

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE
29 JUNE 2016

Minutes of the meeting of the Democratic Services Committee of Flintshire County Council held in County Hall, Mold on Wednesday, 29 June 2016.

PRESENT: Councillor Robin Guest (Chairman)

Councillors: Glyn Banks, Chris Bithell, Clive Carver, David Cox, Paul Cunningham, Ian Dunbar, Andy Dunbobbin, Veronica Gay, Dave Mackie, and Arnold Woolley

APOLOGIES: Councillors George Hardcastle, Ian Smith and Nigel Steele-Mortimer

SUBSTITUTION: Councillor Hilary McGuill (for Neville Phillips)

IN ATTENDANCE:

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

Prior to the start of the meeting Councillor Dave Mackie raised concerns regarding Member attendance at Committee meetings. The Chair said he would forward the concerns expressed to Group Leaders and ask that a substitute be arranged if Members were unable to attend.

17. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

Councillor Dave Mackie nominated Councillor Nigel Steele-Mortimer as Vice-Chair of the Committee. This was duly seconded and supported by the Committee.

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Nigel Steele-Mortimer be appointed Vice-Chair of the Committee.

18. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

19. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 27 April 2016, were submitted.

RESOLVED:

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

20. MEMBER DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

The Member Engagement Manager introduced a report on the current Member Development Strategy. The report outlined how Member training and development had been supported during 2015/16 and what training and development would be offered in the current year prior to the elections in May 2017.

The Member Engagement Manager referred to the annual Development Programme which was agreed by the Committee and to feedback given on Member development events. He said that ongoing training was provided to members of the Planning, Licensing, Audit, and Pensions Committees and Member role descriptions and other information was available on the Infonet and in the Members' library.

Turning to the Member Development Programme for 2015/16 and the workshops which had been provided, the Officer explained that a more flexible approach to training and development had been introduced during the year and the benefit of shorter more focussed sessions with smaller groups was recognised.

Referring to the current, final year of the Council, the Member Engagement Manager advised that training for statutory committees would continue to be provided and further sessions could be arranged if there was need. He reported that a refresher training session for Chairs would be held on 15 July 2016, but no other formal 'development' events had been arranged in this year. Councillor Paul Cunningham said there may be interest from Members who aspired to the position of Chair or Vice Chair and suggested that anyone who expressed such an interest also be included in the training.

Councillor Chris Bithell sought clarification regarding the personal development meetings referred to in paragraph 1.01 of the report. The Member Engagement Manager explained the purpose of the meetings and advised that discussion had taken place with Group Leaders and some training provided on how the review meeting should be conducted. He commented that he was not aware that such interviews had been carried out, however, this may be because Members did not want them or there was no requirement. Councillor Bithell asked if an appropriate officer could undertake a personal development meeting with a Member. The Member Engagement Manager commented that the WLGA held the view that the meetings should take place Member to Member but he could not see any reason why an officer would not be able to undertake this work if Members wished to discuss their individual training needs with an officer instead.

Councillor Chris Bithell proposed that the matter be given further consideration and that discussion should take place with an officer who was independent. Councillor Andy Dunbobbin seconded the proposal. It was stated that annual appraisals were important in terms of personal development and if they were not taking place the reason why needed to be established.

The Chief Officer (Governance) advised that whilst it could be of some benefit for Members to discuss their personal development needs with an officer there may be some difficult situations which may arise as a result.

Councillor Dave Mackie requested that further training on the use of the ipad be provided for Members. Councillor Andy Dunbobbin referred to his previous suggestion that training video/material be provided on the Council's website to assist Members with their training needs.

Councillor Clive Carver suggested that the timing of training events/sessions be guided by the needs of new members following the Council elections in May 2017.

Councillor Hilary McGuill commented on the need to keep an updated record of the training undertaken by Members and also the training required. She expressed the view that all Members should be required to attend training in Corporate Parenting.

Councillor Glyn Banks referred to the nomination of Members to committees and sub committees and suggested that Members be provided with the appropriate training for the terms of reference/specialisms of the committees. He also commented on 'poor' attendance at training events and suggested that sessions be arranged to coincide with meetings of the County Council when the majority of Members were in attendance.

In response to a comment from Councillor Arnold Woolley, the Chief Officer (Governance) explained there were a large number of proposals being considered by Welsh Government around how local authorities provided mandatory and non mandatory training as part of the Local Government Bill. Welsh Government intended to continue with the proposals around training even though it would change the parts of the bill that dealt with local government reorganisation.

