confirmed that following the publication of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales Annual Report 2014/15, a Democratic Services Committee meeting would be arranged.

Members agreed to consider the final designated persons order at a future meeting.

***RESOLVED that the Forward Work Programme information be noted.***

**The meeting concluded at 3.50 p.m.**