

HOLYWELL TOWN COUNCIL

CYNGOR TREF TREFFYNNON

Minutes of the meeting of the Audit Sub-Committee held in the Council Chamber, Bank Place Offices, Holywell on Wednesday, 10 February 2016 at 10am.

PRESENT: Councillor B. Scragg (Vice-Chairman) presiding.
Councillors: P.J. McGarry, (Mayor) and E.B. Palmer.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE were received from Councillors J. Griffiths, J.M. Johnson and P.A. York.

IN ATTENDANCE: D.C. Pierce (Clerk).

A21. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – MEMBERS’ CODE OF CONDUCT

None.

A22. COUNCILLOR P.A. YORK - UPDATE

Members welcomed the news from the Clerk that Council and Sub-Committee Member, Peter York, was home from hospital and was making steady progress to better health.

A23. DRAFT LOCAL GOVERNMENT (WALES) BILL - CONSULTATION

As requested by the Council, consideration was given to preparing on behalf of the Authority a response to the above Draft Bill. The objective of the Bill was to complete the programme of Local Authority mergers and set out a new and reformed legislative framework for Local Authority democracy, accountability, performance and elements of finance. The Bill would also establish a statutory Public Services Staff Commission.

The opportunity had been given to all Members of the Council to access the substantial documentation that had been provided on the consultation on the Welsh Government’s website link, as well as for non-Members of the Sub-Committee to attend the meeting to give their views.

By reference to the items circulated with the Agenda giving a general overview of the Draft Bill and a list of potential discussion points, the Clerk summarised the position to date and added that the Bill was planned to be introduced into the Assembly soon after the Welsh Government Elections in May 2016.

Members had particular regard to the references in the Bill to and the implications for Community Councils (which included Town Councils).

RESOLVED:

That the following responses be submitted to the Welsh Government in respect of the Draft Bill:

General power of competence

- The principle of Community Councils with competence is supported.
- “Relevant professional qualification for Clerk” needs to be clarified. There should be scope for CILCA ‘or equivalent’ possibly with a commitment to ensure continued professional development.

Promoting access to local government.

- Question the desirability for Community Area Committees as another tier of governance.
- The principle of Community Councils serving improvement requests on principal authorities to improve local outcomes is supported.
- No issues to raise if Community Council meetings are held in areas of licensed premises where alcohol is not served; the prohibition of Councillors and members of the public from consuming alcohol during meetings is supported.
- Public participation at local authority meetings should be at the Chairman’s discretion.
- Filming, photography and sound recording by the public of meetings is not supported as this could lead to possible misinterpretation of decisions if shared in a wider forum. Accurate records of meetings are always available in the written/ approved minutes.

Community Councils

- Support the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales undertaking a review of future Community Council arrangements, subject to wide and meaningful consultation with the respective authorities.
- Training for Community Councillors should be offered and not made compulsory although every encouragement should be given to attendance where possible particularly on important issues. The organisation tasked with delivery of training should be appropriately resourced. It should be borne in mind that Community Councillors are unpaid community representatives and a heavy programme of obligatory training requirements could adversely impact on interest in standing for election.

- Support for the proposal to extend the term of Community Councillors elected in 2017, to six years.
- Not opposed to a requirement for Community Councils to publish an annual report so that local people can understand what the Council has achieved during the previous year.
- Preference for the training needs for Community Council Members and employees to be matters for the Authority itself to determine.
- The proposal to repeal the legislation relating to community polls and to require instead that principal councils should implement a petitions scheme and e-petitions facility is supported.

Generally

Given the nature of and wide range of Community Council activities across Wales, the Town Council again draws attention to the fact that the eventual operational proposals in future legislation will have far-reaching consequences on these Authorities and stresses the importance of having a realistic lead-in timetable in place for implementation and further consultation on working arrangements, particularly those proposals that have resource implications.

A24. WORKPLACE PENSIONS : AUTOMATIC ENROLMENT UPDATE

It was noted that a further report on this matter would be submitted in due course when more information was available.

A25. CLOSE OF MEETING

The Vice-Chairman, presiding, closed the meeting at 11.05am.

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Vice-Chairman