

**Minutes of the Meeting of DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE
held remotely via video-conference on Friday, 15 October 2021**

PRESENT; Councillors Ceredig Davies (Chair) Clive Davies, Lloyd Edwards, Gwyn James, Dai Mason and Wyn Thomas

Also in attendance: Councillors Keith Evans and Gareth Lloyd

Officers in attendance: Lowri Edwards, Corporate Lead Officer: Democratic Services; Nia Jones, Corporate Manager Democratic Services and Alan Morris, Corporate Manager Customer Contact.

(10.00 - 11.50 am)

Procedure

The Chairman welcomed all to the meeting.

1 Apologies

None

2 Disclosure of personal /prejudicial interests

None

3 To confirm the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 21 May 2021 and to consider any matters arising

It was **RESOLVED** to confirm as a true record the minutes of the meeting held 21st May 2021.

Matters arising

Item 3: Members asked if there had been any developments in relation to providing a group high speed broadband / fibre contract for all Councillors and Senior Officers of the Council. It was noted this would not be financially viable due to the high cost of installation. Councillor Clive Davies stated that Ceredigion is ahead of the rest of Wales with 26% of the population now on fibre. He is due to meet with Openreach in November, and a new website is due to be launched providing information about the services, technology and broadband across the County.

Item 9: Councillor Ceredig Davies noted that regular monthly meetings are now held with the Chief Executive.

4 To consider a Report on aspects of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act relevant to the Democratic Services Committee

The Corporate Manager for Democratic Services presented a report to the committee, providing an update on the main aspects of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 relevant to the committee. It was noted that a strategy for encouraging public participation was due to be presented to Cabinet, and that Ceredigion are leading on an e-petition scheme for the whole of Wales. Members were reminded that as of May 2022, there will be a duty to publish electronic and postal addresses for every Member, and an update was provided in relation to the electronic

broadcast of meetings and the installation of new equipment at the Council Chamber to facilitate this. It was noted that although the Act has been published, we are still waiting for the Welsh Government to publish the guidance to support it, and as such it is impossible to finalise any of these strategies. It was recommended that a further meeting of this committee is held when further guidance has been received.

Members asked whether the number of attendees has increased as a result of holding remote meetings, and it was confirmed that the numbers have increased significantly. Members also asked whether members of the public could submit paper copies of petitions in addition to electronic petitions, and it was confirmed that the system hosting the e-petition scheme has a section for combining the total number of paper signed petitions to the total electronic signatures. Members also asked that training is provided for Member on the hybrid meeting management system prior to going live.

Following discussion it was **RESOLVED** to note the aspects of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act specific to the Democratic Services Committee, and to schedule a further meeting once guidance from the Welsh Government has been made available.

5 To consider a report on the Diversity in Democracy Action Plan

The Corporate Manager for Democratic Services presented a report to the committee, noting that the Council had endorsed the Diversity Declaration in its meeting on 23 September 2021. It was noted that the Action Plan contained 6 aims, and a timetable for implementation, and that there is a role for the political groups to promote diversity whilst encouraging individuals to stand for election in May 2022.

Following discussion it was **RESOLVED** to agree the action plan leading up to the 2022 local elections with the aim of improving diversity in democracy.

6 To consider a report on the Electoral Review Ward Boundaries

The Corporate Lead Officer for Democratic Services presented a report to the committee, noting that the Minister for Finance and Local Government had previously approved the recommendations of the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales, however since publishing the agenda, the Minister has now placed these changes into legislation. The Order will now be presented at Council next week, which will come into force from May 2022. Any by-elections held prior to May next year will be in line with current arrangements.

It was noted that work will be undertaken over the next few months in preparation for the Local Government Elections in May, and a communication strategy will be developed to ensure that residents are aware of the changes. A Task and Finish group has been established to conduct a full review of the size and membership of all Committees of the Council in

order to ensure appropriate representation, in lieu of the reduced number of Councillors. The intention is to present the recommendations of this group to Council in December.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to agree the action plan as noted above.

7 To consider a report on Elected Member Role Descriptions

The Corporate Manager for Democratic Services presented a report to the committee, outlining the proposed revisions recommended by the WLGA to the current role descriptors. It was noted that these role descriptors are designed to be used alongside the Welsh Member Development (Competency) Framework. It was noted that Officers at Ceredigion County Council has been involved in the development of these revisions alongside Officers and Members representing all Councils in Wales.

Members noted that the role descriptors included operational activity, stating that there was a lack of awareness among some Officers of the role of the Members, and asked that this information is shared with Officers.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to agree the revised set of Member Role Descriptors.

8 To consider a report on a Development Framework for Councillors in Wales 2021

The Corporate Manager for Democratic Services presented a report to the committee, noting that the framework has been developed by the WLGA as a guide to identify priorities for training and development.

Members noted that there is a duty for political parties to take a lead on several of these items, and that training would be vital in order to ensure that Members can provide a high level of support to their residents. Members also noted that some of the items included may not be necessary for all Members such as using *power point* and *excel*. It was noted that this is a development framework where Members would be able to self-evaluate their development needs in accordance with this framework, and that training would then be tailored to meet those needs.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to agree to the adoption of the Development Framework for Councillors.

9 To consider a report on Member ICT Provision post elections 2022

The Corporate Manager for Customer Contact presented a report to the committee, outlining the proposed ICT equipment and support provided by the ICT service.

