

**Minutes of the Meeting of Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny
Committee**
**held Hybrid - Neuadd Cyngor Ceredigion, Penmorfa, Aberaeron /
remotely via video conference on Tuesday, 16 July 2024**

PRESENT; Councillor Elaine Evans (Chair) Councillors Euros Davies, Ifan Davies, Amanda Edwards, Eryl Evans, Raymond Evans, Rhodri Evans, Hugh Hughes, Ann Bowen Morgan, Caryl Roberts and Carl Worrall

Also in attendance: Councillor Matthew Vaux (Cabinet Member) & Gareth Lloyd

Officers in attendance: Ms Elin Prysor, Corporate Lead Officer, Legal & Governance, Mrs Katy Sinnet-Jones, Governance Officer, Mr Geraint Edwards, Corporate Lead Officer, People & Organisation, Mrs Angharad Nofelo-Rees, Corporate Manager, Employee Experience, People & Organisation, Mrs Liz Merriman, Corporate Manager, Human Resources, Legal, HR and Democratic Services, Mrs Dwynwen Jones, Scrutiny Support Officer and Mrs Dana Jones, Democratic and Standards Officer

(10:00am- 10:50pm)

1 Apologies

Councillor Ceris Jones together with the Leader of the Council, Councillor Bryan Davies apologised for their inability to attend the meeting.

Councillor Paul Hinge apologised for his inability to attend the meeting as on other Council duties.

2 Disclosures of personal interest (including whipping declarations)

Members are reminded of their personal responsibility to declare any personal and prejudicial interest in respect of matters contained in this agenda in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Act 2000, the Council's Constitution and the Members Code of Conduct. In addition, Members must declare any prohibited party whip which the Member has been given in relation to the meeting as per the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011.

None.

3 Report on Ceredigion Senior Coroner's 2023 Statistical Return and Report of the Chief Coroner

Consideration was given to the Report on Ceredigion Senior Coroner's 2023 Statistical Return and Report of the Chief Coroner.

It was reported that the Ceredigion Statistical Return for 2023 was yet to be published but the report was expected by the end of June 2024 and would be

presented to the next Committee in meeting on 8th of October 2024. In relation to the report of the Chief Coroner, the Annual Report of the Chief Coroner for 2023 had now been published and could be found on their website. The Report outlines the findings of the Chief Coroner for 2023.

These were as follows:-

- The service had insufficient personnel
- There was an unacceptably wide variation in the provision by local authorities of material resource
- There remains a general need for more salaried Area Coroners
- The 'triangle of responsibility' creates operational difficulties
- Judicial independence was impacted by the current resourcing structure
- Court security arrangements vary considerably and were rarely adequate
- Recent work increases were likely to be permanent
- Delay
- Judge-led inquests
- The appointment of coroners
- Coroner support

Prospective actions were as follows:-

- engaged with the Senior Coroner and relevant local authority to try to encourage improvement
- challenged many local authority representatives about inadequate office and court accommodation
- encouraging local authorities and police forces to consider simplifying the funding model in their coroner areas by arranging for the relevant local authority to assume responsibility for providing and line-managing the coroner's officers
- provide general education on constitutional matters of particular relevance to coroners.
- plans to implement the statutory medical examiner scheme and reform the death certification system with effect from April 2024
- To educate local authorities on security considerations

In conclusion, it was reported that:-

- many coroner areas had not yet been modernised to reflect the deeper implications of those national reforms.
- need for structural change to simplify and streamline the governance and management of individual coroner areas
- moving away from the outdated 'triangle of responsibility' to adopt a simpler and more efficient system of governance.
- shortage of pathologists
- The report also looked at the number of cases over 12 months old for 2023 compared to 2022.
- Ceredigion had 10 cases over 12 months old for 2023 compared to 2 in 2022

It was also reported that a new Chief Coroner has been appointed on the 25th of May 2024, namely Her Honour Judge Alexia Durran for a term of three years.

The National statistics for the Coroner for 2023 had been published. The report shows that in 2023 across the UK there were 36,855 inquests opened which is a 2% increase on 2022. This was the highest number of inquests opened since the start of the annual time series in 1995, excluding the years when DoLS investigations were required. Reported deaths which led to inquests represented 19% of all the deaths reported to coroners in 2023, an increase from 17% in 2022. The number of inquests opened as a proportion of deaths reported in 2023 varied across coroner areas, from 4% in Ceredigion to 39% in Liverpool and the Wirral. However, most coroner areas held inquests for between 10% and 20% of all deaths reported.

The Coroner's Officer was contacted to provide Inquest data for 2024 to date. However, no information had been received to date. An update would be provided at the next meeting in October 2024.

Members reiterated their concern and disappointment that the information requested at the 12 March 2024 meeting following consideration of the Coroner Report 2022 had not been received, even though the Senior Coroner had replied to the letter on the 22nd of March confirming he would produce a report within the 3 month deadline.

