

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

1 JULY 2015

Minutes of the meeting of the Democratic Services Committee of Flintshire County Council held at Delyn Committee Room on Wednesday, 1 July 2015

PRESENT: Councillor Robin Guest (Chairman)

Councillors Haydn Bateman, Chris Bithell, Clive Carver, David Cox, Paul Cunningham, Ian Dunbar, Andy Dunbobbin, Veronica Gay, Dave Mackie, Tim Newhouse, Ian Smith, Nigel Steele-Mortimer, David Williams and Arnold Woolley

SUBSTITUTES: Councillors Mike Lowe (for Alex Aldridge) and Mike Reece (for Glyn Banks)

APOLOGIES: Councillors Peter Curtis, George Hardcastle and Neville Phillips. The Democracy and Governance Manager.

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Bernie Attridge

IN ATTENDANCE:

Chief Officer (Governance), Member Engagement Manager, and Committee Officer

1. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

The Chair sought nominations for the appointment of Vice-Chair for the municipal year.

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Nigel Steele-Mortimer be appointed Vice-Chair for the Municipal year 2015/16.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 28 January 2015, were submitted.

Matters arising

Councillor Clive Carver referred to the response times to Member communications and commented on the difficulties he had experienced in failing to receive responses to his emails to Chief Officers. The Chief Officer (Governance) agreed to pursue the issue raised by Councillor Carver.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be received, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

4. REVIEW OF MEMBER DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

The Member Engagement Manager introduced a report on a review of the Member Development Strategy. He provided background information and advised that a copy of the recently updated Strategy was appended to the report.

The Member Engagement Manager advised that a review of the Strategy provided the opportunity to refresh its provisions to reflect initiatives that had recently been introduced. To reflect this he explained that it had been suggested that a new paragraph be added to the Strategy, following paragraph 3.4, as detailed in the report. The Committee was asked to put forward and consider any alterations it believed appropriate to the Strategy as indicated in the key considerations in the report and any work that should be undertaken to improve delivery of the Strategy.

Councillor Chris Bithell referred to the information in paragraph 3.05 of the report that arrangements are in place for each Member to have the opportunity of having an annual personal development meeting with a Senior Member to identify their training and development needs. He sought clarification around the reference to a Senior Member and queried whether such an arrangement was necessary. The Member Engagement Manager advised that there was a requirement for such an arrangement to take place. The Chief Officer (Governance) commented that Members may have personal aspirations and may wish to discuss how they could develop their political career. They may feel uncomfortable raising such matters with Officers. Councillor Clive Carver suggested that the wording be amended to read Senior Member or Officer as Members may wish to discuss training concerning matters such as IT for example. The Member Engagement Manager explained that despite Officer representations the WLGA had retained the reference to Senior Member in the wording of the Charter. The Chair commented on the opportunity afforded to Members to raise training and development needs at the Annual Personal Development meeting.

Councillor Chris Bithell referred to Appendix 2, paragraphs 53 and 54, and raised a concern in relation to the scrutiny process and Cabinet decision making and referred to the previous Committee structure. The Chief Officer (Governance) responded to the comments and referred to the role of scrutiny in contributing meaningful comment and response.

Councillor Dave Mackie expressed a concern regarding the format of the wording in the appendices to the report and said there was a problem concerning the spacing of text.

RESOLVED:

That the Member Development Strategy be approved with the suggested

amendments being incorporated as indicated in paragraphs 3.01 and 3.02 of the report.

5. ANNUAL MEMBER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME FOR 2015/2016

The Member Engagement Manager introduced a report for the Committee to agree the Annual Development Programme for the Council Year 2015/16. He provided background information and advised that in response to consultation with Members a number of topics had been suggested and a draft Member Development Programme 2015/16 was appended to the report for consideration.

In response to a concern raised by Councillor Ian Smith about those Members who work full time having access to training and development events held during the morning or afternoon, the Member Engagement Manager explained that whilst training events were offered at alternative times evening sessions had been poorly attended. To achieve meaningful interaction a minimum number of Members are needed to be present and for the training session to be cost effective.

Councillor Andy Dunbobbin suggested that training sessions could be provided to Members on film so that the information could be accessed in Members' own time. Councillor Chris Bithell also spoke in support of the suggestion and referred to the benefit of being able to forward on training programmes recorded in this way to new Members in the future. He asked if the facility to record training programmes/events could be explored.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Annual Member Development Programme for 2015/16 as submitted be approved;
- (b) That the Democracy & Governance Manager, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-chair of the Committee be authorised to add items to the programme as necessary; and
- (c) That a report on the use of webinar (web based seminars) and the filming of training sessions be the subject of a report to a future meeting of the committee

6. MEMBERS' SUPPORT

The Chief Officer (Governance) introduced a report for the Committee to satisfy itself that all Members are given as much support as necessary to enable them to fulfil their duties effectively. He provided background information and referred to the key considerations in the report around the determinations made in the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (The Panel) Annual Report issued in February 2015. The Chief Officer advised that Officers believed the level of resources provided to Members met the recommendations of the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) Charter for Members' Support and Development.

Councillor Dave Mackie drew attention to the information contained in Appendix 1, paragraph 3.23, of the IRPW report that Members should have electronic access to appropriate information via an internet connection, and sought further clarification on the statement in terms of internet and telephone provision for Members. Following discussion the Committee requested that the Chief Officer (Governance) investigate what the Independent Remuneration Panel's intention had been when it stated in relation to internet access:

'It would not be appropriate for such facilities (electronic access) only to be available within council offices within office hours.'

The Chief Officer (Governance) responded to a further query raised by Councillor Clive Carver regarding Determination 7, page 41, and the claiming and payment of expenses.

Members requested that for future meetings, the agenda and reports be displayed on screen in the Committee meeting rooms to alleviate any potential IPad reception problems.

RESOLVED

- (a) That the Committee confirms that all Members are given the support that is necessary to enable them to fulfil their duties effectively; and
- (b) That the Chief Officer (Governance) be requested to investigate whether the IRPW had intended that councils should provide internet access at Member's homes

7. FEEDBACK ON MEMBER DEVELOPMENT EVENTS

The Member Engagement Manager introduced a report to provide feedback on the Member development events held since last reported to the Committee. He referred to the development events which had been held in January, March and June 2015 and advised that the feedback received for each of the events was appended to the report. He reported that feedback had been generally positive although attendance at one of the events had been disappointingly low. Members were invited to comment on their experience of any events attended or make suggestions for the improvement of future events.

Councillor Davie Mackie expressed his dissatisfaction with the training which had been provided by an external trainer at one specific event and he said he had forwarded his comments to the Democracy and Governance Manager for information. He also commented on the "embarrassment" caused when external trainers were engaged to provide training events but only a small number of Councillors were in attendance at the session.

RESOLVED:

That the report be received and that it be noted that Councillor Dave Mackie had made representations to the Democracy & Governance Manager about an external trainer's performance.

8. **MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE**

There were no members of the press or public in attendance.

(The meeting started at 2.00 pm and ended at 3.07 pm)

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Chairman