

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Remote meeting held on 16th November, 2020.

The Committee agenda is available [here](#).

Present: Councillor V.J. Bailey (Chairman); Councillor G.D.D. Carroll (Vice-Chairman); Councillors Mrs. S.M. Hanks, N.P. Hodges, M.J.G. Morgan, Mrs. S.D. Perkes, A.R. Robertson, N.C. Thomas and M.R. Wilson.

Also present: Councillor E. Williams

190 APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE –

This was received from Councillor K.F. McCaffer.

191 MINUTES –

RESOLVED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 25th November, 2020 be approved as a correct record.

192 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

No declarations were received.

193 ICT UPDATE FOR MEMBERS (MD) –

The Head of Strategic ICT provided a comprehensive update to the Committee on new developments / work programmes being delivered by the ICT Division to meet the impact and related challenges faced by the Council brought about by the unprecedented circumstances as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic since March 2020.

A considerable amount of work had been undertaken by ICT Division since March 2020 to upgrade the Council's ICT infrastructure to enable home working of the majority of its employees to meet WG / Public Health Wales guidance and to ensure that the Council was able to meet other significant challenges posed by the Pandemic for all Council services to ensure that it could continue to deliver priority services to its customers effectively particularly, within schools across the County and also to mitigate any risks to services users that were considered to be vulnerable.

The Head of Strategic ICT had referred to work undertaken by ICT in partnership with Democratic Services to support Members to participate in remote Council meetings. This work was ongoing, and he referred to the Microsoft Office 365

(O365) rollout which included recent briefing sessions to Members over the preceding week regarding O365 Teams which would be the agreed platform for formal Council remote meetings taking place in future. A phased approach is currently being adopted with the intention that Members will also in the future be trained to use a voting facility at virtual Council Committee meetings and be able to use personal devices more regularly for Council meetings.

Members queried the delay in the use of Teams for meetings and were advised that this had been due to the need to obtain a telephone number through Microsoft that could be used by the public and Members if they were unable to access meetings on laptops and personal devices. The software platform that Democratic services had been using to date had been able to provide a telephone number which had been used by the public as registered speakers at meetings and by Members as and when required. It was noted that virtual meetings were also currently being recorded and uploaded after the meeting on the Council website for the public to peruse.

Councillor Mark Wilson commented that within Teams there was a facility namely Microsoft Forms that could also be used for engagement purposes with the public. The Head of Service advised that this was something that could be considered as we go forward with the software with Members and stated that the facility had indeed been utilised for engagement around free school meals vouchers and aspects of neighbourhood and transport services. Discussions were also taking place at WLGA meetings regarding proposals for economies of scale with the provision of digital facilities within Welsh Local Authorities.

In responding to Councillor Robertson's concern regarding potential security attacks and costs to the service the Head of Service stated that work was ongoing on a regular basis to quarantine spam emails via spam filters and informed the Committee saying that over 70% of viruses were neutralised as soon as they hit the system. Security of systems was an ongoing process for all Local Authorities.

Committee was further advised for its information that IDEV on line training had also been made available during the pandemic for Members to access training as and when required on line.

RESOLVED – T H A T the report be noted with a further update report to be presented to a future meeting of the Committee.

Reason for decision

In view of the information contained within the report and discussions at the meeting.

194 INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL FOR WALES (IRPW) DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22 (HDS) –

This was the thirteenth Annual Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (IRPW), and the tenth published under the requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 (as amended).

All Members of the Council had been circulated by email on 7th October, a link to the IRPW's Annual Report for 2021/22 including information on how to respond to the consultation by the deadline of 23rd November, 2020. Following the consultation closing the IRPW proposed to publish Annual Report including its updated determinations for 2021/22 in February, 2021 to take affect from 1st April, 2021.

The IRPW's determinations for 2021/22 had been influenced by the impact of the pandemic and the affect this was having on the operation of all Local Authorities.

As with all the IRPW's Annual Reports, the determinations on Member remuneration were underpinned by the principles set out in Section 1 of their report.

In May 2020 the IRPW published a Supplementary Report that set out specific principles relating to the provision of financial support for care needs. These were incorporated in Section 10 and would be included in future Annual Reports.

The IRPW had consistently expressed its view that maintaining the democratic values of local government could not be cost free. Payments to Members and Co-opted Members were made available to encourage a diversity of willing and able people to undertake local governance through their elected, appointed or co-opted roles.

