

Minutes



Democratic Services Committee

Date: 20 November 2023

Time: 10.00 am

Present: Councillors R Mogford (Chair), M Spencer, B Perkins, P Hourahine, K Thomas, T Harvey and A Sterry

In Attendance: Leanne Rowlands (Democratic and Electoral Services Manager), Elizabeth Bryant (Head of Law and Standards), Simon Richards (Governance Officer), Emily Mayger (Governance Officer)

1 Apologies

Cllr Stowell-Corten

2 Declarations of Interest

None

3 Minutes of Meeting held on 20 July 2023

- The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager informed Committee that Voter ID Certificates are valid for 10 years.

The Minutes of the Last Meeting held on the 20th July 2023 were approved as a true and accurate record.

4 Amendment to Constitution: Budget Setting Process

The Head of Law and Standards presented the report. Following the Council budget setting meeting for 2023/24, the requirement for further clarification of procedures under the Council's Constitution was identified. The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer reviewed the position and presented a proposed draft update to the Council's Constitution which clarified the position and better aligned with the 'Welsh model' version.

The following was discussed:

- The Committee enquired when this was raised and who raised the matter. The Head of Law of Standards informed Committee that during the 2023/24 budget setting meeting of the full Council in February 2023, a number of councillors requested changes to the Cabinet's final budget proposals. This situation highlighted that the constitution required amendment to clarify the procedures for alternative budget proposals to be submitted in sufficient time for the budget setting process to be completed within the statutory deadline of early March.
- The Committee enquired whether Member training would take place so that the process can be fully explained as there are newer members following the last

election. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager informed Committee that financial matters already formed part of the training curriculum for members. The Head of Law and Standards informed Committee that, should it be agreed, this change will form part of the Constitution; any alternative budget proposals would be required to be put forward to the Monitoring Officer and 151 Officer a minimum of 5 working days prior to full Council. They informed Committee that there is a briefing note for Members that explains the budget setting process.

- The Head of Law and Standards informed Committee that the Constitution already defines the budget in line with the Welsh model and the proposal being considered today is to streamline the budget setting process itself and provide more clarity.
- The Committee queried whether the training that was mentioned could be for all members. The Head of Law and Standards highlighted to the Committee the importance for all members to understand the budget. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager informed the Committee that two separate sessions took place last year, and consideration could be made to accommodate further refresher training.
- The Committee highlighted that this has helped to clarify the situation as it is important to understand what options there are and the time limit within which they can be enacted.

Resolved:

The Committee agreed the recommended changes to go to full Council for review without any further amendments.

5 Democratic Services Committee: Annual Report 2023

The Democratic Services and Electoral Services Manager provided an overview of the report. This report proposed the content of the Democratic Services Committee's annual report 2022/23. Under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, the Democratic Services Committee is required to keep under review the provision of staff, accommodation and other resources made available to the Head of Democratic Services, to ensure that adequate resources are provided for the responsibilities of the post. The attached annual report provides an outline of the resources made available in support of these functions, so that the Committee can fulfil its responsibilities under the Measure.

The following was discussed:

- The Committee were pleased to see that Ward Meetings had resumed.
- The Committee enquired whether the effectiveness of the change of policy regarding supplementary questions can be reviewed. The Head of Law and Standards informed Committee that it cannot be looked at again for 3 months and the Committee noted that it does need time to embed but would like it to be raised again in future.
- The Committee noted their concerns that not all Members complete statutory training. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager informed Committee that a session on the Members Code of Conduct is the only mandatory training required to be completed. Part of the Democratic Services Committee role is making sure that Elected Members have the resources available to be able to do their jobs which includes a full curriculum of training throughout the term served.
- The Committee highlighted that most training takes place around 4pm so Members may find it difficult to attend due to work commitments. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager informed the Committee that a survey was distributed to Members around training and the most suitable time for it to take place and noted that multiple sessions can take place to ensure that Members can attend. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager informed Committee that attendance for training has improved since being held virtually and the biggest challenge is fitting in the training sessions over the year.

