

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 28 June 2023

PRESENT: Councillor Keith Roberts (Chair)
Councillors Non Dafydd, Carwyn E Jones, Gwilym O Jones, Dylan Rees

IN ATTENDANCE: Head of Democracy
Solicitor (Corporate Governance) (MY)
Human Resources Training Manager (MW) (for Item 5)
Human Resources Training Officer (AJ) (for Item 5)
Committee Officer (SC)

APOLOGIES: Councillors Llio A Owen, Alwen P Watkin

1. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

None received.

2. MINUTES

The draft minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on the following dates were presented and confirmed as correct: -

- 22 March 2023
- 23 May 2023

3. EXTENDING THE TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

Submitted – a report by the Solicitor (Corporate Governance) seeking agreement to extend the Democratic Services Committee (DSC)'s terms of reference to include the following provision: -

“Where a discussion, a local choice decision or a response to consultation is required in relation to constitutional matters, such matters may be submitted by the Monitoring Officer, with the agreement of the Committee Chair, for the Committee’s consideration before any final recommendation is made to full Council or before any consultation response is sent (“the proposal”).”

The Solicitor (Corporate Governance) reported that some matters, which may lead to constitutional changes being approved by full Council, require a detailed discussion before the decision is made. The current arrangements do not offer an opportunity for detailed discussion in County Council meetings. Extending the DSC's terms of reference would allow the Committee to consider constitutional changes in detail; discuss options/benefits/disadvantages and offer its

recommendation before a decision is made by full Council. The change would also permit the DSC to consider and formulate responses to consultations.

RESOLVED: -

- **That the DSC agrees to the changes to the Committee's terms of reference as included in the proposal and noted in Enclosure 1 of the report.**
- **That the DSC recommends to the Executive and full Council that the proposal included in the report be agreed.**
- **That a report be presented to a meeting of the Executive with the DSC's recommendations that it makes a recommendation to full Council on the proposal and the subsequent amendments required to the Council's Constitution as a result of such a change; and**
- **Following this, that a report be presented before a meeting of the full Council to approve the proposal and the constitutional changes that must be made as a result of the amendment/addition to the DSC's terms of reference.**

4. ELECTED MEMBERS' ANNUAL REPORTS

Submitted – a report by the Head of Democracy in response to concerns raised at the Standards Committee's meeting in December 2022 regarding the low uptake in members presenting annual reports.

The Head of Democracy reported that arrangements are in place to raise awareness and encourage new members to submit and publish annual reports on their activities. He stated that it is not mandatory for members to complete annual reports but is considered good practice.

It was noted that 25 reports out of 35 (70%) have been presented to date for 2022/23, which compares favourably with previous years.

The Head of Democracy reported that he proposes to undertake the following steps to provide members with every opportunity to respond: -

- To discuss with individual members ways to overcome any barriers that may be present in relation to completing and publishing annual reports.
- To discuss with other County Councils ways to identify good practice/lessons to improve the uptake in annual reports.
- To develop the template for completing reports to ensure that it is user friendly, and provide a digital version of the template.

Members of the Committee praised the progress that has been made to date on the number of reports that have been submitted. Further information was requested on naming non-respondents. The Head of Democracy stated that it wasn't appropriate to name individual members in the report, but that he would contact Group Leaders to share relevant information with them.

RESOLVED: -

- **That the Head of Democracy contacts Group Leaders to request that information regarding members who have not presented annual reports be forwarded to members within each individual Group.**
- **To consider the content of the report and agree on the above action points as presented in paragraph 10 of the report, with amendments.**

5. MEMBER DEVELOPMENT

Submitted – a report by the Human Resources Training Manager on the Elected Member Training and Development Plan.

The HR Training Manager reported that the Member Development Strategy places a duty on local authorities to provide support to members to prepare and publish annual reviews of their training needs. She stated that arrangements are in place for the 2023/24 Training Plan. The Leadership Team and Heads of Service have been consulted and invited to submit any potential member development and training needs on the Draft Plan.

It was highlighted that Group Leaders will receive quarterly reports detailing members' attendances at training sessions from July, including mandatory training, which will be monitored. It was noted that in addition to the Training Plan, Elected Member Bulletins have been published and circulated, summarising the training that is available on Learning Pool. The E-Learning modules now include Health and Wellbeing and generic and specific modules for members' roles.

It was noted that consideration will now be given to convening more hybrid/face to face training sessions. It was further noted that the timing of training is continually being reviewed to offer flexibility and respond to the needs of individuals who have work/caring commitments. Members were also encouraged to complete feedback forms following training sessions to highlight any need for further training.

RESOLVED: -

- **To note the content of the report and the Training Plan for 2023/24.**
- **To inform members that quarterly update reports on member training will be presented to Group Leaders from July. This information to be included in correspondence when the Training Plan is shared with members.**

The HR Training Manager reported that this was her last meeting of the DSC and thanked the Committee for its support and over past 25 years. The Chair on behalf of the Committee wished her a long and happy retirement.

6. DRAFT HYBRID WORKING PROTOCOL FOR MEMBERS

Submitted – a report by the Head of Democracy on the Protocol to convene remote and physical attendance at Council and committee meetings.

The Head of Democracy reported that the Council is currently reviewing its

“Protocol for Hybrid Council/Committee Meetings” and “Remote attendance at meetings Guidance for Councillors” for the purpose of updating the information and combining the two documents into one. He noted that it was important to remind members of the expectations on them when attending meetings remotely, and the principle that hybrid or remote meetings should be conducted as professionally as meetings in one location.

Discussion focused on whether the new model of hybrid working could be adopted for Scrutiny Panels, as opposed to virtual meetings. The Head of Democracy reported that currently all formal Committee meetings are hybrid, and there is no capacity to extend this arrangement at present. He stated that consideration has been given to the Calendar of Meetings, where meetings are scheduled between Tuesdays and Thursdays. It was noted that the current arrangement will be reviewed early in 2024.

Reference was made to paragraph 3.9 of the Protocol which states that members should always keep their cameras on in meetings. It was noted that some members switch their cameras off in meetings. The Head of Democracy responded that if members need to switch off their cameras or leave for a short time, they should contact officers who are in attendance, which can also be echoed by the Chair to strengthen the arrangement. It was also noted that the Protocol is mainly relevant to voting members and officers, rather than those attending to listen in on meetings.

Concerns were expressed that the camera display in webcasts of hybrid meetings appears on a smaller screen for those who attend physically in meetings than those who attend virtually. The Head of Democracy responded that it is likely that additional expenditure would be incurred by Public-i to change this method of webcasting, which is not feasible at present.

RESOLVED: -

- **To note the Committee’s comments above in relation to the draft Protocol.**
- **To recommend that the County Council approves the Draft Protocol**
- **in due course.**

The meeting concluded at 3:05 pm

**COUNCILLOR KEITH ROBERTS
CHAIR**