In determining the level of payments to Members of Local Authorities, the IRPW sought to meet the principle of "acceptability" but acknowledged that the issue of affordability and the likely impact on public perception to any increases to Members' payments. However, the Panel considered that this had to be balanced with fairness to members for their time, worth and responsibility.

For ease of reference, an extract of the Determinations of the IRPW Draft Annual Report and the proposed response on behalf of the Council was appended at Appendix A to the report.

The main points in summary were:

- A small increase in the basic salary of Elected Members of Principal Councils for 2021/22 of £150 a year which equated to 1.06% of £14,368;
- The same rate of increase for Senior Salaries would also apply (1.06%) to members of the Executive, Chairmen of Committees and the Leader of the Opposition;
- That Civic Salaries for 2021/22 would be £23,161 for the Civic Head and £18,108 for the Deputy Civic Head.

The most significant change proposed related to contributions towards the Costs of Care and personal assistance, again these were detailed in Section 10 of the draft report. The Costs of Care element had also been amended with the proposed removal of the £403 monthly cap. This would be replaced with:

- Formal (registered with Care Inspectorate Wales) care costs to be reimbursed in full;
- Informal (unregistered) care costs to be reimbursed up to a maximum rate equivalent to the Real Living Wage (current rate was calculated at £9.50 per hour) at the time the costs were incurred.

RESOLVED – T H A T the draft response as set out in Appendix A to the report be approved and be forwarded to the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales by the consultation deadline of 23rd November, 2020.

Reason for decision

In view of the information contained within the report, discussions at the meeting and in order that the IRPW can be informed of the Committee's response on behalf of the Council.

195 REIMBURSEMENT OF COSTS OF CARE (HDS) –

The Committee's endorsement was sought to promote the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales' (IRPW) proposed changes in relation to the Reimbursement of Costs of Care (RoCoC) which would take effect from 1st April, 2021 and to encourage take-up of the support provided via this mechanism.

This matter linked to the previous work of the Welsh Government's (WG) "Diversity in Democracy Steering Group" which was established to encourage more diverse candidates from a variety of backgrounds to stand in the 2017 Local Government Elections. Much of this work was ongoing to improve diversity through a number of initiatives such as the IRPW proposing to amend related determinations.

The RoCoC was in place to assist those Councillors and Co-opted Members with caring responsibilities. This in turn may help to increase diversity in democracy by encouraging people to stand as candidates as the caring responsibility barrier was removed.

The Council was required to provide reimbursement of cost incurred by Councillors and Co-opted Members in respect of such expenses for arranging the care of children or dependants or for the individual Member as were necessarily incurred in carrying out official business as a Councillor or Co-opted Member of that Authority.

The IRPW, in its current draft Annual Report, intended to go further in terms of removing barriers to accessing care to allow Members to carry out their elected

duties. This was in part due to it being recognised that take up of this support had been low. The proposal for 2021/22 would also remove the maximum amount cap of £403 that could be claimed and move to a reformed criterion limited to the following:

- Formal (registered with Care Inspectorate Wales) care costs to be reimbursed in full;
- Informal (unregistered) care costs to be reimbursed up to a maximum rate equivalent to the Real Living Wage (current rate was calculated at £9.50 per hour) at the time the costs were incurred.

In an effort to meet the principles set by the IRPW, the Head of Democratic Services had designed a RoCoC “Claim Form” (Appendix B to the report) and a Receipt (Appendix C to the report) which were aimed at making the process simpler for Councillors and Co-opted Members. These forms would be made available as E-forms on MemberNet or on request from the Democratic Services Team.

All Councils across Wales would be required to promote this provision so that those with caring responsibilities for other dependents, such as the elderly, were encouraged to claim.

The IRPW had urged each Democratic Services Committee to take steps to encourage and facilitate greater use of the RoCoC provision so that Councillors / Co-opted Members were not financially disadvantaged.

As in the case of existing arrangements, the Head of Democratic Services would continue to monitor claims made by Councillors and Co-Opted Members.

It was proposed that the Democratic Services Committee and the Head of Democratic Services promote the RoCoC provision. This process would begin with the matter being referred to Cabinet for endorsement.

