

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Democratic Services Committee held via VIDEO CONFERENCE on Friday, 28 January 2022 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Joan Butterfield, Rachel Flynn, Hugh Irving, Gwyneth Kensler, Andrew Thomas, Rhys Thomas, Graham Timms and Joe Welch

ALSO PRESENT

The Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services (GW), Democratic Services Manager (SP), Committee administrators (SJ (Host) RTJ)

1 APOLOGIES

The Democratic Services Manager (DSM) informed the committee that the Chair had sent his apologies for the meeting, there was not an appointed vice chair for the Democratic Services Committee. Hence the DSM required the committee to appoint a chair for the duration of the meeting.

Councillor Gwyneth Kensler proposed Councillor Rhys Thomas, seconded by Councillor Hugh Irving.

There were no other nominations, therefore Councillor Rhys Thomas was appointed as the chair for the duration of the meeting.

Apologies were received from Councillors Bob Murray and Christine Marston.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

3 URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent matters raised.

4 MINUTES

The minutes of the Democratic Service Committee meeting held on 5 November 2021 were submitted.

RESOLVED: - *that the minutes of the Democratic Services Committee meeting held on 5 November 2021 be received and approved as a true and correct record.*

5 DIVERSITY IN DEMOCRACY - ACTION PLAN

The Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services (HLHDS) presented the Diversity in Democracy – Action Plan (previously circulated) the HLHDS reminded members that on 7th September 2021, Council approved the Diverse Council Declaration.

The WLGA has an ambitious Diversity and Democracy Programme to try and ensure that council chambers are more representative of the communities that they serve. They have been considering ways in which greater diversity can be achieved following the local government elections in May 2022.

A WLGA cross party working group was set up to explore broader underrepresentation in democracy. It produced a report that identifies barriers to participation which could broadly be summarised as:

- Time-commitment and meeting times;
- Political and organisational culture;
- Childcare and other caring responsibilities;
- Public criticism and online abuse;
- Remuneration and impact on employment; and
- Lack of diverse role models and incumbency.

The HLHDS guided the committee through the Action Plan which was shown as Appendix 2.

- Dissemination of Welsh Government educational resources to accompany the extension of the franchise to 16 and 17 year olds in Wales, education were engaged with the matter to ensure that children were aware of the role of Councillors, throughout their education.
- The WLGA had a website for being a councillor and highlighted the importance of being a County Councillor; each authority in Wales would have its version. Denbighshire County Council would soon release their own updated version since the last election.
- Another element was to increase engagement with the public to raise awareness of the role and activities of the Council and Councillors.
- Roadshows were being organised to ensure that people interested in being Councillors were aware of the work that would be involved in the role.
- Publication of the Council's Constitution. The Constitution guide was a requirement under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, this was being developed, alongside a plain language guide.
- Meetings would continue to be webcast, which was a good method to engage with the community.
- The WLGA indicated that each political group could nominate Diversity Leads.
- Another element was the comprehensive training and awareness programme available through a variety of routes available for members to support them in their role.
- Political Groups would be asked to provide the opportunity for mentoring /shadowing for newly Elected Members.
- Members were provided with opportunities to undertake Personal Development Reviews. However, this was not mandatory.

- Home addresses would no longer require to be published, however an official address would be required.
- Maximise opportunities for individuals to work in ways that enable them to achieve a work / life balance which protects their welfare and wellbeing and allows them to manage any caring / dependency relationships. This was deemed as a large challenge, however, Council has endorsed the New Ways of Working for member meetings to enable fully hybrid meetings which facilitate attendance from an alternative location..
- The Reviewing meeting times to have more flexibility to suit members, the review was challenging. The situation would need to be discussed at a future meeting.
- Greater respect and support for those standing for and securing elected office; there were two elements to this: Promote duty on political group leaders to promote high standards of conduct.
- Standards Committee to monitor group leaders' compliance in relation to the duty and provide training.

RESOLVED that the Democratic Services Committee notes and endorses/considers the draft action plan contained in Appendix 2.

6 ROLE OF DIVERSITY CHAMPION

The Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services (HLHDS) presented the report on the Role of Diversity Champion (previously circulated) which was around the proposal to create the role of Diversity Champion.

The role, purpose and activities for the diversity champion were as followed –

1. To act as a strong strategic leader on raising and promoting diversity issues
2. To argue, support and defend the concerns, issues and needs of people with protected characteristics in the Councils' area.
3. To establish good working relationships with officers and others driving forward strategies, policies and plans.
4. To gain an understanding of diversity and equality issues and the Council's statutory obligations, and where required to explain those duties.
5. To commit to attending nationally facilitated events (such as provided by the WLGA) and to consider making your own regional, cross border and national links as are necessary.
6. To ensure that diversity and equality remain a priority in the Councils' work. As a spokesperson to keep issues at the forefront of debate; raising awareness amongst fellow elected members on issues relating to diversity and equality and the implications of these for the Council.
7. To promote the involvement, participation and engagement of people from diverse backgrounds in the planning and reviewing of all aspects of a local authority's work, including service delivery and policy development.
8. To consider and highlight the role of public, private and third sectors in bringing forward solutions.
9. To attend training and regular briefings.
10. To keep abreast of the evolving impact of national and legislative changes.

11. Where required, in conjunction with the relevant Lead Member (where appropriate) and the Councils' Communications team, to engage with the media.
12. To consider the role of other Champions and their impact on this role and whether to work together where appropriate.

Following the introduction by the HLHDS members discussed the following –

- The committee agreed on the position of a diversity champion; it was felt that the matter would benefit from being presented to the current Council and that the champion should be selected following the local elections in May.
- The HLHDS confirmed that the champion would be elected during the next Council, and they would be appointed for the duration of the Council term.
- Members raised concern with reporting back from champions, and whether anything could be done to have information from the champions throughout their term as champion.

RESOLVED that the Committee endorses the definition in the appendix to the report of the role of Diversity Champion.

7 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Democratic Service Committee Forward Work Programme was presented for consideration.

The next meeting was within the pre-election period there was a recommendation that due to today's meeting having been held that the meeting on the 25th March be cancelled. All present members agreed for the meeting to be cancelled.

RESOLVED that Members ***NOTED*** the verbal update.

The meeting concluded at 11.50 am.