**Minutes of the National Executive Committee Meeting held on a remote basis on Friday 17 March 2023 at 10.30am**

**Present:**

Cllr Mike Theodoulou (Chair of OVW); Cllr Glyn Evans (Blaenau Gwent/Torfaen); Cllr Bryan Grew (Larger Council’s Committee); Cllr Mike Cuddy (Bridgend/Cardiff/Vale of Glamorgan); Cllr John Hughes (Bridgend/Cardiff/Vale of Glamorgan); Cllr Ellen Walsh Moorman (Brecon/Radnor); Cllr Hugh Pattrick MBE (Brecon/Radnor); Cllr Elwyn Evans (Meirionnydd); Cllr Anne McGarry (Montgomery); Cllr Derrick Pugh (Montgomery); Cllr Mal Davies (RCT/Merthyr/Caerphilly); Cllr Josephine Rao (RCT/Merthyr/Caerphilly); Cllr Linda Frame (Swansea); Cllr Carrie Townsend-Jones (Swansea); Cllr Mike Harriman (Wrexham/Flint).

**One Voice Wales Staff:**

Lyn Cadwallader, Chief Executive; Paul Egan, Deputy Chief Executive; Maria Mulcahy, Development Officer; Mel ab Owain Development Officer, Alun Harries, Development Officer

**Apologies:**

Cllr Marjorie Thomson (Wrexham/Flint and Vice-Chair of OVW); Cllr Margaret Thomas (Anglesey); Cllr J. Egryn Lewis (Anglesey); Cllr Kim Broom (Carmarthen); Cllr Glyn Morvan (Gwent Valleys); Cllr Alun Wyn Evans (Meirionnydd); Cllr Rita Edwards (Monmouth/Newport); Cllr David Thomas (Pembroke); Dr Catrin Jones, Policy Officer.

1. **WELCOME BY THE CHAIR.**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. It was noted with regret that Cllr Ben Davies had sadly passed away and it was noted that the Chief Executive had sent a letter and a card to the family expressing sincere condolences from the NEC and the staff of OVW. He would be sadly missed.

1. **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 16 DECEMBER 2022.**

**RESOLVED** that: The minutes be confirmed as an accurate record.

1. **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES.**

a) The Chief Executive would be writing to the four Police and Crime Commissioners encouraging them to liaise with Chief Constables in relation to the importance of the Police maintaining close working arrangements with local councils. It was noted that the extent of engagement varied throughout Wales and it was hoped that a letter of encouragement would assist in developing greater partnership working. The CEO would seek the views of NEC members before finalising the letter.

b) The CEO would again raise the matter of election costs with WLGA as the senior officer who he had previously dealt with had left the WLGA for a new role in the Welsh Government.

1. **MINUTES OF COMMITTEES.**

a) Finance, Resources and General Purposes Committee – 3 March 2023.

**RESOLVED** that: Subject to the following amendment, the minutes be approved:

Reference to United Trust Bank be changed to Unity Trust Bank.

b) Commercial and Communications Committee – 3 March 2023.

**RESOLVED** that: The minutes be approved.

The CEO advised the NEC that he would shortly be advertising for a full-time Communications Officer who would be responsible for reporting to the Committee on communications activities.

c) Policy Committee – 3 March 2023.

**RESOLVED** that: The minutes including the amendment to the date the meeting was held be approved.

The CEO advised the NEC that he had been invited to speak on the subject of ‘Climate Change’ at a forthcoming all Wales Policy Forum to be held in June 2023.

The DCEO advised the Committee that he was seeking confirmation from the IRPW that the Welsh Government Official concerned had received confirmation from HMRC that the basic payments to councillors could be regarded as free of any taxable liability from April 2023. On receipt of the confirmation, he would publish a statement to all member councils advising them of the changed position in relation to taxation.

1. **PARTNERSHIP FORUM – UPDATE.**

The Chair provided a brief report on the most recent meeting he had attended making specific reference to the discussions on regional partnerships; the Social Partner Procurement Bill; and climate change.

