



DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON THURSDAY 23RD NOVEMBER 2017 AT 5:00PM

PRESENT:

Councillor C.P. Mann - Chair

Councillors:

C. Andrews, P.J. Bevan, W. David, A. Hussey, L. Jeremiah, G. Kirby, Mrs G. D. Oliver, Mrs M.E. Sargent, C. Thomas, R. Whiting and W. Williams.

Together with:

R. Harris (Audit Manager and Interim Deputy Monitoring Officer), E. Sullivan (Interim Scrutiny Officer).

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C. Andrews, D.T. Davies, D. Cushion, Mrs C. Forehead, G. Simmonds and Mrs C. Forbes-Thompson (Interim Head of Democratic Services).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made at the beginning or during the course of the meeting.

3. MINUTES – 28TH SEPTEMBER 2017

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 27th September 2017 be approved as correct record and signed by the Chair.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

4. COUNCILLOR CORRESPONDENCE WITH STAFF – USE OF THE ‘ALL USER’ EMAIL CONTACT LIST.

Mrs Emma Sullivan – Interim Scrutiny Officer advised Members that the item referred to a

request received from Councillor Robert Owen, to use the 'All User' email contact list as a method of introducing himself to staff as a newly elected Councillor.

Unfortunately Councillor Owen had been detained by a work commitment and would be unable to attend but had prepared a statement for the Committee's consideration, copies of which were tabled at the meeting and read by the Interim Scrutiny Officer.

Mrs Sullivan referred to the advice given to Councillor Owen by the Chief Executive and the Monitoring Officer on the issue. The Protocol on Member/Officer Relations was circulated for reference and Members were asked to take a view on the proposal before them.

The Committee expressed concern with regard to the potential for misuse and recalled that the reason this privilege had been withdrawn some years ago was due to its inappropriate use by an elected Member. Reference was also made to election periods and the possibility for political use.

Members are also minded that it would not be appropriate to allow this facility to a single Member without offering the same to all Members. It was strongly felt that should it be offered then it would need to be equitable.

Members were also concerned about the possible impact this could have on staff, that they could feel pressurised or that they were somehow being checked up on by Councillors and this could lead to upset. Staff that did respond might then be placed in the inappropriate position of using a corporate facility for personal reasons.

The contact would also not be relevant to the majority of those who would receive it. In fact possible contacts would probably arise from outside the Members ward, or given the number of staff working for the Authority from outside the borough of Caerphilly and that this could in turn lead to confusion and conflicts with other Elected Members. The Members ability to respond to such contacts would also be limited, as suitable permissions would needed to be gained before any action could be taken.

Members expressed their understanding of the reasoning and good intentions behind the request but were mindful that there were other, more appropriate avenues which could be used for this purpose, for example using your own Members intranet/internet profile page, social media, Facebook, twitter, and blogging. On considering the proposal Members agreed that the disadvantages would outweigh the advantages of utilising the 'All User' facility for this purpose.

For these reasons it was moved and seconded that Councillor Owen be advised that the Democratic Services Committee would not support his request to use the 'All User' facility and the Member be informed of the decision taken and by show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that Councillor Robert Owen be advised that for the reasons stated the Democratic Services Committee would not support his request to use the 'All User' email facility.

5. WLGA CHARTER FOR MEMBER SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT

Mrs Emma Sullivan – Interim Scrutiny Officer introduced the report which sought Members views and endorsement on the proposed commitment to renew the Wales Charter of Members Support and Development prior to seeking the approval of Council to reapply for charter status.

Mrs Sullivan explained the charter process and the body of evidence that would need to be

complied in order for the Charter to be awarded. It was noted that Caerphilly County Borough Council was the first in Wales to be awarded Charter status which has since been successfully renewed twice in 2011 and 2014. The Charter aims to develop, recognise and share good practice in the support and development of Elected Members.

The Chair thanked the Officer for her report and Members comments were welcomed.

Members referred to Appendix 1 of the report which detailed the charter criteria and evidence required and worked through each of the sections. In relation to Annual Reports for Elected Members clarification was sought as to whether these would continue to be a requirement in 2018. Mrs Sullivan confirmed that there was an expectation that the White Paper 'Reforming Local Government: Resilient and Renewed' would look at other options for Members to highlight their constituency activity, however it was unlikely that these changes would be implemented before July 2018 when the next round of Annual Reports were due for publication.

The Officer, for the benefit of those Members completing Annual Reports for the first time, explained the process and timescales involved.

Clarification was sought as to when Members Role Descriptions and Person Specifications would be circulated and were advised that this would be done before the Christmas break. The Officer apologised for the delay.

