

Democratic Services Committee

(Multi-Location Meeting - Council Chamber, Port Talbot & Microsoft Teams)

Members Present:

29 November 2022

Chairperson: Councillor S.Rahaman

Vice Chairperson: Councillor N.Goldup-John

Councillors: J.Hale, M.Harvey, J.Henton, A.Lodwig, P.A.Rees and P.Rogers

Officers In Attendance C.Griffiths, S.Curran and S.McCluskie

1. **Minutes of Previous Meeting held on 3rd October 2022**

The minutes were approved.

2. **Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales Draft Annual Report - 2023**

The circulated report set out the proposed changes to Members Remuneration included in the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (IRPW) Draft Annual Report 2023/24.

Members noted the proposed uplift to salaries and that there were no other proposed changes to areas such as sickness, travel, care etc.

Members noted and approved the draft consultation response to the set questions and confirmed that the Head of Democratic Services would write a response to IRPW in formal response to the consultation.

It was noted that there was also scope for individual members and/or political groups to make representations to the panel as well as the link had been circulated to all Members.

RESOLVED:

- a) That Members note the draft Annual Report and proposed determinations for 2023/24.
- b) That the response to the set consultation questions detailed in the report be approved and submitted.
- c) That the Head of Democratic Services prepare the Council's response on behalf of the Committee.

3. Handling Harassment Abuse and Intimidation

Members noted the update in relation to councillor safety; namely in relation to harassment, intimidation and abuse as detailed in the circulated report.

It was noted that there had been a request by the committee for updates in relation to this area of work. Officers explained that the WLGA had committed to setting up a working group to focus the discussions but that there were no further updates on this at this time.

Members were presented with a practical guide that had been produced by the Local Government Association (LGA): 'A Councillor's guide to handling harassment abuse and intimidation' and asked that a copy be circulated to all members of Council.

The committee discussed the recommendations for Local Authorities outlined in the guide including: having named officers to discuss issues of concern, having a code of conduct, and having local resolution processes. Members noted the recommendation in the guide that there should be a dedicated Council policy setting out procedure and protocols should a councillor feel they are being harassed, intimidated or abused and they agreed that this should be brought to a future meeting of the Democratic Services Committee for ratification.

It was brought to members' attention that the ability of the Local Authority to assist in resolving any issues such as defamation, libel or slander is limited.

The Committee agreed that the Chair write to the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) on behalf of the committee seeking

further information on what measures are being put in place to support elected members and asking for such matters to be considered at a national level.

Members discussed the responsibility of members to prepare risk assessments when holding surgeries in the community. Advice includes notifying South Wales Police and liaising with Health and Safety colleagues.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the Democratic Services Committee note the update in relation to the handling harassment, abuse and intimidation and the content of the Councillor Guide to Handling Harassment, Abuse and Intimidation.
- b) That the Democratic Services Committee endorse the work programme that officers will embark on both internally and with stakeholders to develop a protocol for members in respect of harassment, abuse and intimidation.
- c) That the Chair of the Democratic Services Committee write to the WLGA (Welsh Local Government Association) seeking further views on what measures UK and Welsh Government are considering to support elected members who are victims of harassment abuse and intimidation.

4. **Forward Work Programme 22/23**

The Forward Work Programme was noted.

CHAIRPERSON