

ISLE OF ANGLESEY COUNTY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE:	COUNTY COUNCIL
DATE:	26 SEPTEMBER 2013
TITLE OF REPORT:	SUPPORT FOR POLITICAL GROUPS
REPORT BY:	CHIEF EXECUTIVE
PURPOSE OF REPORT:	To present an application by the Plaid Cymru Political Group for the assistance of a Researcher / Political Adviser to assist the Group to operate effectively within the Council
ACTION:	Members of the County Council are requested to consider the contents of this report and to resolve on the matter

SUPPORT FOR POLITICAL GROUPS

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1** On 3 August 2013, a formal application was made by the Plaid Cymru Group on the Council for the provision of a Researcher / Political Adviser to enable the Group to fulfil its duties, and the expectations placed upon it, effectively. As there is no precedent to this type of post within this Council, nor there is there provision in the current budget to sustain a post offering support to political groups, the matter is presented to the attention of the Council for resolution.
- 1.2** In preparing this report general enquiries were made to establish to what extent this type of provision is being made in other local councils. In the course of these enquiries it became evident that such provision is common within authorities in England but very little use is made of the facility within local authorities in Wales. In North Wales only one local authority provides support to its political groups, and that is made on a part-time basis in accordance with the size of the groups. [In that particular authority provision is made to support 3 out of the 5 groups on the Council on the basis of 29 hours, 15 hours and 11 hours per week].

The WLGA also provides support to the largest political group within its organisation, and again on the basis of a part-time post.

1.3 Where provision is made for supporting political groups, the general type of functions fulfilled by the post holders are:

- to take notes in meetings and prepare briefings for meetings on behalf of group members;
- disseminate information to group members and advice on matters of interest or concern;
- to administer the mail received on behalf of the group and to monitor and support effective communication arrangements;
- assist with the development of policy statements and to undertake research in support of policy development;
- networking with other groups within and external to the council in order to co-ordinate political viewpoints on matters relevant to the work of the group within the council;
- to support individual members with their workload within their political wards.

2. THE STATUTORY POSITION

2.1 The Local Government and Housing Act 1989 (c.42) empowers authorities, except in the case of parish and community councils, to appoint assistants to political groups represented on the authority.

There are clear regulations in the Act regarding how a group qualifies to receive support and there are statutory regulations to be applied when political assistants are appointed in relation to their pay and conditions, given that these officers are the only ones within the authority's establishment that can be appointed on the basis of their political affiliations and activities.

These regulations are meant to assist in the process of separating the role of these officers from the other council staff in relation to the provision of advice and guidance to elected members during the process of policy formulation and adopting resolutions.

2.2 It is a matter for the authority itself, within the parameters of the statutory regulations, to resolve on the appropriateness or otherwise of making provisions to support political groups represented on the authority, and to resolve, in accordance with the size of representation, how many groups should receive such support if it is established, and the remuneration levels of the staff appointed.

2.3 The political groups, and the individuals holding office to support political groups, should adhere to the protocol established by the authority to manage the relationship between elected members and paid officers, accepting that each officer has a duty, in legal and management terms, to the council as a corporate body.

3. FINANCIAL PROVISION

- 3.1** There is no financial provision within the current County Council 2013/14 budget to create posts in support of political groups.

If the Council resolves to approve establishing such posts, it could indicate that this should be a priority for consideration in the process of formulating the budget for 2014/15, taking into consideration the Council's financial position and the need for efficiency savings and budget reductions.

On the other hand, if it resolves to approve establishing posts in support of political groups to be effective in the current financial year, then it should note clearly from which budgetary heading this allocation should be made and give clear and appropriate guidance, to officers in relation to implementing that decision.

- 3.2** For information, the authority in North Wales which does provide this type of support has set the pay level on points 25-28 in the Local Government Pay Scale, which approximately would amount to £28,500 per annum to include employment costs [but not the office and accommodation costs].

4. RECOMMENDATION

Members of the County Council are requested to resolve on this matter, keeping in mind the current financial position of the Council and the budget forecast for the future.

Richard Parry Jones
Chief Executive

19 September 2013