

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

29TH NOVEMBER 2017

PRESENT: Councillor R. James (Chair)

Councillors: W.T. Evans and S. Najmi.

Also in attendance:

Councillor A.G. Morgan, Chair of the Chairs and Vice Chairs Scrutiny Forum.

The following Officers were in attendance:

L.R. Jones, Head of Administration and Law;

G. Morgan, Head of Democratic Services;

J. Owen, Democratic Services Officer.

Democratic Services Committee Room, County Hall, Carmarthen – 10:00am - 11:10am

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

An apology for absence was received from Councillor T.J. Jones.

2. DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTERESTS.

There were no declarations of personal interest.

3. CARMARTHENSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S SCRUTINY FUNCTION ANNUAL REPORT 2016/17

The Committee considered the Carmarthenshire County Council's Scrutiny Function – Annual Report 2016/17 which provided an overview of the Council's Scrutiny Function and made specific reference to the work of the 5 Scrutiny Committee's:

- Policy & Resources
- Community
- Education & Children
- Environmental & Public Protection
- Social Care & Health

The Chair of the Chairs and Vice Chairs of Scrutiny Forum was welcomed to the meeting and was afforded the opportunity to present the report to the Committee.

The report highlighted that Scrutiny had a key role in promoting accountability in the decision making process of local authorities. Scrutiny was valuable in ensuring that council policies reflect current priorities, as well as promoting efficiency and encouraging partnership working with external agencies.

Members were informed that the Chairs and Vice Chairs of Scrutiny Forum met quarterly which provided an opportunity to work collaboratively as Chairs and Vice Chairs to discuss any issues which related to the scrutiny function.

The Chair of the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Scrutiny Forum expressed that it had been disappointing to note that only one task and finish review had taken place in 2016/17, but going forward into 2017/18 all Scrutiny Committees were being encouraged to be proactive and undertake at least one task and finish review and that more public participation with regard to scrutiny would be encouraged.

Feedback received from the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Scrutiny Forum was that Scrutiny Committees would benefit from having dedicated Scrutiny Officers as an effective resource in providing valuable support and research. The Head of Admin and Law stated that this matter had also been raised as a concern during the Democratic Services Unit, TIC Review. However, the Committee was reminded that the Scrutiny function was a member led process and that should dedicated scrutiny officers be initiated, there could be a risk that the Council would be criticised for being too officer led by the Wales Audit Office.

In response to a query raised in relation to the disappointingly low attendance figures at the recent Member Development Sessions, the Head of Democratic Services stated that the Learning and Development Advisor was seeking to pilot an evening training session to ascertain if the later time would have an improved attendance rate. In addition the Committee was reminded that all material presented at the Member Development Sessions was available for all Members to view on the Mod.gov app.

RESOLVED that the Carmarthenshire County Council's Scrutiny Function Annual Report 2016/17 be noted.

4. INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL FOR WALES (IRPW) DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT (FEBRUARY, 2018).

The Committee considered a report detailing the determinations and recommendations contained in the IRPW's Annual Report [February, 2018] with a view to making recommendations to Council for inclusion within the Councillors' and Co-opted Members' Salaries and Allowances Scheme for 2018/19.

Members noted that the IRPW was required to send the draft annual report to County Councils and sought any comments by the 29th November 2017. In addition, the IRPW was required to take into account any representations which it receives on the draft before issuing its final version of the report in February.

In setting the level of salaries and allowances for 2018/19 the IRPW had decided that there would be an increase of approximately 1.49% in the basic annual salary for elected members. No increase was proposed for senior salaries but these post holders would receive the uplift in the basic salary element. Furthermore, the IRPW had stated that the discretion to pay different salary levels for the Executive, Chairs of Committees and Civic duties had been removed.

It was suggested that in order to improve the recruiting Members from diverse backgrounds, that a recommendation should be put forward to fix the salary to minimum wage. The Head of Democratic Services confirmed that Committees suggestions and recommendations would be fed back to IRPW.

