

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Democratic Services Committee held in CONFERENCE ROOM 1A, COUNTY HALL, RUTHIN LL15 1YN on Friday, 4 October 2019 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Hugh Irving, Alan James (Chair) and Joe Welch

ALSO PRESENT

The Democratic Services Manager (SP) and Committee Administrator (HB)

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Huw Jones, Gwyneth Kensler, Christine Marston and Graham Timms, and the Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services (GW).

The Democratic Services Manager reported that the quorum for this committee had not been reached but the members present agreed to continue on an informal basis.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no interests declared.

3 URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

4 MINUTES

The minutes of the Democratic Services Committee's meeting held 29 March 2019 were submitted.

Item 5 – Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales – the Committee had raised its concerns about the Panel publishing its letters to local authorities that dealt with ongoing issues relating to individual chief officer salaries. The Democratic Services Manager relayed the Panel's response which was that it now only published the decision but not the letters, as had been the case previously. The Panel had also confirmed that its statutory role for chief officers would cease on the 31 March 2020.

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the Democratic Services Committee meeting held 29 March 2019 be approved as a correct record.

5 MEMBER TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

The Democratic Services Manager (DSM) explained that they were testing whether the iTrent system could be used to log and report on all councillor training records. Currently training was usually arranged directly by the services responsible for the topic which could make record keeping challenging.

Members agreed that it would be beneficial to have the information on one system which was easily accessible and could produce reports for the political groups and individual members on training that has been undertaken, and any mandatory training that was still outstanding.

With Planning training being mandatory for members of the Planning Committee, members queried the multi-member ward restrictions on membership – where only one councillor in a ward represented by more than one councillor, could be a member of the Planning Committee. The DSM confirmed that the Welsh Government had introduced those regulations which were legally binding, though the DSM agreed that they were problematic in Denbighshire.

Members felt that other authorities were probably having similar problems and suggested that a letter be sent to Welsh Government for the process to be reviewed.

In respect of e-learning the DSM explained that the national e-learning site and modules were difficult to use on mobile devices such as members' iPads and that many of the modules needed updating. He advised that the Welsh Local Government Association was coordinating the work local authorities were undertaking to update the training modules and work to improve the e-learning site was progressing.

Denbighshire had volunteered to update a module on 'equality' issues and Councillors Irving and Welch indicated they would be willing to user-test the module once it was ready.

RESOLVED that the Committee notes the report.

6 PERSONAL SAFETY FOR COUNCILLORS

The Democratic Services Manager (DSM) introduced a report (previously circulated) on personal safety for councillors and had compiled information from the Welsh Local Government Association and the Local Government Association on Councillor specific personal safety guidelines.

The report stated that lone working could pose or heighten certain risks for councillors, such as holding surgeries alone in an otherwise empty building or visiting a constituent in their home. The DSM advised that the Council has in place lone worker procedures on its Intranet site that could be applicable to both staff and members.

Councillor Welch indicated that he did receive unsolicited messages on Whatsapp and members discussed how responding to Facebook posts could result in being classified as a 'friend' which could cause complications undertaking their representative roles as councillors.

RESOLVED that the report be circulated to all members for information and ICT be requested to consider providing guidance for members in respect of social media and technology used by councillors.

7 UPDATE ON JOINT SCRUTINY

The Democratic Services Manager introduced a report (previously circulated) updating the Committee on the progress of the joint scrutiny arrangements that were in place to scrutinise the Public Services Board (PSB). The report had been commissioned by the Committee to provide an early overview of the joint Scrutiny arrangements.

The Committee considered the following:

- A training and introduction session had been held in February for the members of the new Joint Scrutiny Committee
- The Joint Committee's first meeting had been held in May. Councillor Brian Cossey (Conwy County Borough Council) was elected Chair, with Denbighshire's Councillor Graham Timms elected as Vice-Chair
- The Joint Committee had endorsed the PSB's 2018 – 19 Annual Report and its three priorities of mental well-being, community empowerment and environmental resilience
- A meeting scheduled for September had been postponed owing to the lead organisation for the environmental resilience priority becoming unavailable.

Members agreed that an update at future Democratic Services meetings of the PSB Scrutiny activities would be beneficial.

RESOLVED that an update on the Joint Scrutiny Committee arrangements be given to the next meeting of the Democratic Services Committee.

8 SCRUTINY ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE NORTH WALES ECONOMIC AMBITION BOARD

The Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services had been unable to attend today's meeting to address the Committee on the North Wales Economic Ambition Board. The Democratic Services Manager gave a brief overview about the Board and the development of scrutiny arrangements to ensure the Board was held accountable through the use of local government scrutiny arrangements.

RESOLVED That the Committee invite the Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services to a future meeting to discuss the development of scrutiny arrangements for this regional joint committee.

9 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Democratic Services Manager (DSM) presented the forward work programme. Members noted the items added to the forward work programme during the meeting and added an update on the Local Government (Wales) Bill to the programme.

RESOLVED that, subject to the above, the forward work programme be approved.