

Democratic Services Committee

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

Members Present:

11 November 2024

Chairperson: Councillor S.Rahaman

Vice Chairperson: Councillor N.Goldup-John

Councillors: J.Hale, M.Harvey, J.Henton, C.Lewis, A.R.Lockyer, P.A.Rees, S.H.Reynolds and P.Rogers

Officers In Attendance S.Curran, C.Griffiths and P.Chivers

1. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

2. **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 July 2024 were approved as a true and accurate record.

3. **Draft Annual Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales**

Officers provided members with a brief overview of the report contained within the agenda pack. Members are consulted annually around this time by the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (IRPW); a final draft of the report will be available around February, which will inform members of the remuneration for 2025/26. The

committee usually makes a request for Democratic Services Officers to respond to the consultation on their behalf, however, members can respond individually if they wish.

Members raised concern regarding elected members who also had caring responsibilities and the impact of balancing responsibilities and undertaking their duties as a councillor. Members questioned what support was in place and how accessible this was.

Officers confirmed that there was a support package for members which included, reimbursement of child care costs incurred. The support package is not mentioned in the report as there have been no changes to it. The support is not being used by members and officers will look at how members can be informed of what support is available.

Members asked for a more proactive approach and whether there could be standardisation relating to a weekly allowance to enable parents/carers to be able to carry out their duties.

Members questioned whether there has been a review of the number of hours elected members undertake to carry out their role as a councillor.

Officers advised members that, to their knowledge, a review has not been undertaken and encouraged members to provide feedback to this effect to the IRPW.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services confirmed that this point could be included as part of the response to the draft IRPW report. The IRPW may need to consider documenting in the draft report how conclusions are reached and the evidence that is there to sustain it.

Members questioned what the financial pressure on the council would be from the proposed increases mentioned in the draft report.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services confirmed that the council do not receive any additional Welsh Government funding in relation to the proposed increase in members salary costs. The council is expected to find the increase as part of the overarching budget proposal setting.

Officers confirmed that the draft IRPW proposals had been raised with the Director of Finance for consideration when setting the budget. A breakdown can be requested for the February meeting.

Members reiterated previous comments in relation to the importance of a standard financial support package to assist councillors in carrying out their role, a standard package for parents and carers may attract a more diverse group of counsellors.

Officers offered to provide details of the existing package of support to remind members of what support was available. The support package is unchanged, so members were encouraged to feedback on that element in relation to the consultation, if the current provision was not considered to be sufficient.

Members requested that the details of the support package is sent to all councillors.

Resolved:

- That the Committee considers and comments on the Determinations made by the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales in their draft Annual Report for 2024/25.
- That the Head of Democratic Services be authorised to make a response on behalf of the Democratic Services Committee reflecting the decision and comments made at the meeting, to the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales

4. **Member Annual Report Scheme**

Member Annual Report Scheme

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services provided an overview of the report contained within the agenda pack.

Resolved:

It is recommended that, having due regard that no integrated impact assessment is required that the Democratic Services Committee note the Members Annual Report Scheme and that the Democratic Services Manager communicates with all Members via email, reminding them of the scheme and inviting them to complete an Annual Report should they so wish.

5. **Members Personal Development Review (PDR) Process**

Officers provided members with an overview of the report contained within the agenda pack.

Members asked if the process was time specific?

Officers confirmed that the review was an annual process so there was no time limit.

Resolved:

It is recommended, that having due regard to the fact that no integrated impact assessment is required that the Democratic Services Committee:

- Note the Members Personal Development Review Scheme
- Approves that the Democratic Services Manager will communicate with the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and political groups to explore a cohort of current members to undertake the training to conduct Personal Development Reviews.
- Approves that the Democratic Services Manager will communicate with all Members via email, reminding them of the scheme and inviting them to complete a Personal Development Review should they so wish.

6. **Survey of Elected Members 2024/2025**

Officers provided members with an overview of the report contained within the agenda pack.

Members asked if the previous year's survey was conducted on a one to one basis.

Officers confirmed that the survey was conducted on a one to one basis for the last few years; this approach provided richer data from members. Based on the feedback obtained, it is hoped that members have confidence that services can be adapted and improved.

Members enquired what had changed as a result of last year's survey.

Officers confirmed that the feedback received, informed the training and development programme. Previously, members had requested budget scrutiny training, which has now been included in the training programme. The results of the survey are reported back to this committee for the recommendations to be followed through.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services advised members that feedback from the previous annual survey resulted in the development of a Task & Finish Group to look at handling harassment abuse and intimidation for councillors. The survey is a learning opportunity for officers and members to identify areas for improvement. Members were encouraged to promote within their group meetings, members taking part in the survey and provide honest feedback so that any issues can be addressed.

Resolved: It is recommended that members agree:

- (a) That an annual survey be conducted with all elected members between November 2024 and January 2025.
- (b) The content of the annual survey based on the draft attached at appendix 1.
- (c) That the survey be conducted on a 1:1 basis by Democratic Services staff.

7. Handling Harassment, Abuse and Intimidation for Councillors Task & Finish Group Final Report

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services provided a background to the work of the task & finish group as contained within the report in the agenda pack. Reference was made to the action plan on page 110 of the report pack. It is proposed that progress will be reported back to committee half yearly. Different policies and procedures will be brought to the committee or other decision makers at various intervals over the course of the next year. It was confirmed that there was flexibility in the action plan for new issues to be added as required. The task and finish group will remain active, to discuss specific areas prior to bringing back to this committee for final endorsement.

Members complimented the format of the action plan and looked forward to the implementation of the actions identified.

Resolved: It is recommended that:

1. That members of the Democratic Services Committee endorse the outcomes of the Task and Finish Group included at Appendix A.
2. That the action plan be monitored by the Democratic Services Committee on a six monthly basis for progress and performance monitoring.

8. **Forward Work Programme**

Officers advised members that a potential special meeting had been added to the work programme for December in relation to the forthcoming works planned for the Princess Royal Theatre. The works will have a significant effect on member facilities including member parking, availability of committee rooms, council chamber and the Civic Centre. The Democratic Services Committee has the remit for member facilities and the committee will be included in planning any necessary mitigations. Officers confirmed that discussions are ongoing with colleagues in the Environment Directorate, to identify consequences of the planned works; as many factors are unknown at present, it is unclear what mitigations may be required.

Members raised concern that the works could hinder members in attending meetings and using facilities in person. It is important to ensure that appropriate alternative options are available for meetings and activities.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services agreed that this was a key consideration and that there was a need to ensure that suitable replacements that meet legal requirements are identified. A potential contingency could be for the ground floor presentation and conference rooms to be used for scrutiny meetings with the chamber being retained for full council meetings, with works ceasing for the meeting duration. The aim is to minimize the impact on council business as much as possible.

Members enquired when would the committee have the opportunity to give views on the new scrutiny arrangements?

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services advised members that the scrutiny review had not yet been factored in for a specific date. A meeting with scrutiny chairs and vice chairs will be held shortly to gather their views. There is potential to revisit the system with Audit Wales to provide an independent oversight. The Democratic Services

Committee will be consulted and be involved in the review processes. There may be a need to hold a special meeting if it is necessary to invite other committee members, to ensure the widest views are captured.

The Forward Work Programme was noted.

9. **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

**Cllr. Saifur Rahaman
CHAIRPERSON**