**RESOLVED** that: The report be noted.

1. **COST OF LIVING SUPPORT SCHEME.**

The CEO was pleased to report that the WG had approved a sum of £150,000 per annum for a three-year period to enable OVW to create the support scheme. The approved sum was short of the amount requested (£165,000) and adjustments to the financial arrangements would be made. There were 3 posts to be filled and a meeting with the WG to agree detailed arrangements for the establishment of the scheme would be required prior to implementation.

1. **THIRD QUARTER MONITORING REPORT TO THE WG.**

The monitoring report had been circulated with the agenda for the meeting. The CEO informed the NEC that 3 member councils had decided to decline the offer of membership in 2023/24 with one of the councils being a larger one. He would however be making a presentation to Buckley Town Council and there was a possibility that they might accept the offer of membership. The NEC considered that a check should be made with any council declining membership so as to understand the reasons for the decision and to ascertain whether anything could be done to persuade them to continue in membership. The CEO explained that this was the usual practice and in relation to the larger council that had declined membership it had been established that the Council had made an informed choice to redirect its resources to frontline services. It was noted that there were currently 732 councils in Wales but there remained large geographical areas not having the benefit of a local council. OVW had urged the Minister to consider creating councils in these community areas but she had not chosen to adopt such an approach. On the positive side, the CEO remained hopeful that in the coming financial year there might well be a net increase in the number of member councils with enquiries having been received about membership from some non-member councils. The latest member survey revealed that councils placed a high value on the services offered by OVW.

1. **DIGITAL DEVELOPMENTS.**

The CEO provided the NEC with the background relating to the request made to the WG for support in relation to the digitalisation agenda faced by Councils in Wales as well as additional technical support for OVW to develop its own digitalisation requirements as well as the development of a new website. The WG had in 2022 engaged the WLGA to undertake a survey of the issues faced by councils in this regard but had not engaged OVW in the process resulting in a relatively low level response to the survey probably because OVW had not been in a position to explain the purpose of the survey to member councils and to encourage them to complete the survey. Nevertheless a report of the survey had been produced (not currently available for publication) which had provided an element of encouragement for the WG to allocate a sum of £150,000 to invest in a project designed to address the identified issues. A Digital Health Group had now been formed by the WG details of which were attached to the agenda for the information of members. It was the view of the CEO that a full-time Digital role would be required for a full year to assist councils and OVW develop its digitalisation arrangements. The Group would meet on a fortnightly basis over the coming months and the CEO was of the view that a 2/3 year programme of work would result from its work.

In the discussion that took place, it was considered that a local councillor should be appointed to serve on the Group. There was also some doubt expressed about whether it would be realistic for a programme of work to be determined by 24 April 2023. It appeared to be the case that there would not be time for a consultation with councils on the programme for action. Some surprise was expressed that the membership of the Group did not include technical representation from unitary authorities. It was suggested that ICT departments in unitary authorities should have a role in procuring equipment for use by councils. The CEO indicated some concerns in this regard especially having regard to the way in which some unitary authorities had used the grant channelled through them some years ago to support the creation of council websites.

On a related matter, it was suggested that some WG officials such as Pia Towell had not yet attended a meeting of the NEC and the CEO indicated that he regularly met with Pia and that it would be a good idea to invite her to attend a future meeting of the NEC.

1. **THE DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT/MINISTERIAL ADVISORY BOARD ON DEMOCRATIC HEALTH DIVERSITY IN DEMOCRACY.**

The terms of reference of the Board had been circulated with the agenda. The initial idea to set up the Group had originated from an OVW suggestion with the purpose of the Group being to better understand how the role of local councillor can be designed as a more attractive proposition.

In the discussion that took place, the following points were made:-

a) It was considered that some of the difficulties involved in attracting election candidates related to time factors and the low level of councillor payments.

b) Lack of sufficient support staff within councils as well as insufficient resources within the OVW team was seen as a drawback.

c) There was a wide variation of how councils worked with unitary authorities on the range of agendas they faced.

