



DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON MONDAY 26TH NOVEMBER 2018 AT 5:00PM

PRESENT:

Councillor C.P. Mann - Chair

Councillors:

C. Andrews, W. David, D.T. Davies, Mrs C. Forehead, A. Hussey, L. Jeremiah,
Mrs M.E. Sargent, G. Simmonds, C. Thomas and W. Williams.

Together with:

C. Forbes-Thompson (Interim Head of Democratic Services), C. Evans (Interim Scrutiny Officer).

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P.J. Bevan, D. Cushing, G. Kirby, Mrs G.D. Oliver and R. Whiting.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the meeting held on the 26th September 2018 be agreed as a correct record and by a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Democratic Services Committee held on the 26th September 2018 (Minute No. 1 – 5) be approved and signed as a correct record.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

4. DRAFT INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL REPORT 2019/20.

The Interim Head of Democratic Services provided the Committee with a report and sought the views of Members on the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales' (The Panel) draft determinations, in relation to councillors and co-opted members for 2019/20, so that a response to their consultation could be sent.

The Committee noted that the Panel's final determinations for 2019/20 will be published in February 2019, following which a report will be presented to Full Council.

The report explained that the Panel is a statutory body established by Welsh Government in January 2008 to determine the scope and salaries, allowances and expenses payable to Councillors and Co-opted Members. The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 gave the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales, additional powers to prescribe Members' remuneration. This was a significant change to the well-established practice of Members determining their own scheme of allowances within the maximum sums prescribed by the Panel. The Panel subsequently received further powers following the introduction of the Local Government (Democracy) (Wales) Act 2013, including the ability to make recommendations about the pay of heads of service for county and county borough councils and fire and rescue authorities. The report reflected the Panel's determinations for 2019/20 and a copy of the Panel's Draft Annual Report was attached at appendix 1 of the report.

The report outlined that the proposed basic salary in 2019/20 for elected members of principal councils shall be £13,868. This is an increase of £268 per member which is equivalent to 1.97%, and is effective from April 2019. There are proposals to award an increase of £800 to the salaries for the Leader and Cabinet Members and also remove the option to select a salary level for civic salaries.

The Committee thanked the Officer for the report and discussion ensued.

Members queried the financial implications of the report on Local Authority Budgets, with particular reference to the Medium Term Financial Plan proposals. It was noted that the overall additional costs for 2019/20, as identified in the report, would equate to £25,852, however, Members were assured that there would be sufficient budget to accommodate this increase, within the annual increase in non-pay costs, for 2019/20.

Having consideration for the report, Members sought further information on the Reimbursement of Care Costs. It was noted that, in order to encourage more people to stand for public office, the Panel is keen to encourage the promotion of the reimbursement of the costs of care. This relates to dependent children below the age of 15 or to dependents over the age of 15, where costs are incurred in providing care, while members or co-opted members are engaged on Council business. However, it was noted that there is some sensitivity concerning the publication of this legitimate expense. Officers explained that the total claims submitted are published, and individual claimant details are not included in the publication. It was also noted however that this information may be available through a Freedom of Information request.

The Committee discussed the increase in the senior salary for the Mayor and Deputy Mayor and it was noted that payments made to the Mayor and Deputy Mayor are not included as part of the Council's 18 Senior Salary posts and are paid inclusive of the Basic Salary. Following representations made by councils, who preferred not to choose from previously set salary options, the Panel has proposed to remove the salary options and, if paid, salaries be set at Band 3 for the Mayor with a salary of £22,568 and Band 5 salary for the Deputy Mayor with a salary of £17,568. The Committee noted that in previous years, the Council has paid Civic Office holders at Band 2, which will result on a salary increase of £768 for the Mayor and £1268 for the Deputy Mayor.

Members queried whether it would be possible to forego the receipt of the increase in Allowances, as such it was advised that this would require individual Members to notify the Chief Executive.

The Democratic Services Committee thanked the Officer for the report and noted its content,

5. FINDINGS OF MEMBER I.T. QUESTIONNAIRE - PRESENTATION

The Interim Head of Democratic Services provided the Committee with a presentation on the recent Councillor IT Provision Questionnaire, which was undertaken earlier in the year.

The Committee were asked to note that of the 73 questionnaires sent out, 39 were returned, providing a response rate of 53%. Members noted that of the 39, 10 were anonymous.

The Questionnaire asked a series of questions, which aimed to determine the opinion of Members on current IT provision, future developments and the possibility of 'paperless' meetings.

Members were asked whether they would be willing to be 'paperless' for all meetings, should they be provided with a tablet device with the use of the Modern.Gov Application. The majority of Councillors (29) were willing to go 'paperless', 4 of which were already using the Modern.gov application and had gone 'paperless' in Committees, 19 would prefer to retain their home devices also and 6 would like a tablet and have no other device at home.

The Council can provide a Citrix Access Key Fob (Fob), which would allow Members to access their emails via any Wi-Fi from their tablet or laptop, and queried whether Members would be interested in this technology, and whether they would cancel their provided Broadband line. 56% were happy to cancel the provided broadband, whereas 20% preferred not to. Comments from the questionnaires included queries around increased costs to Members and reliability of the Fobs. Members were asked to note that a 4G tablet could also be provided, which would enable Members to access their email remotely, however there would be additional costs associated with this option.

Members were asked whether the Council provided adequate access to telephone, email and Internet facilities, as stated by the Independent Remuneration Panel. 77% said yes and 13% said no. However, comments around this question were all related to a lack of mobile phones and access to emails.

The questionnaire sought Members opinions on whether an allowance should be offered to Councillors to offset costs of telephone calls. 26% felt that they should and 64% felt that this would not be necessary; Members were also made aware that there could be tax implications associated with such an allowance.

Members were asked whether they thought the Council should provide mobile phones to all Councillors, 44% felt that they should and 44% felt that they shouldn't. Members raised concerns around costs being too expensive, another commented that they would be happy to use their personal phone with the use of an App to access their Council emails. The Committee were asked to note that the purchase of a mobile phone is estimated at £120, with an annual charge of £78.

The Committee noted that there are currently 3 Councillors trialling an application on their personal mobile devices, which allows access to Council emails. With this in mind, the questionnaire sought Members opinions on whether they would consider this option to have email access on their own devices. It was noted that 72% of respondents said that they would consider the option and 13% said that they would not. Comments from 2 of the Councillors trialling the application said it was very useful, other comments included requests for training and 3 were not comfortable to use the application.

Finally, Members were asked to note that Democratic Services spend £20,000 per annum on printing of Committee papers, which is an average cost of £273 per Member. It was noted that for every 10 Members who go 'Paperless', the Council saves an average of £2,730 per annum.

The Committee thanked the Officer for the presentation and discussion ensued.

Having consideration for the findings, Members discussed the Modern.Gov application and raised concerns that not all agendas were available on the application. Officers explained that the Modern.Gov is a system used by Committee Services, and all meetings arranged and minuted by Committee Services are available on the application. However, Members were informed that, should 'paperless' meetings be widely taken up, there could be scope to discuss offering the use of Modern.gov for those meetings.

Following consideration and discussion of the presentation and feedback from Members trialling the application, it was determined that proposals are developed on the use of Members own mobile phones, with access to Council emails and the cost implications for the use of Tablet devices to encourage paperless Committees. Members were keen to recommend training be provided to those requiring it on the use of the applications and devices.

The meeting closed at 18:08pm

Approved as a correct record subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 6th February 2019 they were signed by the Chair

CHAIR