RESOLVED:

- 4.1 to note that the IRPW has determined that the basic salary for elected member of principal local authorities shall increase to £13,600 for 2018/19;**
- 4.2 that the Chair of the Committee be authorised to respond and provide the feedback raised to the IRPW on behalf of the Committee.**

5. COUNCILLORS AND CO-OPTED MEMBERS' SALARIES AND ALLOWANCES SCHEME 2017/18 - APPROVED DUTIES

The Committee considered the report on Councillors and Co-opted Members' Salaries and Allowances scheme 2017/18 which included a list of approved duties.

Members noted that a request had been made to include meetings whereby a Shadow Member was in attendance to observe a meeting of the Executive Board or Executive Board Member Decisions meeting to the list of duties for 2018/19 onwards.

In response to a query, the Head of Administration and Law stated that she was not aware of any precedence relating to this matter, however, the recommendation would need to include clear formalities and boundaries. It was suggested that as the Chair of Council, the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Opposition and the relevant Scrutiny Committee Chair were permitted to remain in Executive Board meetings when exempt information was considered, that the list of approved duties could be extended to include those members' attendance at Executive Board Meetings.

The consensus of the Committee was to put the request forward as a recommendation to the Constitutional Review Working Group.

RESOLVED:

- 5.1 that the Councillors and Co-opted Members' Salaries and Allowances scheme 2017/18 - Approved Duties be noted;**
- 5.2 to recommend to the Constitutional Review Working Group (CRWG) to consider the inclusion of attendance by the Chair of Council, Leader and Deputy Leader of the Opposition and the relevant Scrutiny Committee Chair at meetings of the Executive Board as an approved duty for 2018/19 onwards.**

6. TIMING OF MEETINGS SURVEY

The Committee considered a report which included the results of a survey on timings of meetings.

In accordance with the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, the Council is required to survey Members in respect of the times and intervals at which meetings of a local authority are held.

The Committee noted that the initial results of the survey was considered at its meeting held on the 8th September 2017 (Minute 6 refers) and agreed to defer the report pending a further breakdown of the responses as requested by the Constitutional Review Working Group.

In response to a query, the Head of Democratic Services stated that the survey was sent out to Members shortly after the elections. It was commented that the results of a further survey may offer different results being 7 months into the role.

The Head of Democratic Services stated that the results displayed a strong preference for morning meetings.

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL that having regard to the responses received to the survey the timing and venue for Council and Committee meetings remain unchanged.

7. IT SURVEY

The Committee considered a draft survey on IT provision which would be circulated to elected members. The Committee at its meeting held on the 8th September 2017 agreed to include a report on IT provision for members on its forward work plan.

The Democratic Services Committee, must ensure that all its members are provided as much support as necessary to enable them to fulfil their duties effectively. This included adequate telephone, email and internet facilities providing electronic access to appropriate information.

Reference was made to question 7 of the draft survey. In response to a query, the Head of Democratic Services stated there were a number of Members who had already opted to go paperless and therefore no longer received paper copies of agendas. It was commented that should the Council opt to go paperless as an organisation some significant efficiencies would be realised. Committee members were reminded that Council Members were able to utilise photocopiers located on any Council premises to print. In light of this the Head of Democratic Services stated that she would ask the Head of Information Technology to e-mail a copy of the Council's printing provision to all Members.

With reference to question 10 of the draft survey, a comment was raised that it would be beneficial for Members if a brief explanation was included explaining what a caseworker system was and what it does was provided. The Head of Democratic Services explained that the caseworker system was a paperless provision which aimed to assist users with logging enquiries and handle complaints. Furthermore, it was agreed that an explanation would be useful for members and would be included on the survey.

RESOLVED that subject to the comments regarding question 10 are incorporated, the draft IT Survey be approved.

8. EXPLANATION FOR NON-SUBMISSION OF A REPORT

The Committee considered the non-submission report.

RESOLVED that the Explanation for non-submission of report be noted.

9. TO APPROVE AND SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THE 8TH SEPTEMBER 2017

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Democratic Services Committee held on the 8th September 2017 be signed as a correct record.

CHAIR

DATE