1. **AUDIT PANEL MEMBERSHIP.**

To date only one NEC member and one external member had indicated their interest in becoming a member of the Panel. The NEC was requested to nominate additional members to become members of the Panel. The following expressions of interest were received:

Councillors Glyn Evans, Linda Frame, Ellen Walsh Moorman, Carrie Townsend-Jones and Josephine Rao volunteered to become members of the Panel.

**RESOLVED** that: The CEO be authorised to make arrangements to set up the Panel and arrange for its first meeting to be held.

1. **ARRANGEMENTS FOR MEETINGS.**

It was proposed that meetings of the NEC and Committees/Panels be arranged on the following basis:

a) Committees and Panels – Virtual meetings.

b) NEC Meetings – June and September meetings to be held on an in-person basis and December and March meetings to be held on a virtual basis.

c) Translation arrangements to be provided for in-person meetings.

d) Consideration be given to the provision of lunch at in-person meetings.

e) The Innovative Practice Conference to be held on 5 July 2023 in the Royal Welsh Showground.

f) The National Conference and AGM to be held on an in-person basis with a suitable venue to be sourced.

g) The possibility of hybrid meetings being held be researched it being noted that this would depend on the availability of suitable equipment available at the chosen venue.

**RESOLVED** that: The proposals be fully supported.

1. **HARASSMENT AND ABUSE EXPERIENCED BY LOCAL COUNCILLORS.**

This matter had been referred for consideration by the Finance, Resources and General Purposes Committee.

**RESOLVED** that: A recent guide published by the WLGA be emailed to all members of the NEC.

1. **MEMBERSHIP OF THE POWYS PSB.**

The CEO gave a brief background of events resulting in the PSB deciding to remove the local council representatives from the Board. The CEO had written to the Chair of the PSB outlining his concerns and referring to the recent Audit Wales publication on ‘community resilience’ which was relevant in this context. The publication had urged unitary authorities to increase the level of collaboration with local councils. The current position in Powys was that local council representatives had been offered membership of working groups which was not quite the same as being members of the PSB. The CEO had requested a review of the decision and would be raising the matter with the Minister. He would seek the support of the Minister in writing to PSBs to encourage them to facilitate local council representation on the main Board of PSBs. It was understood that the decision made by the Powys PSB was at an officer level and not by the Board itself. A general comment was made that there was little in the way of full PSB membership in other parts of Wales and in any event the lack of resources available to local councils could make it difficult for any representatives to fully support the work of PSBs.

1. **SHARING OF CONTACT DETAILS OF NEW MEMBERS.**

It was noted that approximately 14 of the NEC members had responded to the recent consultation. It was agreed that NEC members who had not responded be requested to complete the consent form but in the meantime the contact details of those who had granted consent be emailed to all NEC members.

1. **LOCAL PLACES FOR NATURE PROGRAMME UPDATE.**

The CEO provided a brief report on the success of the scheme. As a result of the overwhelming success of the scheme, the WG had agreed to fund the scheme for a further two-year period.

1. **MATTERS REFERRED FROM THE LARGER COUNCIL’S COMMITTEE.**

There were none.

1. **DEVELOPMENT OFFICER REPORTS.**

The Development Officer reports were noted.

**RESOLVED** that: Development Officer reports be no longer required and if any of these staff wished to raise matters with the NEC they should do so through the CEO.

1. **ONE OFF PAYMENTS TO STAFF AND REVIEW OF STAFF GRADING LEVELS.**

(There were no officers present when this matter was considered).

The Chair reported on proposals developed by the Strategic Coordination Committee at its meeting on 13 January 2023 (Minute No. 8) which were presented to the NEC for consideration.

**RESOLVED** that: The proposals of the Strategic Coordination Committee be fully implemented on the basis that one-off payments would be processed through payroll and subject to statutory deductions.

1. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING.**

The next meeting to be held at the Royal Welsh Showground on 23 June 2023 at 10.30am.

Signed…………………………………. 23 June 2023

Chair