

Minutes



Democratic Services Committee

Date: 9 November 2017

Time: 10.00 am

Present: Councillors C Ferris (Chair), C Evans, M Evans, Y Forsey, K Thomas & T Watkins
Cllr M Whitcutt (Cabinet Member for Assets & Member Development)

In Attendance: E Mulligan (Democratic Services & Communications Manager) & J Howells (Democratic Services Support Officer)

Apologies: Councillors R Hayat & J Mudd, W Godfrey and G Price

1 Apologies for Absence

Noted above.

2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 June 2017 were confirmed as a true record.

3 Member Development

The Cabinet Member with responsibility for Member Development attended for this item.

The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) established the Wales Charter for Member Support and Development in 2012 in response to the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 and the new legislative requirements for corporate governance and member support and development.

The Charter aimed to provide a broad framework for local planning, self-assessment, action and review, together with networking and comparison among local authorities and the sharing of good and innovative practice.

With a new Cabinet lead for Member Development in place, and the WLGA role descriptions adopted at Council in April, Newport was well placed to now embark on the self-assessment process with a view to achieving the Charter accreditation. It was suggested that, as a cross-party group with responsibility for Member support, the Democratic Services Committee could oversee and drive this process, in collaboration with the Cabinet Member.

The Democratic Services & Communications Manager (DS&C Manager) circulated further copies of the self-assessment pro-forma which had been updated to show the progress that Newport City Council had made to date in the self-assessment.

The Cabinet Member for Member Development believed that member development should be given high priority as it gives a level of transparency and allows the electorate to see some form of structure as to what are the duties of elected members. He felt that being an

elected member is a steep learning curve as you are constantly facing challenges in local government.

The following points were raised regarding the Charter.

1. Who would undertake a training needs assessment on senior elected members.
2. Clarification was needed on the role of members nominated to outside bodies.
3. It was felt that the reference to remote attendance would apply primarily to those Councils spread over a wide area and its introduction was not imminent but would need to be considered carefully due to the expense this type of technology would incur.
4. Members had completed a training questionnaire following the election in May. It was confirmed that now the DS&C Manager had been appointed training sessions could be set in place.
5. Questions were raised regarding as to how members would be assessed in their commitment to their roles and it was agreed that the judgement would be by the electorate in 2020.

The DS&C Manager concluded that an action plan be compiled and be brought back to the Committee for their input. She said the aim was to achieve the Charter in two years.

The Cabinet Member for Member Development congratulated her on her enthusiasm towards this topic.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for attending the meeting and for his input into this item.

Agreed:

An action plan be compiled and be included in the Work Programme for the Democratic Services Committee

4 **Independent Remuneration Panel Draft Report**

The Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (IRPW) is the body tasked with setting the remuneration levels for Councils in Wales. Each year, they publish a Draft Annual Report which is circulated 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 2018-2019 is available on its website. The consultation will run until 29 November 2017 with the final IRPW report being published in February 2018.

The Democratic Services Committee gave consideration to the report which set out the determinations by the Panel. There were some 51 determinations although 44 to 51 related to Community/Town Councils. The main issues for the Committee were:

- **Basic Salaries** – an increase of 1.49%, to a basic annual salary of £13,600.
- **Senior Salaries** – no increase was proposed for senior salaries although all post holders would receive the basic salary increase. The provision for two levels of senior salary had been removed.
- **Reimbursement of Costs of Care** – the IRP continued to urge Councils to promote the use of this provision. Last year the Council agreed to change the name of this provision from “Care Allowances”.

Questions were raised regarding some of the determinations in the report:

Determination 8: it was reported that further clarification on this point was included in the IRP's full report, for example relating to job sharing arrangements.

Determination 40: this prompted discussion but it was acknowledged that no co-opted members appointed to Newport City Council committees travelled from far afield to attend meetings.

Determination 43: this related to the reimbursement of costs of care. Previously committee members had differing opinions as to whether claims should be anonymised as there is the need for transparency. The DS&C Manager agreed to flag this point up when the final report was received and before it goes to Council.

Members of the IRP had visited the Council earlier this year and during his interview Councillor Evans had queried some of the questions as he believed some of them had pre-determined answers. The DS&C Manager confirmed that feedback from the visits to Councils by the IRP would be included in the final report.

Agreed

The Democratic Services & Communications Manager to reply to the Independent Remuneration Panel and supply copies to the Committee members.

5 Work Programme

The purpose of a work programme is to enable the Committee to plan, organise and prioritise its workload.

Previously, reports have been brought to the Committee on an ad hoc basis. By adopting the suggested work programme in this report, the Committee would be able to plan out its projects and meetings, be clear on its aims and objectives, and properly assess at the end of the year the extent to which its aims have been achieved.

i. Constitution Review

In September 2015 the Committee agreed the format for a new model constitution. Part of this was agreeing the WLGA role descriptions, which had now been adopted by Council. This Committee needs to oversee the reorganisation of the rest of the constitution which had been amended previously in a piecemeal fashion.

ii. WLGA Member Development Charter

The WLGA Charter sets out a framework for supporting effective Member Training and Development activity. With a new Cabinet lead for Member Development in place, and the WLGA role descriptions adopted, Newport are well placed to embark on the self-assessment process with a view to achieving the Charter accreditation. It was suggested that, as a cross-party group with responsibility for Member support, the Democratic Services Committee could oversee and drive this process, in collaboration with the Cabinet Member.

iii. Support for Councillors in their ward work

The Democratic Services team had recently reviewed the guidance for Members on ward meetings. The actual system of ward meeting support for Members was last updated in 2014 and focussed only upon ward meetings, not other ward activity. As few wards hold ward meetings a review was needed of this as well as the general support offered to all Members for ward work. This could also include the issue raised at the Committee's February meeting, highlighting the need for a protocol regarding enquiries from/about other wards.

iv. Boundary Commission Review of Communities

A “Community” is the unit of local government that lies below the level of the principal council. From time to time, because of developments or shifts of population, it may be necessary to make changes to community areas and boundaries.

The Council has a duty to monitor the communities in its area and, where appropriate, the electoral arrangements of such communities. The Council also has a duty to report to the Boundary Commission for Wales every ten years on its community arrangements. A review is due, and it was suggested that the Committee would be an appropriate body to oversee the process and consultation for this, and report any necessary changes back to Council.

v. Democratic Services Annual Reports

Both the Committee and the Head of Democratic Services are required to produce an annual report to Council each year, so this would be built into the programme.

Questions were raised regarding the Review of Communities. The DS&C Manager confirmed that the review was a very prescriptive process and with several new developments being built in Newport there was a need to review communities. This review would be built into the process over the next 12 months.

Agreed

The Committee discussed and agreed a Work Programme. The support team will plan the reports and meetings for the rest of the year.

Councillor C Evans had to leave the meeting at this stage.

6 Review of the Constitution

This was a verbal update by the Democratic Services & Communications Manager who gave a step by step demonstration on how to access the Constitution online.

The Committee had previously agreed the format for a new model constitution. It now needs to oversee the reorganisation of the rest of the constitution which has been amended previously in a piecemeal fashion.

Work had been started on the review by making it easier to navigate and also giving it a more uniform appearance.

Agreed:

That the review continue and it be brought back to the Committee as a part of the Work Programme.

7 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place on 22 February 2018 at 1700 hours.