

## DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Remote meeting held on 17<sup>th</sup> November, 2025.

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

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

Present: Councillor Dr. I.J. Johnson (Chair); Councillor N.C. Thomas (Vice-Chair); Councillors G. Bruce, G.D.D. Carroll, S.M. Hanks, K.P. Mahoney and J. Protheroe.

Also present: Councillors C.P. Franks and E. Williams.

### 432 ANNOUNCEMENT –

Prior to the commencement of the business of the Committee, the Operational Manager – Democratic Services 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”.

### 433 APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE –

This was received from Councillor G.M. Ball.

### 434 MINUTES –

RESOLVED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 30<sup>th</sup> June, 2025 be approved as a correct record.

### 435 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

Councillor Dr. I.J. Johnson declared an interested in item 4 – Democracy and Boundary Commission Cymru Draft Annual Remuneration Report 2026-27 as they were in receipt of an enhanced salary as a Group Leader. Councillor G.D.D. Carroll also declared an interest in this item as they were in receipt of an enhanced salary as Leaders of Council’s largest Opposition Groups, alongside Councillor N.C. Thomas due to their role as Chair of Planning Committee.

### 436 DEMOCRACY AND BOUNDARY COMMISSION CYMRU DRAFT ANNUAL REMUNERATION REPORT (HDS) –

The Head of Democratic Services presented the report and noted that Members would be familiar as it was presented to the Committee on an annual basis, detailing the proposed payments for Councillors in the next financial year. The Committee was advised that this was the first report around remuneration, as the Democracy

and Boundary Commission Cymru had taken over the responsibilities of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales. The Head of Democratic Services noted the suggestion of the Commission exploring resettlement payments and advised that the Committee would receive more information surrounding this change as it became available. He further indicated that Members could make individual representations, and that Appendix B represented the Council's views to the proposed Determinations, with the responses based upon previous years, with Determinations 1 and 2 echoing wording from previous years, and Determinations 3 to 6 offering no comment as they were areas which did not directly impact upon us as a Council, noting that Determination 5 was for Co-opted Members' pay to be frozen as Welsh Government were planning to undertake a systematic review of co-opted payments across all levels of Government. He advised that following the Committee's agreement of a response to the consultation, a formal response would be shared with Democracy and Boundary Commission Cymru alongside the minutes of the meeting.

Councillor Dr. Johnson added that the Committee continued to use ASHE (Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings) to inform their proposed baseline salaries for Members.

Councillor Mahoney commented that he had personally refused pay rises over several years, and that the proposed remunerations were eye-watering, with the need to give taxpayers a break in the current economic environment. He urged the public to look at the amounts being paid to Councillors and reflected that the same Commission was also looking to increase the number of Councillors from 54 to 59 at the next Election, which he felt would be at increased cost to residents. He further indicated that he would not be in acceptance of the increase in May and urged other Members to follow suit.

Councillor Dr. Johnson clarified that this was the opportunity to shape the Council's response to the proposals, and that the proposed increase to salaries was 6.4%, which would mean that the basic salary for Elected Members would increase to £21,044, alongside the basic salary for the largest Opposition Groups and Committee Chairs increasing to £31,567, with a full breakdown by all positions available in the report.

Councillor Carroll indicated that he was unable to support the proposals or responses outlined within the consultation response, as he felt they were not suitable, sensible or appropriate, and moved that the Committee recommend Members in receipt of salaries as outlined within Determinations 1, 2 and 3 should receive a pay freeze for the upcoming year. This was seconded by Councillor Bruce.

Councillor Thomas noted that the Committee had the same discussion every year, and that recommendations from the Commission were based on a three-day working week, with many Chairs and Senior Members doing more hours than this. He further added that whilst lots were under pressure financially, the proposals were evidence based and reflect the wider nature of increasing salaries and noted that whilst many Members of the Council were involved in the work of Town and Community Councils, many did not take the allowances which were available.

Councillor Hanks believed that this was a significant increase and the Commission should increase the number of constituents within wards if increasing salaries to reflect additional workload, and felt there was no need to increase the number of Elected Members.

Councillor Bruce reflected upon the salary being based on a 20-hour working week, and that she believed some Members did a lot more than this; whilst also noting that it was not possible to know how many hours individual Members worked as this information was not recorded and collated.

