

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Democratic Services Committee held in CONFERENCE ROOM 1A, COUNTY HALL, RUTHIN on Friday, 13 March 2015 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Bill Cowie, Barry Mellor (Chair) and Merfyn Parry

Observer: Councillor Meirick Lloyd Davies

ALSO PRESENT

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

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Joan Butterfield, Martyn Holland and Peter Owen

The Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services referred to the Constitution and explained the Committee was inquorate. Members agreed that the meeting proceed on an informal basis and any action taken be ratified at the next meeting of the Committee.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

None.

4 APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIR

The Democratic Services Manager re-iterated the fact that the Committee was inquorate and, therefore, could not appoint a Vice-Chair. He confirmed he would email all Committee members to ask for expressions of interest.

5 MINUTES

The minutes of the Democratic Services Committee held on 28 November 2014, were submitted.

The Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services (HofL,HR&DS) confirmed the minutes would not be ratified at this meeting due to the Committee being inquorate.

Councillor Meirick Lloyd Williams requested clarification from the HofL,HR&DS regarding matters arising 6. Page 4 of the minutes submitted.

The HofL,HR&DS confirmed observers at meetings could speak, with permission of the Chair, but would not be able to propose recommendations.

***RESOLVED** that subject to the above, and confirmation at the next meeting, the minutes be received and approved as a correct record.*

6 WELSH GOVERNMENT WHITE PAPER - REFORMING LOCAL GOVERNMENT: POWER TO LOCAL PEOPLE

The Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services (HofL,HR&DS) introduced the Welsh Government White Paper report (previously circulated) for Committee to consider the Paper and comment on those matters that were the subject of consultation.

The HofL,HR&DS confirmed the White Paper had been presented to Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group, and would also be presented at Corporate Governance Committee and to the Senior Leadership Team. Political Group Leaders were to be consulted for comments. Various Officers of the Council would also be submitting comments to the HofL,HR&DS.

The HofL,HR&DS confirmed the White Paper had been published in three versions, the Full version, the Everyday version (summary) and the Young People version. The full version had been previously circulated.

The Committee's views were particularly sought in respect of the elements of the Paper that related directly to members and the democratic structures of the authority.

Some of the proposals and policy options within the White Paper offered limited detail around how the proposals were to be implemented.

The Committee was asked to consider in particular the chapter entitled "Renewing Democracy" as this was the chapter which dealt mainly with issues that were within the Committee's area of responsibility.

At this juncture, Councillor Bill Cowie expressed his disappointment at the attendance at both this and previous Democratic Services Committee meetings. Councillor Cowie stated it would be difficult to take part in a debate with so few members in attendance. The Chair requested the HofL,HR&DS to circulate the main points to Committee Members expressing the importance of sending their comments to be included in the response.

The HofL,HR&DS explained the proposals within the White Paper and the Members gave the following response:

- All Members present agreed to the five year term for Councillors.
- No-one was in agreement with the proposed phased elections stating there would be a duplication of resource and continuity issues.

- Nomination papers were not required to be published and members, therefore, did not understand why councillors' political affiliations needed to be recorded, whether or not they stood on behalf of that party.
- Members disagreed with the proposal of the Leader publishing a manifesto which would then become the Council's priorities as currently consultation took place and workshops were held. Council decided the priorities, Cabinet delivered those priorities and Scrutiny held them to account. Publication of a manifesto would be a problem as elections were usually held in May, the Leader would be elected at the end of May so that would leave a very short space of time for a manifesto for the next five years to be drawn up.
- Under the new proposal, objectives for both the Chief Executive and Cabinet Members would be required to be published.
- Members strongly disagreed with the proposal to co-opt non-elected members on to Cabinet, as members had been elected by the people and non-elected members should not be given the opportunity to sit on Cabinet.
- All agreed there had not been sufficient detail with regards to the number of members on Cabinet and the issue of whether a full-time post or not. More information would be required.
- The mandatory training proposals were not agreed upon.
- All present agreed there should be standards of attendance to prevent issues, as at present, of some members not attending many meetings.
- Additional guidance was requested regarding the completion and publication of member's annual reports. It had been questioned how this would be enforced.
- All were in agreement that the safeguards regarding imposing of appropriate sanctions as stated within the White Paper could be open to abuse.
- Denbighshire already had Anti-Bullying and Anti-Harrassment Policies in place. The HofL,HR&DS and Standards Committee enforced the policies if necessary.
- There had been no mention within the White Paper of additional resources for the Chief Executive to establish a Youth Council.
- As the promotion of diversity was to be a major proposal, Members agreed there could be an issue if Elected Members were working and had to take unpaid leave to attend meetings. They did not want any Elected Members to be disadvantaged.
- Members disagreed with the term limits. Consensus of opinion was that if someone was doing an excellent job, why bring them off at the end of the stated term. The replacement member may not match up to the displaced member.
- All agreed if a person was elected on to County Council, they should be disqualified from becoming an Assembly Member.

The HofL,HR&DS confirmed he would collate the response and forward it to members prior to submission to Full Council in April.

RESOLVED that subject to the above, the Democratic Services Committee considered the White Paper and commented as stated.

7 INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL FOR WALES ANNUAL REPORT 2015/2016

The Democratic Services Manager (DSM) introduced the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales Annual Report 2015/2016 (previously circulated) to make the Committee aware of the Panel's determinations for 2015/2016.

The Panel was required to produce an annual report setting out the levels at which members were to be paid for various duties and responsibilities for the coming municipal year. The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 required Local Authorities to implement the recommendations of the Panel.

This year the Panel decided not to increase remuneration due to the continuing cuts in local Government funding.

The Head of Legal, HR & Democratic Services would present the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales Annual Report 2015/2016 to Council in April.

***RESOLVED** that the Democratic Services Committee noted the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales Annual Report 2015/2016.*

8 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Democratic Services Manager introduced a verbal report.

***RESOLVED** that the Democratic Services Committee noted the report.*

Meeting concluded at 12.15 p.m.