

Minutes



Democratic Services Committee

Date: 8 November 2018

Time: 10.00 am

Present: Councillors C Ferris (Chair), C Evans, M Evans, Y Forsey, I Hayat, R Hayat, K Thomas and T Watkins

In Attendance: G Price (Head of Law & Regulation), E Mulligan (Democracy & Communication Manager), A Jenkins (Governance Team Leader)

Apologies: Councillors L Lacey

1 **Declarations of Interest**

None received.

2 **Minutes of last meeting**

There were typing errors highlighted on pages 3 and 4.

Agreed:

That the Minutes were approved subject to the above.

3 **Independent Remuneration Panel Wales: Draft Annual Report**

The Committee was presented with the draft Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (IRPW) Annual Report and were invited to discuss the response from Newport City Council as part of the consultation process.

The Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (IRPW) was the body tasked with setting the remuneration levels for Councils in Wales. Each year, they published a Draft Annual Report which was circulated to the committee for comment.

In accordance with the requirements of Section 147 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 ("the Measure"), the Panel's draft Annual Report, including proposals which would have effect for the municipal year 2019-2020, was published on its website.

The Consultation would end on 27 November 2018. The final IRPW report would be published in February 2019.

A summary of the proposed changes, and some suggested responses, were set out in the report.

The Chair along with the Head of Democratic Services had recently met with the panel in Cardiff. The Head of Democratic Services outlined the proposed uplift for salaries which rose to 1.97% to £268 per councillor along with an uplift for Executive Members in response to feedback following elections from councillors in various authorities.

Civic Heads Allowances were paid on a separate scale and although there was still discretion as to whether or not to pay the Civic Head and Deputy, it would be set out at band 3 and 5 respectively.

Discussion ensued regarding the function of the Mayor. The Head of Democratic Services explained that not all Councils had a Mayor, therefore a Civic Head did not have to be a Mayor.

The Chair advised that the increase would put payments to Councillors back in line with 2010 arrangements.

Determination 6 and 7 referred to adequate telephone access and that all councillors should be provided this facility. Mobile phones were currently issued to certain senior post holders, however our arrangements for meeting this element of the determinations were currently under review, including a proposal to issue all Members with tablet devices to support them in their roles.

The provision of broadband was also briefly discussed. In light of the fact that more recently, councillors used their own broadband at no extra cost, the option was in place but not a requirement for many councillors.

Agreed:

To agree the proposed response from Newport City Council as part of the consultation process.

4 Minor Property Transactions or Council Property Assets

The Committee was asked to consider recommending to Council the adoption of a policy to determine Minor Property Transactions by delegating authority to Officers.

Currently all acquisitions and disposals of property were decided by the designated Cabinet Member. This resulted in relatively minor matters becoming delayed and significant management and Member time being committed in processing such transactions. Previously, the Council adopted a policy to manage minor matters through a simplified procedure, delegated to Chief Officers. It was proposed to reintroduce such a system.

Members considered that the time it took for these properties to go through the process was longer and endorsed the change of scheme of delegation. This was with the condition that ward members were aware of the delegated decision.

It was suggested that a register of the list of minor properties could be published for information. There was however concern that the Cabinet Member should have some kind of involvement with private financial transactions which may result in Newport City Council losing money. Newport Norse however made assurances that there was value for money in place, Officers and Norse would agree the terms of sale in the first instance. The process then was governed by other Standing Orders.

Members had agreed to the minor issues outlined in the report however councillors would need to be informed on any larger purchases. The Monitoring Officer advised that the more important transactions would go to the Cabinet Member. In general, the market price would be reflected in transactions however prices were not always guaranteed, although the market price would be on the asset register.

Members referred to a purchase of land in Pillgwenlly and the possible pitfalls should certain transactions be delegated to officers.

Members asked whether ward members would be out of the loop in cases of private sale. These were normally not under negotiation as they were either by auction or private tender. In other cases, councillors might be told on a confidential basis if they needed to know.

Discussion ensued regarding property with an annual value, as long as it did not have an annual value exceeding £1,000 then it would be delegated. Anything above that cost would go to Cabinet Member for a decision.

Members reiterated that they would like more information on any transactions within their wards, whether they were large or small, as there had only been information at the point of purchase and not before.

Members also asked who would decide to sell the land. This would be the Head of Service, which would then be forwarded on to the Cabinet Member for Assets, again, with the changes to the scheme of delegation, smaller issues would be delegated to officers.

The Chair suggested to the committee that it appeared that those present agreed in principal to the report and would generally prefer information rather than consultation. It was reiterated by the Chair as outlined in the report that responsible officers would inform ward councillors. It was generally agreed that it would firm up the process with the caveat in place that in appropriate cases ward members would be consulted.

Clarity was requested within the report to refer to any transaction below £10,000 as of monetary value which could be worth something to the council. This would be covered in the matters in the proposed delegation.

Agreed:

To recommend to council adoption of the policy for Minor Property Transactions set out in this report to speed up and simplify minor property transactions and reduce management costs, with the following conditions -

- £1,000 was the annual value
- £10,000 would be a suggested cap value
- Ward members to be consulted on all minor property transactions under the scheme of delegation
- An update to be presented at a future meeting on how the information would be circulated to ward members

5 Support for Councillors in their ward work - presentation

The Head of Democratic Services gave a presentation to members outlining progress on its review of support provided to ward councillors in their work. A call for evidence survey was carried out during the summer, of which 19 responses were received. Graphs indicating responses received on questions within the survey were shown to members, such as Communication Methods, frequently used, including telephone calls, social media, ward surgeries etc. Feedback was also invited from ward meeting support officers.

This information would be fed in to the review which would include working on a toolkit to support Members in all of their ward work. A further update was scheduled for the Committee's next meeting.

6 Date of next Meeting

The next meeting would take place on Thursday 14 February 2019 at 10am in Committee Room 1.