- The Committee enquired how the effectiveness of training is measured. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager informed the Committee that a Member survey was conducted. The Committee stated that the concept of e-Learning meant that it could be done at any time and a window of when the training needed to be completed by could be provided. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager informed Committee that e-Learning has been used in the past and they are currently reviewing in terms of the Code of Conduct training.
- The Committee enquired whether it is policy for training materials to be provided as they did not receive the materials for a previous training session when requested. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager informed Committee that how training is conducted needs to be reviewed including how to provide attendees with the training material. They assured the Committee that they will send out a survey again to Members to better understand their needs and offer different options.
- The Committee enquired whether there are any penalties for not completing mandatory training. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager informed Committee that there are no penalties, but it could be brought before the Standards Committee so would then be in the public domain. The Committee stated that attendance at meetings is recorded so could this be applied to training. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager informed Committee that attendance is monitored but it is not shared publicly at present. The Head of Law and Standards informed Committee that it is shared at Standards Committee and this year attendance at Code of Conduct training was 100%. They informed Committee that having attendance for training made publicly available could be added to the Forward Work Programme for consideration.

Resolved:

The Committee agreed to present the Annual Report to the Council in order to meet the requirements of the Local Government Measure.

6 Head of Democratic Services Annual Report 2023

The Democratic Services and Electoral Services manager presented the report. Under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, the Democratic Services Committee is required to keep under review the provision of staff, accommodation and other resources made available to the Head of Democratic Services, to ensure that adequate resources are provided for the responsibilities of the post.

The following was discussed:

- The Committee enquired about the challenges and benefits of working from home. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager informed Committee that the team returned to the office in 2022 and are able to facilitate hybrid meetings. All members of the team are in at least twice per week which is useful for new members of staff and is a positive change for Members as the office is occupied every day. They informed Committee that the biggest challenge is the pace of change in legislation for both Democratic Services and Electoral Registration.

Resolved:

- The Committee agreed to consider and comment upon the Annual Report.
- The Committee endorsed the view of the Head of Law and Standards and Democratic and Electoral Services Manager that the provision of staff, accommodation and other resources by the Council is adequate to discharge the

statutory requirements in relation to decision making, democratic administration and scrutiny; and

- The Committee agreed to ask the Democratic and Electoral Services Manager to keep under review the provision of staff, accommodation and other resources made available to members to ensure that statutory requirements and any changing needs of elected members are met, and to present a report to this Committee should any review be required.

7 **Draft Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) Report and Consultation**

The Democratic Services and Electoral Services Manager presented the report.

The following was discussed:

- The Committee enquired how the different salary groups are determined. The Head of Law and Standards informed Committee that it is based on population size. The Committee stated that some areas have lower average earnings but that may not be reflected in the remuneration settlement so are the panel mindful of this. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager informed the Committee that the panel only considers the average pay in Wales.
- The Committee queried what the next steps are in respect of the report. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager informed the Committee that consultation is due to end on the 8th December 2023 and asked whether the Committee would prefer to answer as a Committee or individually. The Committee stated that it is more complicated now and more information is needed to answer the questions, previously was a rigid formula. The Head of Law and Standards informed Committee that the reason for the change was because the level of remuneration was lagging behind inflation and the Panel felt the link to average earnings was more appropriate. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager highlighted to the Committee that the methodology used has been included within the report.
- The Committee highlighted the importance of encouraging people to take up democratic opportunities. The Head of Law and Standards stated that this is why it has now been linked to average earnings. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager informed the Committee that the final report will come back to the Committee in February 2024 but that will be for information only and no changes can be made at that point.

Resolved:

The Committee agreed to consider and comment upon the report on an individual basis using the online link.

8 **Forward Work Programme**

The Committee recommended that the implementation timeline for the Model Constitution be brought back to the next meeting.

The Final Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel would also be brought the Committee as an Information Only update.

The Committee also wished to receive an update on training for members and to consider the impact of the recommendations made to Council concerning Supplementary Questions to the Leader

9 **Date of next Meeting**

The date of the next meeting is Monday 18th March 2024 at 11am.