

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOMS 2/3, CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB ON THURSDAY, 5 NOVEMBER 2015 AT 2.00 PM

Present

Councillor JH Tildesley – Chairperson

DK Edwards
RC Jones
E Venables

N Farr
JR McCarthy

P James
M Reeves

RM James
G Thomas

Officers:

Gary Jones - Head of Democratic Services
Mark Galvin - Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees

88. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the following Member for the reason so stated:-

Councillor C A Green - Holiday

89. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None.

90. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of a meeting of the Democratic Services Committee dated the 28 May 2015 were approved as a true and accurate record, subject to it being noted that Councillor D K Edwards had given his apologies for absence at this meeting which had not been reflected in the Minutes.

91. SERVICE AND PERFORMANCE UPDATES

The Head of Democratic Services presented a report, the purpose of which, was to update the Democratic Services Committee with performance information relating to different elements of support provided to Elected Members.

The report covered the following areas which the Head of Democratic Services gave a update :-

- Member Referrals
- Pre-Council briefings
- Member Development
- Annual Reports
- Personal Development Reviews
- Modern.Gov Update
- Welsh Language Standards
- Webcasting

- Members ICT Forum
- Democratic Diversity
- Member Support Officer Network

In terms of Member Referrals, Members queried if these could be left open indefinitely, i.e. until such time that the referral has been followed-up and acted upon and completed fully by the appropriate Officer of the Council it had been referred to.

The Head of Democratic Services confirmed that it was normal custom and practice to leave referrals open for a period of 3 months, though there was scope if the referral was not completed, to re-initiate the referral after a further 3 months.

A Member pointed out that she normally took up any constituents queries or complaints directly with the appropriate Department as opposed to going through the Members referral system, though she was aware that this method would not be recorded as a 'hit' for her on the Members referral system, where data was collated and available for inspection.

The Head of Democratic Services confirmed that if the Officer was contacted directly by the Elected Member then the referral could be retrospectively logged by the officer to allow the referral to be included on the system for information and completeness.

A Member recognised that a significant volume of work was committed to the Member referral system by Officers in the Democratic Services Section, however, he felt the system was important, as it gave an audit trail in terms of matters raised by constituents having been followed-up, so that the Member can then go back to the constituent with feedback on the referral.

A Member suggested that it may be advisable to approach other neighbouring local authorities to compare our procedures, practices and protocols with their own, to see if there may be a more effective method by which to deal with referrals.

A Member felt that there was no point in keeping a referral open, if this related to something that required a financial resource that the Directorate was unable to support due to budget restrictions under the MTFS.

The Chairperson advised that the number of referrals processed over the last few years was as follows:-

- 2012 – 2,972
- 2013 – 3,287
- 2014 – 2,513
- 2015 - 1,842 (to date)

Members concluded the debate by requesting the Head of Democratic Services to look into the current process being undertaken in respect of the Member referral system, in order to establish if it could be improved. Assistance should be sought from ICT and other Departments, to consider possible options to keep referrals open for longer of time using reminders which would minimise the need to administrative support.

Paragraph 4.2.3 of the report then showed the Pre-Council briefings topics that had been put forward or requested.

Members felt that the item on Domestic Violence should be prioritised, as should two further listed items, namely the South Wales Fire and Rescue Service item and Digital

Transformation. It was also requested that two further items be added to this list on the topic of Mental Health Friends and the Military Preparation Training College. It was the opinion of Members also, that the pre-Council presentation in respect of an update on the Cultural Trust could be considered instead as a Member development training session.

With regard to Member Development training sessions held this year to date, as outlined in paragraph 4.3 of the report, the Committee felt that the attendance by Members at these was overall a little disappointing, and therefore, it was suggested that Group Leaders be approached to encourage their Members to increase and improve attendance at these events in the future, particularly as there was cost implication to the Authority in relation to arranging and holding these sessions.

Paragraph 4.3.3 of the report then listed topics for future delivery in the form of twice repeated hour sessions, or as part of a Round Robin event. Members agreed to add the following topics to this list:-

1. Awen Trust (follow-up)
2. Feedback on the Scrutiny Annual report
3. Human trafficking
4. Update on Gypsy Travellers
5. Radicalisation of Young People (PREVENT)

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the report be noted
- (2) That the Head of Democratic Services investigates any possible refinements that could be made to the Member Referral System, and in turn, reports feedback on this to Members at the next scheduled meeting.
- (3) That Members identified and prioritised topics to be delivered as Pre-Council briefings and Member Development sessions, as detailed above, and contained in the report.