It was proposed that Members are offered the same provisions as council staff, namely a *Windows* laptop, a 24" screen with internal docking capability

or separate docking station allowing the laptop to be connected with a single cable, a keyboard, mouse, headset and a basic carry case. Ceredigion email address and Office 365 account would be installed, and an ability to install Office applications on up to 5 personal devices. Printing and scanning facilities would be provided in the Members' Room, with access to Wi-Fi in all council offices. Members would be able to access email and Office files from personal devices and mobile phones and appropriate training would be provided on issued devices and data protection, whilst ICT support from corporate ICT service desks would continue to be provided.

Members asked if they could purchase the equipment that they currently use as they have been using it for other purposes. It was noted that all Members would need to return existing equipment which would be wiped and re-issued or disposed of in line with the usual corporate refresh arrangements. It was explained that this is because equipment and licenses are owned by the Council, however ICT would be able to support Members in transferring personal information to other devices if required.

Members noted that *i-pads* are useful for working in the community to take pictures of issues or to show documents to residents. Members also asked if 3G and 4G could be provided on the laptop. Officers noted that it would be possible to take pictures on a mobile phone linked via Office 365, and that laptops issued to staff do not have a sim card slot. However this could be looked into if that is what the Members want. Members noted that they sometimes attend meetings from alternative locations such as the car, and that they may occasionally lose electricity or internet connection. They also noted that if information is provided late, there may not be an opportunity to go to the office to print it.

It was noted that Chairs of Committees were issued with an additional piece of equipment during lockdown in order to be able to view meetings via zoom, whilst reading documents on a separate monitor. This would not be possible with an *i-pad*. It was also noted that Members are not able to see track-changes or highlighted section in documents viewed on *i-pad*. Officers noted that there needs to be a rationalisation as it is not financially viable to provide everything, and that we also need to consider our carbon footprint. Members noted concern regarding their eyesight, in reading documents on screen.

Members also asked about additional data protection when using personal ICT equipment for Council business. Officers noted that training would be provided in relation to this. It was also noted that due to ongoing supply issues, an order would need to be placed by January in order to ensure that the equipment is available to Members by May 2022.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to recommend that a survey of all Members be undertaken to seek their views regarding future ICT equipment.

10 To consider a draft Ceredigion County Council Candidates' Guide

The Corporate Manager for Democratic Services presented a draft Candidates' Guide to the committee, asking for their input, noting that the

guide would be available electronically on the Council's website and at Council Libraries, and that it would also be promoted via social media. It was noted that this Guide would be updated as and when further information is available regarding the Local Elections.

Members recommended the inclusion of an e-mail address at the end of the guide, and asked that Members contribute to the comments on page 3.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to approve the draft guidance document.

11 To consider a draft Members' Induction Programme 2022

The Corporate Manager for Democratic Services presented a draft induction programme to Members, outlining the mandatory courses that Members would need to attend prior to sitting on committee meetings, and it was noted that an additional training programme had been included for Cabinet Members. Reference was also made to additional training that would be provided during the year, and the link to the Members' Development Programme.

Members noted that the proposed programme was manageable, noting that it is preferable that training is provided in small manageable chunks.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to agree the Members Induction programme following the County Council elections in 2022.

12 To consider the Democratic Services' Committee Annual Report

The Corporate Lead Officer for Democratic Services presented the annual report to the committee, noting that although the committee only met once during the year, a substantial amount of work has been carried out. If the report is agreed, it will be presented to Council at its meeting next week.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to approve the draft Democratic Services Committee Annual Report for presenting to Council on 21st October 2021.

13 To consider a report in relation to the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales' Draft Annual Report 2022/23 consultation

The Corporate Lead Officer for Democratic Services presented a report to the committee noting that the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (IRPW) Draft Annual Report for 2022/23 sets out the remuneration framework for community and town councils. The draft report states that since 2009, due to austerity and pressure on public finances, remuneration of elected members of local government in Wales has not kept pace with measures of inflation or other possible comparators. The report also defines financial arrangements in relation to entitlement to family absence, contributions towards costs of care and personal assistance, sickness absence, reimbursement of travel and subsistence costs. It was noted that consultation on the draft report is open until 26th November 2021, and that the final decision will be made by the IRPW, and is out of the hands of individual Councils. It was noted that all back-benchers are remunerated at

the same rate throughout Wales, however there is a banding for those receiving some senior salaries.

Member of the Committee noted their concerns that the increase to the remuneration appears to be significant, whilst acknowledging that the increase reflects the amount of work carried out by Councillors, which equates to circa 3 days per week for a back-bencher, and that the number of Councillors will be significantly reduced from May 2022. It was noted that Councillors can elect to refuse the increase on an individual basis, and that this information is published on the Council's website. The committee agreed to defer the decision to a Members' Panel, in order that all Members can provide an input into the response that will be sent to the IRPW.

14 Any other matter which the Chairman decides is for the urgent attention of the Committee

Members asked that Officer ensure that confidential voting is in place for the forthcoming Special Meeting of the Council, and noted that they are looking forward to see the roll-out of the improved 'Clic' enquiry system.

**Confirmed at the Meeting of the Democratic Services Committee held
on xx.xx.xxxx**

Chairman: _____

Date: _____