

Democratic Services Committee

(Via Microsoft Teams)

Members Present:

11 October 2021

Chairperson: Councillor J.D.Morgan

Vice Chairperson: Councillor A.R.Aubrey

Councillors: J.Hurley, S.Pursey, A.J.Richards, S.Renkes and S.Lynch

Officers In Attendance: C.Griffiths, S.Curran and C.Plowman

1. **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 September 2021 were approved as an accurate record.

2. **Assessment of Resources for the Democratic Services Committee**

The Committee were provided with a report on the outcomes of an assessment of the adequacy of resources within the Democratic Services Team.

Following the successful appointment of the Democratic Services Manager to the post of Head of Democratic Services, there was a need to consider the operational capacity and structure of the Democratic Services Team; the Head of Democratic Services role involved focussing more on the strategic aspects of the function including implementing the requirements from the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 and preparing for Member Induction 2022.

Appendix 1 of the circulated report detailed the existing structure of the Democratic Services Team, and Appendix 2 detailed the proposed structure. It was proposed to introduce two Senior Democratic Services Officers at Grade 9 to the Team; these posts

would be ring fenced to the existing Democratic Services Team members given the level of expertise and knowledge they will need to have). It was highlighted that they would be responsible for overseeing Scrutiny Support and Project Management, and Committee Administration and Forward Work Programmes respectively. Officers added that it was also proposed to recruit to the vacant Grade 7 Democratic Services Officer post.

Following discussion, Members were in support of the recommendations contained within the report.

3. **Report of the Member Induction 2022 and Diversity in Democracy Task & Finish Group**

Officers presented a report containing the outcomes of the Task and Finish Group which was established to consider the Member Induction Programme for 2022 and the Diversity in Democracy.

Following various meetings of the Task and Finish Group, a draft Member Induction Timetable had been produced (detailed in Appendix 1 of the circulated report); the comments and feedback from the Members of the Group had been incorporated into the timetable. It was stated that there will be additional elements that will need to be included over the coming months, and Officers were going to be meeting with Corporate Directors to obtain their views on what they think would be beneficial for Members during this period.

It was explained that the timetable was set out in two formats, a list of the various meetings and training sessions, and a diary marker to display how they were going to be spread out; Officers were conscious not to overload Members in the first few weeks as there would be a lot to take in following the Election. Therefore, Officers had produced a structured Programme providing Members with the basic information needed in the weeks leading up to the Annual General Meeting (AGM), and gradually phasing the other elements into the programme over the summer period.

Members were informed that the Task and Finish Group also completed work in regards to Democracy in Diversity element and how the Council could contribute positively to Diversity in Democracy; following this, an Action Plan had been prepared (detailed in Appendix 2 of the circulated report). It was mentioned that the Action Plan contained various elements, including the establishment of a

Council website page 'Becoming a Councillor'; this webpage was now live, and will be built on further over the coming months to include more relevant information.

Following consideration of the report presented, it was resolved that:

(a) Members of the Democratic Services Committee endorse the Member Induction Timetable for Local Government Elections in 2022 and forward the same to Full Council for information purposes.

(b) Members of the Democratic Services Committee endorse the proposed Diversity in Democracy Action Plan and the same be forwarded to Full Council for approval.

4. **Public Speaking Protocol**

Members were sighted with the draft Public Speaking Protocols which were established as part of a wider public participation scheme.

Detailed within the circulated report it was noted that one of the requirements of the Local Government and Elections Wales Act 2021, was that Local Authorities must establish ways of promoting and facilitating processes by which local people may make representations to the principal Council about a decision before, and after, it is made; each Council had the discretion in the way in which this would be taken forward.

Following the introduction of the Act, it was stated that Officers had been looking into the Councils democratic arrangements and public participation; there were various different elements that were going to be a part of this work, in order to involve the public more in the decision making process. Members were informed that the first proposal of this work was to introduce public speaking at various Council meetings; a draft Public Speaking Protocol had been developed (detailed in Appendix 1 of the circulated report) which set out the rules and regulations.

Officers provided further detail on the process and the protocol. It was highlighted that at the start of every meeting, there would be a period of time provided for members of the public to ask questions on the items listed on the agenda; the meetings in which this would apply to in the first instance would be the executive, decision making meetings including full Council, Cabinet and the Cabinet Boards. It was added that the public will have a forum in which they will submit their

questions in advance of the meeting, and then receive the answers during the meeting. Officers explained that this was a pilot, and that the public participation scheme would be developed over time; there was also a need to engage with the public to identify what worked and what didn't work.

Members were informed that Planning Committee and Licencing and Gambling Acts Committee had different protocols and regulations, therefore they were currently excluded from this process.

