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DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

Minutes of a remote meeting held on 22nd November, 2021.

The Committee agenda is available [here](#).

The Meeting recording is available [here](#).

Present: Councillor V.J. Bailey (Chair); Councillor G.D.D. Carroll (Vice-Chair); Councillors S.M. Hanks, K.F. McCaffer, S.D. Perkes, A.R. Robertson, and M.R. Wilson.

Also, present: Councillors L. Rowlands and E Williams.

ANNOUNCEMENT –

Prior to the commencement of the business of the Committee, the Chair read the following statement: “May I remind everyone present that the meeting will be live streamed as well as recorded via the internet and this recording archived for future viewing”.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE –

These were received from Councillors M. Morgan and N.C Thomas

MINUTES –

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 12th July, 2021 be approved as a correct record.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

No declarations were received.

INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL FOR WALES (IRPW) DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23 - CONSULTATION (HDS) –

The Head of Democratic Services presented the report advising that it was the fourteenth Annual Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (the Panel), published under the requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 (as amended). The Panel had consistently and vigorously expressed in previous Annual Reports that local democracy and governance of public services were not cost free and should be valued to enable everyone to participate. Levels of remuneration needed to be set at a level sufficient to encourage a diversity of willing

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and able people to undertake local governance through elected, appointed or co-opted roles.

Since 2009, it was the view of the Panel that remuneration of elected members of local government in Wales had not kept pace with measures of inflation or other possible comparators. These included Retail Prices Index, Consumer Prices Index, NJC (public sector employees), National Living Wage (NLW), the Living Wage Foundation's Living Wage (LWF) rates, Members of Senedd Cymru, MPs and also the Annual Survey of Hourly Earnings (ASHE). The Panel considered that this had undervalued the worth of elected local Councillors and that it was now time to restore the link to ASHE as the most appropriate comparator.

The Covid pandemic had also put unprecedented pressures on locally elected Councillors and public servants. As Wales emerged from the pandemic, there was increased awareness that the nation needed to draw on a diverse talent pool to meet the scale of the ongoing challenges facing the nation. Local governance needed to engage lived experience and knowledge of local people.

Although the changes proposed would normally take effect on 1st April each year in light of the Local Government Elections in Wales scheduled to take place on 5th May, 2022 it was the Panel's view that 9th May, 2022 was the best date to enact a 'significant reset' and invest in local democracy in Wales with the proposed increase in remuneration levels coming into effect from this date.

The Head of Democratic Services also indicated that he had previously emailed to all Councillors on 6th October, the IRPW Draft Annual Report which included the proposed determinations for 2022/23, inviting them to individually respond to the consultation exercise by the deadline of 26th November 2021.

Councillor Robertson commented that in his view it was not the time for such increases given the wider challenges faced as a result of the pandemic and the financial and economic pressures faced by local government, local residents and other sectors.

However, some Members in acknowledging the issues raised by Councillor Robertson, in their view did not outweigh the need to look to the future, encourage greater diversity within Local Government and that it was also difficult to balance all the factors that needed to be considered in order to attract a diverse range of candidates to the role of a Councillor. It was noted that the proposed increases would be met from within existing resources.

Councillor Wilson also drew attention to the other elements of the role of a locally elected councillor e.g., school governor roles and responsibilities and community work where no remuneration was received. For those Members holding a "back bench" role, in no other employment, the allowance less National Insurance and income tax contributions, the remuneration was relatively small.

The Chair having regard to the contents of the draft Annual Report and the comments made particularly in regard to the timing of the proposed increases in remuneration, reminded the Committee that the IRPW'S remit was to make such

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determinations and consequently suggested that the draft response as set out in the appendix to the report be endorsed as the Council's formal response to the consultation.

RESOLVED – T H A T the draft response as set out in Appendix A to the report be endorsed and forwarded to the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales by the consultation deadline of 26th November 2021.

