

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

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

SUBJECT: DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE - 16TH MARCH, 2020

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC OFFICER

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR M. CROSS (CHAIR)

Councillors M. Cook
N. Daniels
M. Day
P. Edwards
M. Holland
J. Holt
H. McCarthy, B.A. (Hons)
J. Millard
J. C. Morgan
K. Pritchard

WITH: **Scrutiny Chairs & Vice-Chairs**

Councillors J. Hill
C. Meredith
L. Parsons
S. Thomas
J. Wilkins

Head of Governance & Partnerships (Statutory Head of Democratic Services)
Organisational Development Manager

ITEM	SUBJECT	ACTION
No. 1	<u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u> It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.	

<p>No. 2</p>	<p><u>APOLOGIES</u></p> <p>Apologies for absence were received for:-</p> <p>Councillors G. A. Davies, K. Hayden, W. Hodgins, G. Paulsen, T. Sharrem, H. Trollope.</p>	
<p>No. 3</p>	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.</p>	
<p>No. 4</p>	<p><u>DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 5th November, 2019, whereupon:</p> <p>Councillor S. Thomas left the meeting at this juncture.</p> <p><u>Apology for Absence</u></p> <p>It was noted that Councillor Lee Parson’s apology for absence had not been recorded.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the Minutes be received as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
<p>No. 5</p>	<p><u>ANNUAL REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL FOR WALES 2020/2021</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Organisational Development.</p> <p>Councillors N. Daniels and S. Thomas joined the meeting at this juncture.</p> <p>At the invitation of the Chair, the Organisational Development Manager spoke briefly to the report and highlighted the following salient points contained therein:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (IRPW) published an annual report detailing its determinations for the upcoming year. 	

- For 2020/2021, the Panel had determined that there would be an increase of £350 a year in the basic salary.
- No additional increases would be paid to senior salary holders in 2020/2021 – only the basic salary element increase would be received.
- Councils were committed to ‘paperless working’ and without electronic access Members would be significantly limited in their ability to discharge their duties. It was not appropriate for facilities required by Members to be only available within council offices within office hours.
- The responsibility of each Council through its Democratic Services Committee to provide support should be based on an assessment of the needs of its Members.
- The Panel had determined that there would be no change to mileage rates which Members were entitled to claim.
- Reimbursement of Costs of Care – 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. However, the Panel was continuing to review this provision as it was clear that very few Members were utilising it and on 13th February, 2020 the Panel published a draft supplementary report – ‘Principals relating to the Reimbursement of Costs of Care’. This consultation would end on 9th April, 2020 and comments prior to the publication of the final report would be appreciated.

In addition, previously it had been the decision of each principal Council to determine how the cost of care was published. For 2020/2021 the Panel had removed that option and had stipulated that authorities should only publish the total amount reimbursed during the year.

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

Paperless Working – a Member referred to paragraph 2.9.2 of the report i.e. “Councils were committed to ‘paperless working’ and without electronic access Members would be significantly limited in their ability to discharge their duties”.

Taking into the consideration the Covid 19 pandemic which would affect everyone, it now was definitely the time for the Council to come into the 21st Century in terms of its ICT provision and as the Council was not currently complying with this determination there was a need for this matter to be addressed urgently.

The Head of Governance & Partnerships acknowledged the important point relating to the Covid 19 outbreak and advised that this would be pursued as part of the Emergency Response Team arrangements. In terms of compliance, it was reported that the Council was complying with the Panel's determination as all Members had been offered ICT provision and were able to access this outside of normal office hours.

The Member continued by stating that Members had received contradictory advice in terms of devices i.e. some had been offered laptops but some had declined this on the advice received and had purchased I Pads, however, accessibility issues were still being experienced by those Members who were using laptops. He concluded by stating in his opinion this determination was not being complied with and this issue needed to be addressed urgently.

Another Member stated that further guidance needed to be sought in terms of ICT provision and what would work best for Councillors.

The Chair pointed out that the Council could not insist that all Members used ICT but for those Members who used the devices further assistance should be provided as there were some issues with access particularly at the weekends.

In reply to a question regarding testing of telephone/video conferencing facilities, the Head of Governance & Partnerships advised that this would be discussed and pursued as part of the governance arrangements and would take into account demographics. It was noted that Council's Constitution also outlined governance arrangements during an emergency situation and this would also be reviewed as part of that process.

The Leader confirmed that he had spoken to the Managing Director regarding this matter and advised that these discussions would continue and would be brought into political arena as soon as possible.

A Member said that he hoped that the wellbeing of staff was being carefully considered, as some staff as part of their duties met with members of the public. Focus should be given to this primary group of officers.

For clarification, the Head of Governance & Partnerships advised that Council's had no jurisdiction to amend the determinations of the Panel and the Senior Salary Bands were detailed on page 38 of the Panel's Annual Report. The Chair added that there was an option for any individual to opt personally and in writing to receive a lower amount.

Upon a vote being taken it was unanimously it was,

AGREED to recommend to Council, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and Option 1 be endorsed, namely that the determinations contained in the IRPW Annual Report for 2020/2021 be agreed.

No. 6

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

The report of the Head of Governance & Partnerships (Statutory Head of Democratic Services) was submitted for consideration.

The Head of Governance & Partnerships spoke in detail to the report which provided a summary of the comprehensive arrangements that were in place to support Members. The points raised in the earlier item were noted and Members were advised that advice and guidance in terms of ICT provision would be sought.

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

Modern.Gov Agenda Management System – concern was expressed that Members were unable to view 'confidential' items on this system. In addition, these items were unable to viewed on the I Pad 'app'.

The Head of Governance and Partnerships whilst undertaking to pursue this matter pointed out that 'confidential' items could be accessed via Members' laptops.

The additional comments/question were raised:

- Most people used android devices and this should have been pursued earlier by the I.T. department.
- If Members were being asked to use a variety of platforms could separate passwords be provided to access these sites?
- There was a need for the Council to focus on how it would move forward in terms of its ICT arrangements in the future. One local authority had established a Members Working Group that would produce its own report and this would be used to supplement the reports provided by officers.

The Chair proposed that a representative from the Shared Resource Service (SRS) be invited to the next meeting of the Committee in order that Members had the opportunity to ask these poignant questions. As the date for the next meeting of the Committee had yet to be set, the Chair confirmed that a Special Committee would be convened specifically to discuss issues in relation to ICT arrangements.

It was pointed out that the SRS was currently undertaking priority work as part of the emergency response arrangements to the Covid-19 pandemic and it was acknowledged by the Chair that this work would need to take precedence.

This course of action was AGREED accordingly.

Upon a vote being taken it was unanimously it was,

FURTHER AGREED to recommend to Council, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and Option 2 be endorsed, namely that the Committee had made specific recommendations for Council for consideration prior to approval.