

CEREDIGION COUNTY COUNCIL

Report to:	Democratic Services Committee
Date:	17th June 2022
Title:	Members' Schedule of Remuneration 2022/23 – matters referred for consideration by the Council
Purpose of report:	To consider matters referred to the Committee for consideration prior to making a recommendation to Council on 7th July 2022.

Background

The Council is required to produce its Members' Schedule of Remuneration on an annual basis in order to exercise of the powers conferred by the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 (the Measure) and as amended by Sections 62 to 67 of the Local Government (Democracy) (Wales) Act 2013; Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales Regulations. In addition, the Schedule must meet the requirements of the Independent Remuneration Panel's Annual Report.

The Members' Schedule of Remuneration for 2022/23 was presented to the Council on 20th May 2022. Council approved the Schedule, save for the following, which it was agreed would be deferred for further consideration by the Democratic Services Committee:

- Paragraph 8; bullet point 6 and 7 of the covering report –
“In line with the Local Government and Elections Act 2021, the Council will be holding hybrid meetings which means that not all Councillors will need to be present in the Council Chamber in order to attend meetings. Those that are not members of the respective Committee or are specifically invited to attend, should attend meetings remotely.

In person attendance at conferences, seminars, external meetings and training events must receive prior authorisation from the Corporate Lead Officer, Democratic Services.”

- Paragraph 15.1 of the Schedule – “Overnight stays will only be permitted where the Authority's business extends to two days or more, or the venue is at such a distance that early morning or late night travel would be unreasonable. All overnight stays must receive prior authorisation from the Corporate Lead Officer: Democratic Services.”

Rationale for the proposed changes

- Local Government and Elections Act 2021

The Act states that “a local authority must make and publish arrangements for the purpose of ensuring that local authority meetings are able to be held by means of any equipment or other facility which enables persons who are not in the same place to attend the meetings”

Supported by a Welsh Government grant, the Council has invested in new equipment in the Council Chamber, which enables the Council to meet the new statutory requirements.

Phase 1 of the work has been completed. Phase 2 will improve the experience for those attending in person and remotely and will provide more functionality.

In recent weeks, we have also already seen examples where Councillors and Officers have attended meetings remotely.

- Diversity

On 23rd September 2021, Ceredigion County Council endorsed the WLGA ‘Diversity in Democracy Declaration’.

Over recent years, the WLGA has been taking steps to advance gender equality and diversity in local democracy and ensuring that the barriers and challenges to attracting more diverse councillors are taken. The WLGA identified the barriers and challenges as broadly:

- Time commitment and meeting times;
- Political and organisational culture;
- Childcare and other caring responsibilities;
- Public criticism and online abuse;
- Remuneration and impact on employment; and
- Lack of diverse role models and incumbency.

Leading up to the Local Elections 2022, the key steps undertaken by Ceredigion County Council to attracting more diverse councillors included:

- A Candidate’s Guide for prospective candidates in the Local Elections. This detailed the role of a Councillor, the different Committees, the nomination process etc. The Guide also referred to the contributions the Council can make to the cost of care as well family absence etc.
- Enabling hybrid meetings to take place which will provide flexibility for those who may have caring or work commitments;
- Broadcasting meetings or enabling people to join meetings remotely so that they can see the type of discussions that take place.

- Carbon

The Council has adopted a Carbon Management Plan 2018-2023 which sets out the strategy and action plan for reducing carbon emissions during that period. The Plan outlines a set of actions where Ceredigion County Council 'sets an example by leading the way amongst public sector organisations'.

The Plan identifies reducing business travel as a means of contributing towards the reduction of carbon. Moving to a hybrid model will significantly reduce budget costs and subsequently carbon footprint of Members and Officers.

- Budget

You will be aware that Ceredigion County Council has made over £50m budget savings in the last 10 years, with further significant savings projected for the next 3 years at least.

All budgets have been reduced, including travelling budgets for both Officers and Members. During this period Officer expenses have reduced from circa. £2.4m to £750k. However, over the same timespan members expenses have remained constant at around £45k per annum.

Historically, Members and Officers have regularly been called to meetings in Cardiff which last no more than 1 hr. There are examples where Members and Officers are requested to attend a second meeting the next day and subsequently overnight accommodation is also required. Using the technology available will result in considerable corporate savings and set a good example for future working practises across the Country.

Conclusions

The matters highlighted above illustrate the need to carefully manage travelling claims made both within the County and outside the County.

The Council has invested in the technology to enable Members to attend meetings remotely, thereby saving costs, carbon and time.

We are actively asking organisations such as Welsh Government, WLGA etc. to ensure there is always an option for both Officers and Members to be able to attend meetings, conferences, training etc. remotely.

The pandemic has demonstrated that attending meetings remotely are effective and efficient, especially for out of county meetings.

The requirement to seek authorisation from the Corporate Lead Officer: Democratic Services for overnight stays has been in place and approved by the Council since 2017.

Recommendations: For the Committee to consider the rationale for the proposed changes to the Members' Schedule of Remuneration 2022/23 and to make a formal recommendation to Council.

Appendices: None.

Background documents: Report to Council, 20th May 2022 – Members' Schedule of Remuneration 2022/23 (which includes the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales' Annual Report 2022/23);

Local Government and Elections Act 2021;

Report to Council 23rd September 2021 – Diversity in Democracy Declaration;

Candidates' Guide for prospective candidates in the Local Elections 2022;

Carbon Management Plan;

Report to Council, 3rd March 2022 – Budget for 2022/23;

Medium Term Financial Strategy 2022/23 onwards;

Members' Allowances previous years.

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Date: 08.06.2022