Councillor Dr. Johnson responded that a framework to monitor Members' working arrangements would be difficult to implement and manage and emphasised that the Council generally followed on through with the recommendations from the Commission.

Following a request from a Member for a Recorded Vote the vote took place about the proposed amendment to the consultation response as follows:

	<b>For</b>	<b>Against</b>	<b>Abstain</b>
Gillian Bruce	√		
George Carroll	√		
Sally Hanks		√	
Ian Johnson			√
Kevin Mahoney	√		
Neil Thomas		√	

Councillor Hanks additionally raised that this did not agree with the proposed resettlement payments, with Councillor Mahoney in agreement and stating that if Members were not voted in, they should lose their salary. Councillor Carroll also expressed opposition to the principle of resettlement payments and confirmed that these arrangements already existed in the Senedd. Councillor Dr. Johnson indicated that the Committee disagreeing with the principle of resettlement for Members who lose their seat in an ordinary election of Council could also be added to the consultation response.

**RESOLVED –**

(1) **T H A T** the Democracy and Boundary Commission Cymru (DBCC) Annual Report be noted.

(2) **T H A T** the consultation response to the Democracy and Boundary Commission Cymru (DBCC) Annual Report (Determinations 1 to 3) be updated to include that the Vale of Glamorgan Council feels that there should not be a 6.4%

increase in Members' salaries, and that they should remain unchanged from 2024/25.

(3) T H A T Members of Vale of Glamorgan Council do not support the proposals for resettlement payments for Councillors being explored by the Democracy and Boundary Commission Cymru.

Reason for decisions

(1-3) To ensure that Members of Democratic Services Committee had had opportunity to share their viewpoints surrounding any proposed changes and reflect discussions at the meeting.

437 UPDATE FROM WELSH LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION (WLGA) HEADS OF DEMOCRATIC NETWORK (HDS) –

The Head of Democratic Services shared that there was not a significant amount of work being undertaken in this space, as the focus was upon preparing for the upcoming elections in the next 18 months, but drew Members' attention to the two main areas within the report – the Annual Remuneration Report, which was previously discussed, and the National Councillor Induction Survey, with a copy of the presentation of National results provided by the WLGA in Appendix A. They shared that this Survey was commissioned by WLGA and e-mailed to all Members nationally to get a feel for what worked, what did not work, and what could be improved to support the induction process for 2027. They indicated that Councillors would note this was a National survey, and alongside this, there was a range of local information following the Council's local induction process in 2022, which had been presented to this Committee previously, and would be used to help shape this national learning locally. He proposed that rather than focus today upon this overview, this item be presented as a dedicated item with further detail to the Committee in April 2026.

RESOLVED – T H A T the contents within the report and the work of the Heads of Democratic Services Network be noted.

Reason for decision

To ensure Members of work being undertaken surrounding Democratic Services on a national basis

438 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY DEMOCRATIC SERVICES (HDS) –

The Head of Democratic Services presented the report to provide an overview of proposed changes being explored within the Democratic Services team, and clarified that, for the purpose of this item, when considering a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Democratic Services, it was to be one that was utilising its tools and resources effectively and in the most productive way whilst maximising digital capabilities, and highlighted how this work supported a number of organisational strategies and evidence bases;

including responding to the Performance Panel Assessment, Audit Wales findings, supporting the new Corporate Plan, Vale 2030, the Council's Digital Strategy, alongside feedback provided during the Scrutiny feedback sessions with Members and a range of broader guidance as included within the report's supporting documents. He further noted that whilst a large amount of emphasis had been placed upon embedding revised Scrutiny arrangements within Democratic Services in the last year, there were also a number of areas beyond this where we needed to modernise as a Council and explore alternative ways of working, and that this was not an exhaustive list but represented a range of ideas which would develop iteratively, with lots drawn for areas of good practice from Wales and beyond, with an initial table providing an overview of the changes and target implementation dates, supported by the Roadmap in Appendix A.

He advised that the Multi-Location Meetings Policy has not been included as there was currently an internal audit underway, and this would benefit from being a more detailed item to be considered. He highlighted that as Members would be aware, there had been a significant amount of change within the Democratic Services team in the last year, including starters and leavers, and the team were a resource which the Committee had oversight of within its Terms of Reference, and wanted to assure Members that there had been sufficient workforce planning including knowledge and skills development as outlined within sections 2.2 to 2.10 of the report to support this proposed direction of travel.

