

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

SUBJECT: DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE - 5TH NOVEMBER, 2019

REPORT OF:

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR M. CROSS (CHAIR)

Councillors M. Cook
N. Daniels
G. A. Davies
P. Edwards
K. Hayden
M. Holland
J. Millard
J. C. Morgan
K. Pritchard

WITH:

ITEM	SUBJECT	ACTION
No. 1	<u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u> It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.	
No. 2	<u>APOLOGIES</u> Apologies for absence were received for:- Councillors J. Hill, W. Hodgins, K. Rowson and J. Wilkins.	
No. 3	<u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u>	

There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.

No. 4 **DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE**

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 1st July, 2019, whereupon:-

Apologies

It was noted that Councillor Julie Holt had submitted her apologies for the above meeting.

The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the Minutes be received as a true record of proceedings.

No. 5 **DRAFT REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL FOR WALES 2020/2021**

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Organisational Development.

At the invitation of the Chair, the Organisational Development Manager spoke to the report and highlighted the following salient points contained therein:-

- The report detailed the main determinations of the 2020/21 draft annual report of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (IRPW).
- As part of the consultation process Panel Members had met with the Heads of Democratic Services and Chairs of Democratic Services Committee. The position generally expressed by both officers and Members remained, particularly in the context of austerity, that the basic workload discharged by all elected Members was substantial and exceeded 3 days per week.
- When making financial determinations for the Annual Report the Panel had determined that there should be an increase in the basic salary level in 2020/2021 of £350 per year which equated to 2.5%.

- It was noted that this basic salary in the sum of £14,218 should be paid by each principal authority in Wales from 1st April, 2020 to each of its elected Members unless an individual Member opted personally and in writing to receive a lower amount.
- No additional increases would be paid to senior salary holders in 2020/2021 – these Members would receive the basic salary element increase.
- There was no change to the reimbursement of Costs of Care, this remained at a maximum of £403 per month upon production of receipts from the carer. It was noted that the IRPW were currently undertaking a review of this provision with a view to encouraging a greater take up by those Members who had caring responsibilities.
- Previously it had been the decision of each principal Council in how the cost of care was published. However, for 2020/2021 the IRPW had removed this option and stipulated that ‘the Panel had decided that the relevant authorities should only publish the total amount reimbursed during the year’.

The views of Members were, thereupon, sought in relation to the report.

- **Reimbursement of Costs of Care** - the Chair commended the continued inclusion of the reimbursement of the costs of care for those Members who had caring responsibilities within the draft proposals.

The Head of Governance & Partnerships (Statutory Head of Democratic Services) advised that this issue had been discussed at length at the IRPW consultation event. It was noted that there was generally a low take up in Wales for reimbursement of the costs of care and the IRPW as outlined above was undertaking a review of this provision with a view to encouraging a greater take up by those Members who had caring responsibilities.

Those Members who felt they needed this support was urged to contact the Head of Governance & Partnerships (Statutory Head of Democratic Services).

- **Supporting the Work of Elected Members** – a Member referred to Paragraph 2.9.1 of the report i.e. that the Panel did not consider it appropriate that Members should be required to pay for internet related services to enable them to discharge their council duties and asked whether there should be an upper limit applied to this provision (for example £10-15 per month).

The Chair pointed out that there were currently problems being experienced in some parts of Wales in terms of internet connections and suggested that this pertinent point be discussed with Panel Members.

The Head of Governance & Partnerships confirmed that certain parts of Wales did experience issues with internet access and broadband speeds. However, the Panel did not consider it appropriate that elected Members should be required to pay for internet related services to enable them to discharge their council duties and the Member's comment would be raised as part of the consultation process on the draft proposals.

This was action was AGREED accordingly.

- **Payments to Members of Town and Community Councils** – in reply to a point raised, the Head of Governance & Partnerships advised that the Town and Community Councils would be aware of this aspect of the report and would have had the opportunity to comment and make observations to the IRPW in respect of the draft proposals.

It was noted that the IRPW was eager to meet with representatives of Town and Community Councils through the Council Liaison Meeting and arrangements would be made for the representatives to attend a future Liaison Meeting.

Upon a vote being taken it was unanimously,

The Committee AGREED to recommend to Council, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and Option 1 be endorsed, namely the determinations as set out in the draft Independent

Remuneration Panel for Wales report be noted.

No. 6

DEMOCRATIC ARRANGEMENTS AND SCRUTINY PROGRESS REPORT

The report of the Service Manager Performance & Democratic was submitted for consideration.

At the invitation of the Chair, the Service Manager Performance & Democratic spoke in detail to the report which provided Democratic Arrangements and Scrutiny Progress covering the period April to September 2019.

The Service Manager concluded by drawing Members' attention to the reducing level of attendance at Scrutiny Committees compared to the 1st and 2nd quarters of this year and compared to the same quarter the previous year.

The views of Members were, thereupon, sought in relation to the report.

- **Mobile Iron App** – a Member expressed his concern that the intranet was only available for those who had access to a laptop and enquired whether the same service could be provided for Members who accessed information on iPads.

The Service Manager undertook to investigate this matter.

- **Modern.Gov** – a Member expressed his concern that he was unable to access the agenda paperwork for the authority via the Council's website.

The Head of Governance & Partnerships (Statutory Head of Democratic Services) explained that technical issues were being experienced with the Moder.Gov 'app' at present and work was being undertaken with the SRS to rectify this issue. However, agenda paperwork was still accessible publicly via the internet.

Councillor J. Millard joined the meeting at this juncture.

- **Webcasting** – the Chair commended the approach to webcasting and said he hoped that meetings of the Council could be webcast in the future.

Another Member added that in previous years the Council had webcast meetings as a pilot approach and said that he would also welcome meetings being webcast in the future.

- **Member Attendance at Scrutiny Committees/Members Briefings** – a Member expressed his concern regarding the number of Scrutiny Committees/Members Briefings that had been cancelled or rescheduled recently and asked that this matter be addressed.

The Head of Governance & Partnerships (Statutory Head of Democratic Services) undertook to pursue the matter.

A brief discussion ensued when another Member also expressed his concern regarding the low level of attendance at Members Briefings and at Scrutiny Committees.

The Chair suggested that attendance levels be discussed within respective political group meetings.

- **My Council Services App** – in reply to a request, the Head of Governance & Partnerships undertook to pursue whether there was an option available to report several issues at once on the My Council Services App rather than individual service requests being submitted. The importance of the using of this app to report issues was noted as this app was able to capture and record vial information.

The Committee AGREED to recommend to Council, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and Option 1 be endorsed, namely that the information contained with the report be noted and the report be recommended to Council for approval.