RESOLVED –

- (1) T H A T the report be noted.
- (2) T H A T the draft Claim and Receipt forms for the Reimbursement of Cost of Care be approved for use.
- (3) T H A T the report be submitted to Cabinet for endorsement.

Reasons for decisions

- (1) In view of the information contained therein.
- (2) To achieve the principles of RoCoC.
- (3) To raise awareness of RoCoC.

196 ANNUAL REPORT OF HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES (HDS) –

The report provided an outline of the staff resources existing within Democratic Services for the period 2019/20 and therefore was a retrospective assessment of the work and duties covered in that period, including ongoing developments and plans for the future.

The Committee should have received the Head of Democratic Services' Annual Report earlier in the year, however due to the global pandemic created by the Covid-19 virus, it was not possible to report sooner.

The current staff structure as set out in paragraph 2.5 of the report was, at the time of the reporting period, considered to be sufficient.

As reported in the last Annual Report, one of the first tasks of the Head of Democratic Services was to implement previously agreed restructuring proposals approved by the Managing Director to reduce the level of administrative support within the Cabinet Office (including Town Twinning) and the Mayor's Office. The Head of Democratic Services confirmed that this work had been completed in terms of recruitment to the establishment.

The report included a summary of work undertaken in the last twelve months and ongoing work and the Committee would continue to be kept fully informed on progress of these, and other, initiatives.

Paragraphs 2.10 onwards of the report related to initiatives with which the section was actively engaged and included within the information were some analytics relating to web page unique views (hits) and public registered speakers' satisfaction rates with the Council's processes and support for Planning Committee and Scrutiny Committees' speakers.

Member development / Expo matters were referred to within paragraphs 2.19 – 2.20 of the report.

Taking account of the impact of the Covid emergency and with a fair amount hindsight, much of the anticipated work planned for 2020/21 had been delayed due to the Pandemic.

Member Personal Development Interview process were undertaken during November 2019 to February 2020. As indicated in my other report regarding Member Personal Development and Review Interviews, this process would inform the content of the Programme going forward, but this had been affected due to public health restrictions.

The Democratic Team would continue to undertake Member Scrutiny Satisfaction Surveys with the public who had participated in our public speaking arrangements at Planning and Scrutiny Committee meetings.

Finally, the planned review of the Member Development Strategy would now be reported slightly later than planned and would be submitted to the Committee for consideration in 2021. This would allow the Head of Democratic Services to factor in any changes brought about as a consequence of the introduction of the Local Government and Elections Bill and changes to Member induction arrangements for post Local Government Elections in May 2022.

RESOLVED – T H A T the report be noted.

Reason for decision

In view of the information contained within the report.

197 MEMBER PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW INTERVIEWS (HDS) –

The report was a summary of the Member Development Interviews conducted by the Head of Democratic Services between November 2019 and February 2020 to inform the Council's ongoing Member Development Programme.

17 of the 47 Members on the Council (including all Members in receipt of a Senior Salary) took up the opportunity of having a Personal Development Interview. By their very nature, the discussions at interviews varied amongst Members. The opportunity was taken to discuss:

- Members' current roles and responsibilities;
- Any specific tasks Members envisaged carrying out during the year ahead;
- Identifying areas of existing and / or new knowledge which Members felt might help in their undertaking of their various roles;
- Any "barriers" to undertaking their role effectively;
- Training / development feedback and future requirements.

In summary, the interviews resulted in:

- Requests for individual "refresher" training including topics such as ICT, Rules of Debate and Safeguarding;
- A general awareness amongst Members of the importance of maintaining awareness of legislative, and other, changes (particularly within Quasi-Judicial areas such as Planning and Licensing, but also in respect in any emerging significant legislation likely to impact on the Council such as collaborative joint committees);
- Requests for training and development in OTHER areas included:
 - Charing and Questioning, Charing meetings in a virtual world was currently being arranged for existing Chairmen;
 - Public Speaking;
 - Media Skills;
 - Social Media Skills (advanced);
 - Financial Management of Budgets.

- There was willingness to participate in different forms of training and development (including e-learning).

RESOLVED –

(1) T H A T the report be noted.

(2) T H A T the "themes" and, where practicable, all individual training needs identified, be provided for within the Council's Member Development Programme up to the Council elections in May 2022.

Reason for decisions

(1&2) To inform the Committee of the outcome of the Member Development Interview process and inform the Council's ongoing Member Development Programme.