

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Democratic Services Committee held in Conference Room 1a, County Hall, Ruthin on Friday, 7 February 2014 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Bill Cowie, Gwyneth Kensler, Barry Mellor (Chair), Peter Owen, Arwel Roberts and Gareth Sandilands.
Councillor M.LI. Davies attended as an observer.

ALSO PRESENT

Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer (RGW), Democratic Services Manager (SP) and Administrative Officer (CW).

1 APOLOGIES

No Members declared any personal or prejudicial interests in any business identified to be considered at the meeting.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No Members declared any personal or prejudicial interests in any business identified to be considered at the meeting.

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

No items were raised which in the opinion of the Chair, should be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency pursuant to Section 100B(4) of the Local Government Act, 1972.

4 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the Democratic Services Committee meeting held on the 14th November, 2013 were submitted.

Matters arising:-

The Democratic Services Manager referred to Business Items in the Forward Work Programme and explained that there had been no indication as to when the Designated Persons Order would be made.

The Committee were informed that as a result of feedback from members revised templates would be circulated incorporating clearer guidance and details on the type of the information to be included in the report. Confirmation was provided that Members were not obliged to provide an Annual Report.

7. Webcasting of Council Meetings – In response to a question from Councillor W.L. Cowie, the Democratic Services Manager provided details of the funding arrangements. He explained that the webcasting of Council meetings was not a legal requirement and the Council would need to make a decision on whether or not to enter into a further contract following the initial two year period.

9. Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales Draft Annual Report – The Democratic Services Manager informed the Committee that the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales Draft Annual Report had not yet been published.

In response to a question from Councillor A. Roberts, the Democratic Services Manager confirmed that representations made “that Vice-Chairs of Scrutiny Committees should be in receipt of an additional payment for holding the post of Vice-Chair” had been forwarded to the Independent Remuneration Panel and a response was awaited.

The Democratic Services Manager confirmed that identification of the Chair and Vice Chair of the respective Committees would be included on future agendas.

RESOLVED – *that, subject to the above, the minutes of the Democratic Services Committee held on the 14th November, 2013 be confirmed as a correct record.*

5 WEBCASTING OF COUNCIL MEETINGS

A copy of a report by the Democratic Services Manager (DSM), which provided an updated position statement on the progress towards the webcasting of certain meetings in 2014, had been circulated with the papers for the meeting.

The DSM reported that the installation of webcasting equipment and software had started in December and was completed yesterday with the final application of broadband to the two ADSL lines expected on Saturday. The DSM informed the Committee that written details of a protocol, which would provide guidance in respect of webcasting, would be circulated to all Members. He also explained that consideration had been afforded to providing a brief presentation to Members at the Council Briefing meeting on the 19th February, 2014 and members indicated their consent.

The Council intended to webcast approximately 60 hours a year of meetings of Council and the Planning Committee, which would be webcast from the Council Chamber, County Hall. In response to questions from Members regarding the webcasting of additional meetings such as Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees, the DSM explained that the Webcasting services had been procured using the WG’s £40,000 grant for a two-year period, and any decision to extend or renew the contract would be made by Members. Members were advised that the Welsh Government had very recently informed local authorities that the grant funding could be carried forward into 2014 / 2015 which would allow the Council adequate time to implement webcasting arrangements. The introduction and operation of the arrangements would result in additional officer time being assigned to the meetings which were webcast. The impact was currently not certain, but it was expected that the webcasting arrangements would be delivered within existing resources. Some

resource implications could be experienced for the ICT service though the external supplier would be expected to provide support as part of the contract.

With the aid of a PowerPoint presentation the Head of Legal and Democratic Services (HLDS) provided details of the webcasting system and outlined its capabilities.

The following responses were provided to questions and issues raised by Members:-

- At present there was no funding available to reposition the red microphone buttons on the desks in the Council Chamber. However, this could be considered at a future date if sufficient funding was made available to re-design the Chamber.
- It was confirmed by the DSM that written minutes would be produced for meetings which had been webcast.
- The HLDS informed Members that the service providers had produced statistics which indicated a higher level of public engagement when Council meetings had been webcast.
- Details were provided of the social media and communication functions of webcasting which could be utilised by the Council to improve engagement with the public and service users
- In response to a question from Members, the HLDS agreed to consult with the service provider on issues relating to copyright.
- It was suggested by the Chair that webcasting could be utilised for education purposes in promoting the work of the County Council and engaging the interest of the younger generation.

Following further discussion, it was:-

RESOLVED – *that the Democratic Services Committee endorses the arrangements and progress in respect of the webcasting of meetings in 2014.*

6 COMMITTEE TIMETABLE 2014/15, ANNUAL REVIEW OF POLITICAL BALANCE, AND APPOINTMENT OF SCRUTINY CHAIRS

A copy of a report by the Democratic Services Manager (DSM), containing information and requests decisions on Committee-related issues, had been circulated with the papers for the meeting.

The draft timetable for meetings in 2014/15, Appendix 1, was presented for the Democratic Services Committee for consideration and full Council would be asked to consider and approve a timetable. Members were advised that the draft timetable had been developed in consultation with various officers who were associated with the various committees. The DSM referred to the committee-by-committee explanation in the appendix of the factors that had affected the dates and cycles which made up the timetable.

The DSM reported that in 2013 some Members had suggested extending the timetable to cover a longer period, and he asked for the Committee's views on this matter.

It was explained by the DSM that there was a requirement for the Council to consider, at least annually, how the membership of its Committees related to the political balance of the Groups. Changes to Committee membership and the strength of the political groups had resulted in not all Committees being politically balanced, as indicated in Appendix 2. Members were advised that the changes in May to the civic posts of chair and vice chair of the Council would affect the membership and political balance of some committees.

Details pertaining to the appointment of Chairs of Scrutiny Committees had been incorporated in the report.

During the ensuing discussion Councillor M.LI. Davies suggested that the timetable be extended to cover a two year period. An amendment to the recommendation in the report was proposed by Councillor W.L. Cowie, and seconded by Councillor P.W. Owen, that due to the significance of the issue of the timetabling of meetings, the views of County Council be sought regarding this matter. On being put to the vote the amendment was carried.

Following further discussion, it was:-

RESOLVED – *that the Democratic Services Committee:-*

(a) receives and notes the contents of the draft committee timetable, and (b) agrees that the views of County Council be sought in respect of extending the timetable over two or more years.

7 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The DSM introduced the report and explained that the following Business Items remained on the Committee's Forward Work Programme:-

(i) Designated Persons Order - to be considered following the receipt of further information and guidance from Welsh Government.

(ii) Final Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales - To be included in the Forward Work Programme.

RESOLVED – *that the position be noted.*

Meeting ended at 11.05 a.m.

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