Reason for decision

In view of the information contained within the report, discussions at the meeting and in order that the IRPW can be informed of the Committee's response on behalf of the Council.

COUNCILLOR SAFETY AND SUPPORT (HDS) –

The report set out useful guidance so that Councillors understood the steps they should take to keep themselves safe. The Authority's Lone Working Policy attached as an Appendix to the report applied to employees with its purpose being to ensure that there were adequate systems in place to ensure the Health, Safety and Wellbeing of Lone Workers.

In presenting the report the Head of Democratic Services drew attention to Appendix B to the report which detailed a guide relating to the Personal Safety of Councillors. The guidance had been prepared with the specific purpose of providing advice to assist Councillors carrying out their roles safely and effectively. The Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales' Annual Report stated that an Authority must support the work of its Councillors and Statutory Co-opted Members to enable them to carry out their duties and this included the safety of its Councillors.

Whilst the Democratic Services Committee was under a duty to fund and provide the support necessary to enable Councillors to discharge their roles reasonably and safely it was not practicable to bring individual requests to the Committee, particularly in the event that some requests may be urgent. It was therefore proposed that the Head of Democratic Services and the Head of Finance / Section 151 Officer be delegated authority to consider any requests to provide funding for appropriate security measures by Councillors.

It was further noted that any such request would be considered on its merits, but there would be an expectation that security measures had been advised by the Police or security services. The relevant bodies would therefore normally inform the required provision of support with any funding to be reasonable and proportionate.

Councillor Carroll although acknowledging that events in this regard may be rare was pleased that the matter was being taken seriously by the Council. Councillor Wilson also commented that in single Member wards some Members would be in a more vulnerable position than others.

Councillor Perkes considered that it was important that Members took the necessary

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precautions and suggested that the implications and advice be reaffirmed to all Members on a frequent basis. Following the discussion, it was

RESOLVED –

(1) T H A T the Guidance be endorsed and placed on the Authority’s website and emailed to all Councillors subject to Resolutions (2) and (3) below.

(2) T H A T it be recommended to the next Cabinet and Council meetings that where a Councillor is at personal risk or significant threat of harm in carrying out their role that consideration be given to funding appropriate security measures particularly in instances where such measures have been advised by the police or security services.

(3) T H A T it be recommended to the next Cabinet and Council meetings that delegated authority be granted to the Head of Democratic Services and the Head of Finance / Section 151 Officer to consider and determine any request for such funding.

Reasons for decisions

(1) To agree for the Guidance to provide a formal mechanism to be put in place for safeguarding purposes.

(2&3) To support Councillors in carrying out their various elected roles.

DIVERSITY IN DEMOCRACY – ACTION PLAN (HDS) –

The Head of Democratic Services advised that Council, at its meeting on 26th July 2021 had considered an initial report on Diversity in Democracy resolving as follows (Minute No. 298):

“(1) T H A T the making of the following Vale of Glamorgan “Diverse Council” Declaration be approved: “The Vale of Glamorgan Council will:

(i) Provide a clear, public commitment to improving diversity;

(ii) Demonstrate an open and welcoming culture to all;

(iii) Consider staggering Council meeting times and agreeing recess periods to support Councillors with other commitments; and

(iv) Set out an action plan of activity ahead of the 2022 Local Government Elections.”

A Draft Diversity in Democracy Action Plan had therefore been prepared which was attached at Appendix A to the report for the Committees consideration. The plan included details of planned activities to be undertaken by the Council ahead of the Local Government Elections in 2022 as well as some activities that were proposed to

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be undertaken following the elections. The objectives within the Action Plan had been based on those suggested by Welsh Government.

RESOLVED – T H A T the Diversity in Democracy Action Plan be endorsed, and the report and Action Plan be referred to the next meetings of Cabinet and Council recommending adoption of the Action Plan.

Reason for decision

To formally adopt the proposed Action Plan and to support the work associated with Welsh Government's Diversity in Democracy Agenda.