

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Democratic Services Committee
held remotely via videoconferencing on Thursday, 15th October 2020**

PRESENT: Councillor Ceredig Davies (Chairman); Councillors Clive Davies, Lloyd Edwards, Gwyn James, Dai Mason and Wyn Thomas.

Councillors Keith Evans and Rhodri Evans were also in attendance.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE: Lowri Edwards, Corporate Lead Officer: Democratic Services; Elin Prysor, Corporate Lead Officer: Legal and Governance, Nia Jones, Corporate Manager: Democratic Services; Lisa Evans, Standards and Scrutiny Officer.

(10.00am –11.15am)

1 **Procedure**

The Chairman welcomed all to the meeting.

2 **Apologies**

There were no apologies received.

3 **Disclosure of Personal and Prejudicial Interest**

There were no disclosures of interest.

4 **Minutes of the Meeting held on 20th January 2020**

It was **RESOLVED** to note the minutes of the meeting held 20th January 2020 as correct.

5 **Annual Report of the Democratic Services Committee**

Councillor Ceredig Davies, Chair of the Committee presented the report to the committee, noting that it is an annual statutory document which reflects the work of the committee during the previous municipal year. It was noted that the report will be presented to the Council on 16 October 2020.

Following discussion, it was **RESOLVED** to approve the draft Democratic Services Committee Annual Report for presenting to Council on 16th October 2020.

6 **Report on Holding Remote Meetings**

The Corporate Lead Officer, Democratic Services presented the report to the committee, noting the present circumstances due to the Coronavirus outbreak is not unique to Ceredigion. However due to exceptional insight, Ceredigion County Council held its Annual General Meeting prior to the lockdown in March of this year.

She noted that Ceredigion County Council had conducted an extensive review of the various systems and mechanisms for holding remote meetings, and decided upon 'zoom' as it provides a mechanism for

translation. Meetings resumed during the Summer, and a full programme of meetings were re-convened from September onwards.

It was noted that the system, planning and support is resource intensive, and as such agendas and reports are provided to Members electronically. Only one Councillor receives printed documents at present, and whilst it is appreciated that this can be challenging, there has been no negative feedback.

It was noted that the 6 month rule in relation to attendance is still in force, however attendance by remote meetings has been higher than that of the Council Chamber, and there are no concerns relating to this. It was confirmed that meetings at the Chamber would not resume whilst the Welsh Government advice is to work from home where possible, and whilst the number of COVID-19 cases in Ceredigion higher now than at the time of the original lockdown. Members of the public and the press are able to join meetings remotely, and the Council and Cabinet meetings are live-streamed as-spoken or with translation from Welsh to English, via facebook.

It was confirmed that a revised specification for extending the webcast provision in the Council Chamber was due to go out to tender, and that further information would be provided to the Committee when available.

Members noted that the attached supporting documents were extremely useful, and asked whether additional funding for resources were required. It was also noted that video footage had been provided during Development Control Committee meetings as site meetings cannot take place at present. Councillor Ceredig Davies thanked the staff for their work, acknowledging that there would be improvements to the technology with time.

Members raised concerns regarding meetings of Community Councils, and were advised to contact 'Un Llais Cymru' for advice.

Prior to the meeting, Councillor Keith Evans had submitted a query in relation to investigating the possibility of providing a group high speed broadband / fibre contract for all Councillors and Senior Officers of the Council, potentially as a pilot scheme. It was confirmed that a request would be sent to ICT Services to look into this matter. Councillor Clive Davies, Member Champion for IT noted that he will be meeting with the Head of 'Openreach' next week and will discuss this. In addition, it was noted that Peter Williams from Welsh Government will be attending the next Overview and Scrutiny Corporate Resources meeting regarding Broadband coverage.

Following discussion is was **RESOLVED** to ask ICT to look into the possibility of providing a broadband group account.

7 **The results of the annual self-evaluation of Overview and Scrutiny Survey**

The Standards and Scrutiny Officer, Democratic Services presented the report to the committee.

It was noted that the number of respondents was twenty-five; however, the responses on the whole were reassuring. On the recommendation of this committee, the number of questions had been reduced to 9 with an aim to increase participation, however this had not happened.

Councillor Ceredig Davies noted his disappointment with the low level of responses as this is an opportunity for Members to convey their views. He noted that there was only one individual that was unhappy, and took it that those who did not respond were satisfied.

He referred to the timings of Committees, acknowledging that each time a review is held, they majority have asked for the current pattern to continue. It was noted that attending remote meetings is less demanding on the time of those who work during the day and that there would be additional challenges to holding remote meetings outside of office hours.

Following discussion is was **RESOLVED** to approve the Annual Overview and Scrutiny Self-Evaluation report.

8 **Forward work programme for 2021**

Consideration was given to the forward work programme for 2021, and it was noted the progression of the Local Government Bill through the Senedd had been suspended for a period due to COVID-19; however this would resume over the next few weeks.

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the forward work programme as presented.

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

Prior to the meeting, Councillor Keith Evans had submitted a query in relation to recording absenteeism due to changes to the date of committees. Councillor Ceredig Davies acknowledged that the COVID-19 outbreak had placed a lot of additional pressure on Officers, and changes had been inevitable.

It was noted that currently absences due to Members attending other meetings as representatives of Ceredigion County Council were recorded; however a statement could be added to the report to recognise this, and it was also recommended that Councillors record this information in their Annual Reports.

Two other queries had been submitted relating to road closures identified as 'Safe Zones' and responses to issues submitted via 'Clic'. It was noted that the details of these queries may not be relevant to this Committee and that both matters will be discussed by the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committees. Councillor Ceredig Davies however noted that this committee is responsible for ensuring that Members are notified and informed on procedural matters generally.

**Confirmed at the Meeting of the Democratic Services Committee held on
xxx**

CHAIRMAN:
