

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

**SUBJECT: DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE –
9TH NOVEMBER, 2020**

**REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC & COMMITTEE SUPPORT
OFFICER**

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR J.C. MORGAN (CHAIR)

Councillors B. Summers
J. Collins
G.A. Davies
M. Day
L. Parsons
K. Pritchard

ALSO: Scrutiny Chairs & Vice-Chairs

Councillors M. Cook
J. Hill
J. Holt
C. Meredith
M. Moore
S. Thomas
H. Trollope

**AND: Head of Governance & Partnerships
(Statutory Head of Democratic Services)
Organisational Development Manager –
Payroll, Health & Safety**

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 & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</u>	

	<p>Apologies for absence were received from Councillors G. Collier, L. Elias and H. McCarthy.</p> <p>The Chair expressed his thanks to Councillor Malcolm Cross for his time as Chair of the Democratic Services Committee.</p>	
No. 3	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.</p>	
No. 4	<p><u>DEMOCRATIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 16th March, 2020.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the Minutes be received as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
No. 5	<p><u>DRAFT REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL FOR WALES 2021/22</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Organisational Development which was presented to inform Members of the proposals contained within the draft report of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales 2021/22.</p> <p>At the invitation of the Chair, the Organisational Development Manager spoke to the report and highlighted that the report considered the main proposals included within the 2021/22 draft report as they related directly to Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council.</p> <p>The views of Members were, thereupon, sought in relation to the report.</p> <p>A Member enquired regarding the care component in relation to personal expenses. The Organisational Development Manager explained that when reported under the statement of payments made, the bottom entry within the statement of accounts showed the total value reimbursed, there was no reference attributed to any elected Member in the detail.</p>	

The Head of Government & Partnerships added that during the last consultation period and the discussion around how the cost of care was reported it had been agreed by this Committee and Council that it would be reported as an aggregated amount and not attributed to individuals.

A Member referred to para 2.12.6 of the report and enquired if the Authority were encouraging diversity and promoting the take-up of contributions towards the costs of care and personal assistance. The Head of Governance & Partnerships said that as Head of Democratic Services she actively supported and encouraged Members to claim a contribution of cost of care. She felt that some Members could benefit from this opportunity, however, it was Members personal choice. This message was also reiterated when the report was presented to Council. If Members wished to discuss this matter with the Head of Democratic Services, she would welcome the opportunity to further encourage take up of this offer.

With reference to paragraph 2.13 Entitlement to Family Absence, a Member enquired if there was a set time period for an elected Member substituting for a senior salary holder. The Head of Governance & Partnerships said that although reference was made to this, there was no specific time limit stated in the report. A few anomalies had been identified during the consultation period and there were elements of the draft report that needed improvement. She felt that if there was an instance where a substitute was appointed to a senior salary role, the duration of that appointment would depend on the personal circumstances of the situation and full Council would decide on what approach should be taken.

A Member enquired regarding remuneration to support Members to improve digital connectivity, broadband speeds etc. The Organisational Development Manager said the draft report made reference to elected Members to have ready use of e-mail services and electronic access to appropriate information via an internet connection. Without adequate connections Members would be significantly limited in their ability to discharge their duties.

The Head of Governance & Partnerships said that the general point from the report was around Members being supported to access appropriate digital ICT equipment and arrangements so they were not disadvantaged and felt that this may not necessarily be a payment for enhanced broadband connectivity. The draft report did not make reference to this in specific terms, the Head of Governance & Partnerships would forward these comments for consideration as part of the consultation process.

The Chair commented that ICT issues were becoming more prevalent going forward.

A Member referred to the significant differences in connectivity in different areas of the borough and was happy to pay for reliable broadband. He felt that consideration should be given to public perception around this issue.

In response to a Member's question regarding mileage expenses and subsistence allowances, the Organisational Development Manager clarified that the Council paid in line with HMRC rates and as long as the payment was equal or less than the HMRC rate, there were no tax implications at all on mileage claims. There were no tax implications on subsistence allowances as this was a reimbursement of actual receipt amounts up to the maximum amount.

The Head of Governance & Partnerships commented that this was an opportunity for Members to make any specific and affirmative observations during the consultation period. The final version of the report was due in February 2021 and would be presented to this Committee at the end of February/early March in line with the Forward Work Programme. The IRP report would be presented to Council with the Panel's determinations set for the Council to abide by.

A Member raised concerns regarding ICT connectivity issues and upon discussion it was proposed that this issue be raised as part of the Democratic Arrangements Year End Progress report on the Forward Work Programme.

The Committee AGREED this course of action.

	<p>Councillor Gareth A. Davies left the meeting at this juncture.</p> <p>Upon a vote being taken it was unanimous that</p> <p>The Committee 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 Report in Appendix 1 for 2021/2022 be agreed.</p>	
<p>No. 6</p>	<p><u>PROPOSED DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2020/21</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Chair of the Democratic Services Committee.</p> <p>The Head of Governance & Partnerships spoke to the reports on the Forward Work Programme. This Committee meeting had been delayed due to the pandemic and the next meeting had been proposed for the end of February/early March so Members would have an opportunity to have sight of the final IRP report before being presented to Council. Democratic Arrangements Year End Progress report would give a year end position and tie in with the Annual Report of the Head of Democratic Services. With regard to the Statement of Payments and Schedule of Members Remuneration, statutory obligations remained within the time scale set and this work needed to carry on. The final IRP report would be added to the Forward Work Programme if available.</p> <p>In response to a Member's question regarding SRS colleagues being invited to a future meeting to discuss issues with digital connectivity, the Head of Governance & Partnerships advised Members that due to the pandemic connectivity issues had dramatically moved on since the last debate with Members now accessing formal Committee meetings via Microsoft Teams and online with support from Officers and this was the same picture throughout Wales. ICT issues raised in the previous debate had been very specific and may not be relevant now. Moving forward, Members remote attendance could be considered in future reports.</p> <p>A Member enquired regarding issues accessing exempt items on the Modern.Gov App. The Head of Governance &</p>	

	<p>Partnerships said this may be an issue with functionality and product development on the Modern.Gov App, she would make enquiries to see if any progress had been made regarding this point and provide Members with an update on the report.</p> <p>Another Member commented that there may be cost implications associated with access to exempt items on the Modern.Gov App. The Head of Governance & Partnerships said it may be the case that some additional functions may need to be added to the Modern.Gov App, and would also incorporate this information into the report coming forward.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED this course of action.</p> <p>With regard to the Annual Report of the Head of Democratic Services, a Member expressed his appreciation for the work the Democratic Services Team were doing to support Members. The Chair and the Committee agreed with the Members comments and also expressed their thanks for the support received.</p> <p>The Head of Governance & Partnerships thanked Members for their comments and said it had been an extremely challenging time and Members had been outstanding in the way they had grasped this new way of working, it had been a steep learning curve for everyone.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and the Democratic Services Committee Forward Work Programme be approved.</p>	
<p>No. 7</p>	<p><u>TIME OF FUTURE MEETINGS</u></p> <p>The Committee AGREED that future meetings of the Democratic Services Committee would be held at 10.00 a.m.</p>	