92. CONSULTATION - INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL FOR WALES DRAFT REPORT 2016-17

The Head of Democratic Services submitted a report, which advised that the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (IRWP) had issued its Draft Annual Report for consultation. The purpose of the report was for the Committee to provide its views in respect of the draft report. A response would be submitted to the IRWP and the WLGA by the deadline of 30 November 2015. The draft report was attached to the main covering report at Appendix A.

The Head of Democratic Services gave a resume of the report, and reiterated the following for the benefit of Committee Members:-

1. The basic salary to all elected Members would remain unchanged
2. The Leader's salary would remain unchanged
3. The Deputy Leader's salary would be slightly reduced as per the report
4. Four Cabinet Members salaries would remain at £29k, with any further Cabinet Members salary being reduced to £29,600
5. No changes to Mayor's or Deputy Mayor's salary allowance

6. Two proposed levels of remuneration for Chairpersons of Committees i.e. Level 1 £22k and Level 2 £20k
7. An allowance of £20k (reduced from £22k) for the Leader of the largest opposition group to the majority group
8. No changes to remuneration for Committee Co-opted Members

The remainder of the report related to information Supporting the work of local authority Elected Members; reimbursement of travel, subsistence and care costs when on official business, payments to members of Town/Community Councils and salaries of Heads of Paid Service.

The Head of Democratic Services advised Members that compliance in respect of the IRPW requirements remained extant, and that it should be noted that earlier this year the IRPW identified Bridgend's Schedule of Remuneration as an exemplar of good practice, and this was circulated to all Local Authorities in Wales.

A Member felt that whilst the IRWP had been established primarily to look at Councillors allowances, he considered that the Panel seemed obliged each year to alter in some way or another these allowances. He also added that whilst they were looking to reduce allowances in some way or another for local government Members, allowances for Welsh Assembly Government Members were increasing. He asked how much the proposals would save the Authority.

The Head of Democratic Services confirmed that if the proposals in the report were to materialise, the adjustments to allowances would save the Authority around £25 - £30k a year.

A Member stated that some of the proposals under valued the Chairpersons of statutory and/or regulatory Committees, as opposed to Overview and Scrutiny Committees. The former Committees however, met more frequently, and made decisions that were challengeable through various types of appeal processes, i.e. the Licensing Sub-Committee, Appeals and Development Control Committee.

Members having considered the report, together with the Draft Annual Report of the IRPW (Appendix A to covering report), and having debated the matter

RESOLVED:

The Committee:

1. Provided views on the Draft Annual Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales, along the lines as expressed above.
2. Supported the WLGA's request to meet with the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales
3. Supported the position that the WLGA write to the Minister following the passage of the Local Government Bill proposing a moratorium on any changes. This should be set in the context for the need for continuity on Local Government remuneration frameworks in the run up to whatever reorganisation proposals emerge as a consequence of the Assembly Elections in 2016, and for the remaining duration of the current local government term.

4. Supported the WLGA's request that a fuller review could occur at a later stage in light of other factors such as proposals which may emerge from the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission on the number of Councillors in Wales.

93. DEVELOPMENT OF AN ELECTED MEMBER LONE WORKING POLICY

The Head of Democratic Services submitted a report, the purpose of which, was to request the establishment of a cross party working group consisting of 6 Members of the Committee, to undertake a collaborative risk assessment and to assist in the development of an Elected Member Lone Working Policy.

The report gave some background information, following which it was confirmed that elected Members routinely work alone and as a result of this, may be open to placing themselves in vulnerable positions, for example, through visiting constituents at their home.

Paragraph 4.3 of the report stipulated that undertaking appropriate risk assessments should identify the typical hazards which elected Members may face when working alone, as were exemplified in this section of the report.

The Head of Democratic Services confirmed that the cross working party would undertake a collaborative elected Member Lone Working Risk Assessment, and assist in the development of an elected Members Lone Working Policy.

He added that it would be of benefit also, if one of the Members of the group so established had attended the Dealing with Conflict Member Development session in 2013. He further added that a provisional date had been arranged for the first meeting of this Working Group i.e. 16 November next at 10.00am in these offices.

Following discussion on this item, Members

RESOLVED: That the Committee agreed to establish a cross party Working Group comprising of the following Members to undertake a collaborative Risk Assessment and assist in the development of an elected Members Lone Working Policy:-

Councillor J H Tildesley
Councillor M Reeves
Councillor J R McCarthy
Councillor C A Green or Councillor E Venables
Councillor R C Jones
Councillor R M James

94. URGENT ITEMS

None

The meeting closed at 4.08 pm