It was AGREED to note the content of the report for information.

4 HR policies - Safe Recruitment Policy, Annual Leave Purchase Scheme , Travelling & Subsistence Guidance

The People & Organisation Service has been continuing to review, develop and update key policies. Following consultation, the following policies and guidance documents had been discussed, amended, and agreed by the recognised corporate trade unions:

- Safe Recruitment Policy
- Annual Leave Purchase Scheme
- Travel, Subsistence and Accommodation Guidance

The purpose of all employee policies and procedures was to clearly set out the behaviours, processes, and procedures required, how they could gain advice and support and, where applicable, the consequences of not adhering to the policy and/or procedure.

Safe Recruitment Policy

The Safe Recruitment Policy sets out Ceredigion County Council's standards towards the safe recruitment and retention of people who wish to work with vulnerable groups, both children and/or adults. The current Policy, introduced in 2017, had been reviewed to ensure that it remains compliant with

legislation and was fit for purpose. Only minor amendments had been proposed and these were detailed below. The revisions were to maintain a robust and thorough vetting process for all staff, volunteers and contractors that work for, or with, Ceredigion County Council.

There are no changes to the current practice of DBS checks only on appointment for roles undertaking regulated activity. Periodic rechecking would only take place where it was required by legislation or if a concern, complaint or information is received relating to the conviction or caution of an employee in a regulated activity role.

The proposed changes to the Policy were as follows:

- Amendments due to the Council no longer being a registered body. All DBS
- checks are now undertaken online in agreement with Powys County Council as the registered body.
- Further clarification provided on pre-employment screening/vetting checks
- Re-formatting the policy to provide a separate section on Disclosure & Barring
- Service and moving sections from the main body in to the appendices.
- Greater clarification on portability of DBS checks
- Removing reference to pre-2012 definition of regulated activity.

In addition to trade union consultation, the Policy has been reviewed by the Council's Corporate Safeguarding Board.

Annual Leave Purchase Scheme

Annual Leave Purchase Schemes were voluntary arrangements which provided employees greater flexibility over their leave entitlement through the purchase of additional leave in a salary repayment arrangement. These schemes were widely found across public and private sector organisations. The scheme offers savings to the Council due to no salary costs for the period of the additional annual leave and a reduction in employer National Insurance contributions. The benefit to the employee was the opportunity to spread the cost of unpaid leave over a period of up to 12 months.

A summary of the scheme's conditions were as follows:

- The maximum amount of additional leave that an employee could purchase would be twice their weekly contractual hours
- The minimum amount of additional leave which can be requested was the equivalent of one day contractual hours
- Applications signed off by the Corporate Lead Officer.
- The Council reserves the right to refuse an application if it was decided that there would be an adverse effect on service delivery. There was no right of appeal.

- Applications could be made throughout the annual leave year up to 31 May. If approved, salary deductions would be calculated based on the number of available months remaining in the annual leave year.
- Employees were encouraged to book their annual leave in the first instance.
- If approved, the Annual Leave Purchase Scheme would be incorporated into the Leave and Absences Policy which was approved by Cabinet on 3 June 2024.

Travel, Subsistence and Accommodation Guidance

The guidance document for employees in relation to travelling and subsistence was last updated in 2015. As part of the review process, advice was sought from the Council's tax advisors to ensure that the final document was compliant with HMRC regulations.

The revised guidance sets out the circumstances under which Council employees on approved Council business can submit claims for travelling costs such as mileage allowances, fuel expenses, public transport, subsistence or accommodation costs.

The most economic form of transport must always be considered.

The proposed changes to the Guidance document were as follows:

- Remove the "Tea allowance" previously paid for absences of greater than 4 hours to include between 3pm and 6pm
- Increase maximum threshold for overnight accommodation from £150 to £200

for inside London and from £95 to £120 for outside London. All overnight accommodation should be booked through the Council's Procurement Team. There was no HMRC level set for overnight accommodation and the proposal to increase the threshold was following analysis of the current prices for inside and outside London.

Following discussion and questions from the floor, it was AGREED to recommend the approval of the following to Cabinet:-

- Safe Recruitment Policy
- Annual Leave Purchase Scheme
- Travel, Subsistence and Accommodation Guidance

5 Forward work Programme

It was AGREED to note the Forward Work Programme as presented subject to a report on the sale of the Council assets at the October 2024 meeting.

6 To confirm minutes of the 16th May 2024 meeting and to consider any matters arising from those Minutes.

It was RESOLVED to confirm as a true record the Minutes of the Meeting of the previous meeting subject to noting that Councillor Carl Worrall was present at the meeting.

Confirmed at the Meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 8 October 2024

Chairman: _____

Date: _____