He further indicated that in terms of the specific change projects identified, Members may be familiar with some but not all areas being considered, so a brief summary overview of each had been provided within the body of the report, and that this report was not seeking the Committee's agreement on every change being presented today and that any changes would be taken through the Council's governance structures as appropriate as individual items with increased detail.

He shared that the areas for consideration had been diffused into four key themes - implementation of PowerBI, Council's Decision-Making Processes, Internal and External Websites and automation of forms, and asked Members to note the strategy direction of travel within the Democratic Service areas, to reflect upon any of the areas identified within the roadmap to provide initial feedback, including the proposed timelines for implementation, to consider if there were any other areas they believed we should be exploring to become a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Democratic Service and to be assured that the team had the skills, capacity and capability to support these changes.

This would not be the final opportunity to share ideas for improvements, and welcomed suggestions to the modernisation agenda, and advised that the Committee would be presented an update in 12-18 months' time as to how these changes were being implemented, what had been the impact and potential lessons learned.

Councillor Hanks felt this was an excellent report that they enjoyed reading but sought clarity as to what PowerBI was, and queried if consideration had been given to if new Members should be paperless, to which the Head of Democratic Services responded that PowerBI was a data visualisation tool, used to bring together information from a range of spaces in an automated manner, and that the recently launched Scrutiny Recommendation Tracker used this platform. He also indicated

that whilst he encouraged Members to access papers digitally, there were individual requirements such as visual impairments and dyslexia which meant that paper copies may need to be provided, but that this was dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

Councillor Carroll commented on the recent Scrutiny changes, and he remained to be convinced around the impact of these changes, including task and finish and the associated workload, and queried when these would be reviewed. He further suggested that in Committee meetings, where references were presented without the supporting paper, that a hyperlink be included as this could be a labour-intensive task for someone in finding the original information and could improve how Members and the public access this information.

The Head of Democratic Services responded that there had always been a commitment to review the arrangements, and that Audit Wales would be undertaking a review, starting in Spring 2026 and likely lasting until the late Summer/early Autumn, and asked Members to consider how they would like to best get involved in this process and be interviewed. Councillor Dr. Johnson sought clarity on the timeline and was advised that whilst commencing in Spring 2026, it was anticipated field work would be completed by the Autumn, with the appropriate governance and response taking place at the end of the year, with any resulting changes being made in the following Municipal year.

Councillor Protheroe welcomed the introduction of PowerBI and believed the Scrutiny Recommendation Tracker was an excellent addition that people would need support in using and the upcoming review of Scrutiny but shared that it was for Members to drive task and finish work by actively participating, with all needing to get involved to make it a success.

#### RESOLVED –

(1) T H A T the content of the report and proposed approach being undertaken in becoming a 21st Century Democratic Services, including the roadmap within Appendix A, be noted.

(2) T H A T the Committee, having considered if there were any additional areas they would like to see within this roadmap in relation to the Democratic Services function, identified that there should be a review as to how references were presented to improve openness, transparency and ease of access to information.

(3) T H A T the Committee was assured that the Democratic Services function had sufficient capacity, resource and skills to deliver the changes outlined within the report

(4) T H A T a further update surrounding 21st Century Democratic Services be reported in 12 months' time highlighting progress to date, lessons learned and any changes to the roadmap contained within Appendix A to the report.

Reasons for decisions

- (1) To apprise Members of developments within the Democratic Service's function.
- (2) To reflect Members' contributions of additional suggestions to the roadmap.
- (3) To allow for the Committee to exercise its responsibility in ensuring oversight surrounding resourcing within the Democratic Services function.
- (4) To allow for the Committee to monitor and review the proposed roadmap provided.

439 DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME (HDS) –

The Head of Democratic Services shared the Forward Work Programme and noted that Members would note that this was now a standard item consisting of standard items for every agenda, cyclical items which they would receive regular updates upon and other items which were on a case-by-case basis. He indicated that the next iteration would include provisional items for the forthcoming Municipal year as it currently only includes the 2025-26 year.

RESOLVED – T H A T the provisional Democratic Services Committee Forward Work Programme for the 2025/2026 Municipal year be agreed.

Reason for decision

Having regard to the contents of the report to allow for the Committee to have a clearly structured programme of work to support their ongoing work.