During the course of debate clarification was sought on the use of recording devices and the taking of photographs during formal meetings. The Officer confirmed that recording devices and cameras were not allowed in the Chamber or any other meeting room. As Council meetings were webcast live there should be no requirement for Members to do so. Further to this, Councillors had decided some time ago to prohibit the use of social media during meetings. Their opinion being that Members concentration should be on the business at hand rather than updating social media.

In this regard a Member referred to a Facebook post referencing the electronic voting system and clarification was sought as to when this would be re-introduced. The Officer confirm that the two practice sessions had gone very well and a report would be presented to this committee in the new year on the reintroduction of the electronic voting system. Mrs Sullivan advised that as the webcasting system and electronic voting system would have to be driven by the Committee Services Officer from the podium, comprehensive testing would need to be undertaken to ensure that both systems would operate successfully in tandem.

Further clarification was sought with regard to the way in which votes would be published and the Officer referred to the previous protocol on this matter. It was explained that the vote taken in number form would be appended to the minutes of the Council meeting; however the vote by Member would only be published if there was a call for a Recorded Vote as defined by the constitution. A Member queried what would happen should the electronic system break down during a meeting and the Officer confirmed that all efforts would be made to restart the system however if this failed then voting would revert to show of hands.

Having fully considered the report it was moved and seconded that the proposal to reapply for the Wales Charter for Member Support and Development be recommended to Council for approval and by show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RECOMMENDED to Council that the commitment to the Wales Charter for Member Support and Development be re-affirmed.

6. INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT 2018/19

Mrs Emma Sullivan – Interim Scrutiny Officer introduced the report which sought Members views on the draft determination of the Independent Remuneration Panel Annual Report 2018/19 as part of the consultation process.

Members were referred to section 4.2 of the report which detailed the proposed changes to the basic salary for 2018/19. It was noted that an increase of £200 per Member or 1.49% would be applied giving a basic salary of £13,600. The table at section 4.5 outlined the proposed Senior Salaries and it was noted that the previous option to select salary levels had been removed for this year and had been set by the Panel at the higher level plus the basic salary uplift.

With regard to level of Civic Salaries this would continue to be determined at a local level and the Officer confirmed that last year Council agreed this at the lower Level 2. The only other proposal for local determination would be payment of travelling expenses for journeys made within Members wards. To date Council has made to the decision not to allow such travel claims.

Proposals relating to sickness absences for senior salary holders were referred to in section 4.35 of the report and Members were asked to note that the specific arrangements around this reflected the Panels concerns about long term sickness.

The Officer referred Members to section 7.2 of the report and the financial implications for the Panels proposals which would result in an £11,000 increase against the basic salary a £37,700 increase in costs against Senior Salaries and should the Civic Salaries once again be set at Level 2 incur a £200 increase in costs.

The Chair thanked the Officer for her report and Members comments were welcomed as part of the consultation exercise.

The Committee discussed the payment of travel expenses for journeys within Members own ward and it was moved and seconded that in line with previous years this payment not be allowed and by show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

The Local Government Pension Scheme was discussed and the Chair encouraged newly elected Members to take up this option.

A Member expressed concern with regard to accepting the proposed uplift particularly during a period of austerity and was referred to section 4.39 of the report which explained the process for foregoing either some or all of the salary.

The Committee discussed the setting of the Civic Office salary levels and it was moved and seconded that as the other Senior Salaries had been set at the higher level, in the interest of parity, this salary should also be set at Level 1 and by show of hands and in noting that there was 1 against and 1 abstention this was agreed by the majority present.

Having fully considered the report it was agreed that the comments of the Democratic Services Committee be forwarded to the Independent Remuneration Panel as part of the consultation process.

RESOLVED that: -

- (i) the payment of travel claims for journeys made within Members wards not be allowed;
- (ii) the payment of Civic Salaries be set at Level 1 in line with that paid to Senior Salary holders.

The Chair thanked the Committee for their contributions to the meeting and advised that if they wished to raise any matters concerning Members support and development that they can do so via the Interim Scrutiny Officer, Emma Sullivan or Head of Democratic Services, Cath Forbes-Thompson for inclusion on future agendas.

A Member asked if it would be possible to look at the use of personal devices to access corporate email, it was noted that this facility is offered by both the Fire Service and Welsh Government. The Chair advised the Member that this had been subject to a previous report and working group but acknowledged that had been some time ago. Members agreed that they would like to revisit this issue and receive an update on any changes in possible provision, particular in light of the proposal to enter into the Shared Resource Service.

Mrs Sullivan confirmed that she would contact Paul Lewis (Head of IT) and invite him to attend the next meeting and provide an update report.

Approved as a correct record subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 12th April 2018 they were signed by the Chair

The meeting closed at 5:40pm

CHAIR