

Democratic Services Committee

Monday, 30 November 2020

PRESENT: Councillor R. James (Chair)

Councillors:

W.T. Evans, E.M.J.G. Schiavone and D. Thomas

The following Officers were in attendance:

L.R. Jones, Head of Administration and Law

G. Morgan, Head of Democratic Services

H. Daniels, Learning & Development Advisor

M. Evans Thomas, Principal Democratic Services Officer

R. Lloyd, Democratic Services Officer

K. Thomas, Democratic Services Officer

S. Rees, Simultaneous Translator

J. Corner, Technical Officer

Virtual Meeting - 2.00 - 2.30 pm

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

There were no apologies for absence.

2. DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTERESTS.

There were no declarations of personal interest.

3. TO APPROVE AND SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THE 2ND DECEMBER 2019

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 2nd December, 2019 be signed as a correct record.

4. INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL FOR WALES DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT - FEBRUARY 2021

The Head of Democratic Services presented the draft annual report for February, 2021. The Committee was reminded the Independent Remuneration for Wales (IRPW) determines the rates of payment which are made to elected and co-opted Members of Welsh local authorities for the following municipal year and has powers to make recommendations on proposed variations to the remuneration of Chief Executives and Chief Officers of Principal Councils in Wales.

The Head of Democratic Services advised that for 2020/21 the IRPW draft determinations proposed -

- an increase in Basic Salaries of £150, bringing the basic salary for Councillors up to £14,368 (No additional increase will be paid to Senior and Civic Salary holders, they will only receive the basic salary element increase)

- the Panel has made a significant change to the Reimbursement of Costs of Care determination. It sees the removal of the £403 monthly cap and allows a Councillor and/or Co-opted Members to seek their full costs of care to be reimbursed fully for formal carers and up to a maximum rate equivalent to the real Living Wage for informal carers. This determination will place an additional financial burden on the Council; however, given the historic numbers of claimants, it is envisaged that this will be managed within the existing democratic budget.

Concern was expressed about the payment of tax paid on this allowance. The Head of Democratic Services advised that she would seek clarity from payroll.

The salary determined by the IRPW is required to be paid by each Principal Authority in Wales from 1st April, 2021 and to each of its elected members unless any individual member opts personally and in writing to receive a lower amount.

The IRPW draft determinations for 2021/22 will result in an additional budget requirement of £11,100. This will be validated when setting the budget for the forthcoming year. It was noted that there was an error in Annex 5 to the IRPW report in terms of the basic salary level and this would be drawn to the Panel's attention as part of the Committee's response to the draft report.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED

4.1 that the report be received.

4.2 that the Chair of the Committee submit a response to the IRPW on behalf of the Committee.

5. WELSH GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION DOCUMENT CHANGES TO ADOPTION ABSENCE FOR LOCAL AUTHORITY MEMBERS

The Family Absence for Members of Local Authorities (Wales) Regulations 2013 (the regulations) govern adopter's absence (the form of leave taken by an individual adopting a child). The Welsh Government proposes amending the 2013 Regulations so as to extend the period of adopter's absence for members of councils from 2 weeks to 26 weeks and, as far as practicable, to align procedures relating to adopter's absence.

The Committee considered the consultation document on changes to adoption absence for Local Authority to propose changes to adoption absence for local authority members from 2 to 26 weeks and expressed support for the proposals. It was noted that the report had been circulated to all members of the Council in order for them to respond directly to the consultation.

The Head of Democratic Services advised that she would produce a draft response for the committee to consider.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Head of Democratic Services respond on behalf of the Committee.

6. DEMOCRATIC SERVICES FUNCTION

The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 requires the Council to designate one of its officers to the statutory post of Head of Democratic Services and provide that officer with sufficient resources to discharge the associated statutory functions.

The Committee considered a report detailing the staff, accommodation and other resources made available to the Head of Democratic Services in order to discharge those functions.

The Committee was asked to determine whether the services provided were adequate to deliver the democratic process for the forthcoming year.

In response to a question, the Head of Democratic Services stated that it has been a challenging year and members and officers have adapted well to the encounters faced and the new ways of working; which included getting used to new video conferencing software and working virtually and highlighted the fantastic work done. The Head of Democratic Services advised that although the new working arrangements had been challenging, the team were adapting well in the circumstances. Arrangements were now being put in place to transition from Microsoft Teams to Zoom for all meetings rather than a mix of both, as this provided a better simultaneous translation solution.

The Corporate Learning and Development Advisor contributed by stating that on-line training has been provided and continued to be provided to members on the use of zoom which is available to them on a more than 1 time basis thus allowing them to build confidence with digital skills and that a survey was issued a few months prior as part of TIC to get responses/feedback from users; more information will be shared at the next meeting.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received

CHAIR

DATE