It was asked whether the public speaking in meetings element would be introduced into the Scrutiny Committees. Officers confirmed that the focus at this stage was to introduce the opportunity for members of the public to ask questions at the decision making forums, in which the questions would be directed to the Cabinet Board Members who make the decisions; Scrutiny Committees provided the opportunity for Members to question and raise issues on particular matters, therefore it was proposed that they be kept separate from this and that they continue to be Member led and driven. It was mentioned that there will be further refinements made moving forward with this, and from experiences there could be a need to change various elements; such as questions being asked in Scrutiny Committees in order to allow the Scrutiny Members to hear what was being asked. Officers explained there will be a flow of communication with the Members of the Scrutiny Committee, as they will be made aware of any questions that had been submitted by the public, to be asked in the Cabinet/Cabinet Board meeting; Members could then determine whether they wished to hear the answer to the questions, and if so, could ask to attend the Cabinet/Cabinet Board meeting.

Members expressed their concerns with the following clause detailed in the draft protocols; 'the number of questions that an individual can ask in a municipal year shall be limited to two, with any further questions being accepted only at the discretion of the Chair'. It was highlighted that limiting the public to two questions per municipal year could prevent good, just questions from being asked and restrict the public participation in meetings.

It was noted that Officers had looked into the approach that other Local Authorities had adopted, and found that most had set a limit to 2/3 per person per municipal year. Members were informed that the Council wanted to encourage questions from the public, however were cautious of the process being hindered by similar types of questions being asked by the same individuals; Officers had tried to

reflect this in the protocol. It was highlighted that if Members were of the collective view that they did not want to include a cap on the number of times a person can attend a meeting and ask a question, then they could implement this.

It was explained that the initial implementation of the public speaking protocol would be a pilot scheme that would be reviewed in 12 months to ensure that it remained appropriate or whether amendments were required to ensure the overarching aims of providing the public the opportunity to raise questions with members were being met. Officers mentioned that the review could be changed to 6 months if necessary; and that any other various formats could be considered.

A discussion took place regarding the wording of the clause. Various suggestions were made, and it was asked if the protocol could be trialled without a limit to the number of questions that could be asked, in order to set the right tone to the public; however, if regular problems were to occur, for this to be reviewed and potentially reverted to the original clause. It was mentioned that other elements of the protocol, such as the time limit set for questions from the public, could help to prevent the discussed concerns in regards to not having a limit.

In regards to the Chairs of the Cabinet Board meetings, it was confirmed that the role was usually agreed at the start of every meeting, and would be dependent on who from the Cabinet were in attendance; if questions were being received from the public for a particular meeting, Officers will need to ask who will be chairing it in advance of the meeting.

Members raised their concerns in regards to Cabinet Members determining which questions should or should not be asked from the public. Officers stressed the importance of a defined criteria, and stated that the criteria in which someone could reject a question, would be limited; there was a need to highlight as to when Chairs discretion can or cannot be applied. It was confirmed that the Head of Legal and Democratic Services would include a clause to reflect this within the protocol.

It was agreed that the Head of Legal and Democratic Services would amend the wording of the clause to reflect the views of the Committee, before the report was presented to full Council for consideration; the wording would not limit the number of questions

that could be asked, however would provide the Chairs with an element of control if the questions weren't contributing towards the effectiveness of the meeting.

Following consideration of the report presented, and the agreement to amend parts of the Public Speaking Protocol to reflect Committees view, it was resolved that:

(a) Members of the Democratic Services Committee consider the draft protocol for public speaking at Council meetings recommending any changes that they feel are appropriate; and

(b) Delegated authority be granted to the Chair of the Democratic Services Committee to agree the final draft for commending to Council on behalf of the Democratic Services Committee.

5. **IRPW Annual Report**

The Draft Annual Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (IRPW) was provided to the Committee; the Annual Report set out proposals which, if implemented, would impact on Member remuneration in the civic year 2022/2023. It was mentioned that the IRPW invites comments on its draft proposals before making its final determinations for the following civic year.

It was noted that the Head of Democratic Services would provide a response to the proposals on behalf of the Council, which would include any comments and/or views made by Members of the Democratic Services Committee.

Members were informed that the figures contained within the circulated report had been set by the IRPW and it would be up to the individual Member if they wished to accept the revised arrangements; all Elected Member had the opportunity to provide their individual responses to the proposals by submitting them to IRPW directly.

It was asked if the Democratic Services Committee Members would be sighted of the Council's draft response before it was sent to IRPW. Officers highlighted that the Head of Democratic Services would incorporate the views and comments of the Members of the Democratic Services Committee by taking on board the minutes of the meeting; if it was the case that there were no comments raised, then Officers would provide a neutral response. Members were informed that the response needed to be submitted by the end of

November 2021; prior to this it was agreed that the response will be drafted and sent to Members via email for consideration, before being sent to the IRPW.

In addition, it was highlighted that the Chair and the Head of Democratic Services would be attending an IRPW briefing on Friday 22 October; and would be happy to raise any points that Members had.

Following consideration of the proposals, Members were in support of the recommendations contained within the report.

6. **Forward Work Programme 2021/22**

Members noted the Democratic Services Committee Forward Work Programme for 2021/22.

It was confirmed that an additional meeting had been arranged for Monday 13 December due to the need to consider upcoming business.

CHAIRPERSON

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