

Democratic Services Committee

Friday, 26 November 2021

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

N. Daniel, Head of ICT and Corporate Policy; Interim Head of Planning

J. Williams, ICT Operational Delivery Manager

H. Daniels, Learning & Development Advisor

S. Rees, Simultaneous Translator

E. Evans, Principal Democratic Services Officer

K. Evans, Assistant Democratic Services Officer

E. Bryer, Democratic Services Officer

Virtual Meeting - 10.00 am - 11.05 am

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

An apology for absence was received from Councillor H.I. Jones.

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 23RD MARCH 2021

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 23rd March, 2021 be signed as a correct record.

4. CARMARTHENSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S SCRUTINY FUNCTION - ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21

The Committee considered a report providing an overview of the Council's Scrutiny Function and the respective Scrutiny Committees' work during the 2020/21 municipal year.

The Council had five Scrutiny Committees which normally met on a six weekly basis. The report provided an overview of the Council's Scrutiny Function and made specific reference to the work of the 5 Scrutiny Committees:-

- Policy & Resources
- Community & Regeneration
- Education & Children
- Environmental & Public Protection

- Social Care & Health

Councillor Giles Morgan (Chair of the Chairs & Vice-Chairs of Scrutiny Forum) advised that the committees had spent a considerable amount of time reviewing covid related issues. Thanks were expressed to Democratic Services for facilitating the changes that enabled meetings to continue.

It was asked how much travelling costs had been saved by having virtual meetings. The committee was advised that the exact figure would be circulated to the committee.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

5. MEMBERS ICT PROVISION

The Democratic Services Committee were asked to comment on the provision of Members IT equipment following the Local Government elections in May 2022.

The Head of ICT and Policy advised that it was proposed to continue providing a laptop, an iPad and BYOD facility for mobile devices. It was noted that the Authority also proposed to introduce Soft phones software to allow telephone calls over the internet and to remove the Authority provided broadband line.

The Committee was also asked to consider if the £20 communication allowance was a sufficient contribution towards the Council related business costs for broadband and telephone usage.

The following questions/observations were raised on the report:

- Reference was made to members purchasing their own kit, and it was stated that it would be beneficial to investigate this option. The Head of ICT and Policy advised that having Authority issued laptops and iPADS would make the provision of support much easier and he emphasised that members would no longer benefit from in-house IT support if they were to procure their equipment from an external provider.
- It was asked what was considered to be the minimum Mbps required for working remotely. The Committee was advised that around 30 Mbps was considered the benchmark. It was stated that some rural areas experienced connectivity issues and that the IT department was encouraging members to review their current broadband packages.
- The Committee agreed that the £20 communication allowance was a sufficient contribution towards the cost of broadband, and noted that there would be an opportunity for elected members to discuss with the IT division questions regarding connectivity requirements.

RESOLVED that the report be received.

6. INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL FOR WALES (IRPW) DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT - FEBRUARY 2022

In accordance with the requirements of Section 147 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, the IRPW had published its draft Annual Report setting out its determinations for the municipal year 2022/23.

The Democratic Services Committee considered the report, in accordance with its Terms of Reference on the implementation of reports issued by the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales.

The Committee was advised that the Panel had taken the opportunity to reset the salaries of elected members to align with the average earnings in Wales. It was noted that given the Local Government Elections in May 2022, the Panel has determined that the new salary determinations would be effective from 9 May 2022 on this occasion.

The following questions were raised on the report:-

- It was stated that the proposed pay increase should not be supported and that an increase in line with inflation would be more reasonable. Concern was expressed that the proposed IRPW pay rise would be sending out the wrong message at a time of austerity.
- In response to a question regarding if members could opt out of the proposed increase in salary, the Head of Legal Services advised that members could decide not to take the full allowance. However, it was noted that members were encouraged by IRPW to take up the full entitlement.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that:

- **the report be received and**
- **that as part of the consultation process, representations be made by the Chair to the IRPW that a pay increase in line with the rate of inflation would be more appropriate.**

7. DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE - ANNUAL REPORT 2020-21

The Head of Democratic Services presented the report which outlined the work of the committee during the 2020-21 municipal year and noted that due to the impact of Covid19 it had not been possible to hold the full cycle of Committee meetings for the year.

Whilst the schedule of meetings for the Committee had been reduced this year, the Committee had focussed its work on ensuring that the needs and requirements of Members were addressed and that appropriate arrangements made to support Members in their duties.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOVLED that the report be received and made available to members of Council for information.

8. 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.

The following questions were raised:-

- The Committee noted the additional resources required for Hybrid meetings and it was stated that it would be more appropriate to have additional staff within Democratic Services as opposed to relying on assistance from other departments. The Head of Democratic Services advised that whilst the growth bid for additional staff had not been successful, appointments had now been made to the two vacant posts within the unit and the offer of support from other parts of the departments should be sufficient however resources would need to be kept under review.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

9. UPDATE ON MEMBER DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT

The Democratic Services Committee received an update on the Member Development Toolkit, a dedicated page on the Democracy Pages which would support the Member Development Plan for 2021/22.

The following questions/observations were raised:

- It was stated that there was a significant amount of training that members attended, however this was not detailed on the Council website. The Head of Democratic services confirmed that the publication of training attendance data on the Council website was being considered and would likely be available post May 2022.
- It was asked when the Development Toolkit would be made available to Members. The Corporate Development Advisor advised that Phase 2 of the toolkit would be available in January for Members to comment and feedback their observation. It was anticipated that the full system would be live by May 2022.
- It was stated that attending daytime meetings and training events was difficult for some members who worked full time. The Head Administration and Law advised that the Authority had a statutory duty to survey all Councillors regarding the timing of meetings and that this would be undertaken after the election.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to:-

- **Receive the Toolkit of learning to support the Member development Programme.**
- **Agree a series of demonstration workshops for all members.**

CHAIR

DATE