Councillor Chris Bithell put forward an amendment to his proposal and asked that discussion took place with Group Leaders to determine why professional development meetings with Members were not taking place and that feedback be provided to the Committee. In addition he asked that the possibility of the Authority's officers also undertaking personal development meetings with Members be explored. This was agreed by the Committee.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the current Member Development Strategy be recognised as good practice;
- (b) That the Member Development Strategy be supported as the basis to ensure adequate provision for member development and support for the new Council to be elected in 2017;

- (c) That the Committee agree that the emphasis, in the last year of the current council should be on the provision of training where there is a perceived need, rather than seeking to provide a full programme; and
- (d) That discussion takes place with Group Leaders to determine why professional development meetings with Members are not taking place and feedback be provided to the Committee, and the possibility of the officers also undertaking personal development meetings with Members be explored.

21. INDUCTION ARRANGEMENTS FOR MEMBERS FOLLOWING THE 2017 COUNTY COUNCIL ELECTIONS

The Member Engagement Manager introduced a report on the contents of the Welsh Local Government Association's (WLGA) proposed Induction Programme for Members elected following the 2017 County Council elections. He advised that the contents of the WLGA Induction programme were not mandatory but suggested as offering the necessary range of training to enable both new and returning Members to understand and fulfil their roles and responsibilities.

The Member Engagement Manager explained that for the 2017 Induction programme the WLGA had developed a suggested outline which was being consulted on by user authorities. He advised that the Authority was not bound to use the WLGA framework but could customise it to suit its own requirements. The Member Engagement Manager advised that the Authority would also review its own information pack it provided to give guidance to Members to complement in style and content the WLGA pack. Members were invited to consider and comment on the WLGA Induction document which was appended to the report. Members views and comments could then be included in the Authority's response to the WLGA on the Induction programme.

The Member Engagement Manager explained that it was intended that the Authority's approach to induction would be more flexible than in previous years and some of the training sessions would be shortened and more focussed. He referred to the 'Your Council' event which was the normal starting point of the induction programme and suggested that a working group of appropriate officers be set up to develop this and the Induction programme. The working group would then report back to the Committee on progress and for Members to offer guidance. In addition a meeting of senior officers would be held during the Summer to provide direction to the working group. He suggested that a working draft of the Induction programme be brought back to the next meeting of the Committee on 5 October 2016. Councillor Chris Bithell asked that some Member representation also be included on the working group.

Councillor Dave Mackie referred to the WLGA discussion document and commented on the list of mandatory training which had been suggested by the Welsh Government on page 16. He suggested that introductory training on Planning also be included on the list. Councillor Glyn Banks concurred that training on Planning matters should be made mandatory for Members and

suggested that it also be extended to include members of Town and Community Councils. Councillor Mackie also referred to the suggestion of training on Introduction to Equalities and commented that Welsh language was usually included in this. The Member Engagement Manager suggested that training on the use of an ipad could also be added to the list of training required by Members. Councillor Hilary McGuill commented on the importance of keeping a record of the training that Members had attended.

Councillor Veronica Gay concurred with the previous suggestion made by Councillor Glyn Banks that Members be provided with training specific to the terms of reference/specialisms of their allocated committees or sub committees.

Members expressed the need for a single point of contact within each directorate which could 'sign-post' the caller to the appropriate service and contact officer and for an updated list of 'Who's Who' within the Council.

The Chair commented on the additional demands on Member time during the elections in May 2017 and suggested that it may be helpful for both new and returning Members if the induction programme was 'phased in' gradually instead of immediately following the elections. He also suggested that it would be helpful if new Members were provided with guidance as to the commitment which was expected in terms of attendance at induction events and meetings of the Council. The Member Engagement Manager explained that the WLGA guidance placed an emphasis on the commitment and time which was required of Members.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That officers be requested to continue to prepare an Induction Programme for new and returning Members following the 2017 elections; and
- (b) That a working draft of the Induction programme be brought back to the next meeting of the Committee on 5 October 2016.

22. LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985 – TO CONSIDER THE EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED:

That the press and public be excluded for the remainder of the meeting for the following item by virtue of exempt information under paragraph(s) 15 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

23. ESTABLISHMENT STRUCTURE IN GOVERNANCE

The Member Engagement Manager and Committee Officer withdrew from the meeting at this point.

The Chief Officer Governance introduced a report proposing changes to the structure within Democratic Services. He answered questions from

members of the Committee and it was resolved that the proposed structure for Democratic Services be approved.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee confirmed that in its opinion the proposed structure will ensure adequate resources for the provision of democratic services and it was therefore recommended to full Council;
- (b) That the Democratic Services Committee designated the Democratic Services Manager post as the Statutory Head of Democratic Services;
- (c) That the Committee recommended Full Council should transfer to the Democratic Services Manager the powers of the Democracy & Governance Manager as set out in paragraph 1.12; and
- (d) That a report be brought back in 6 months on the levels of support for committees and how well the proposed structure is working in practice.

24. PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

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

(The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and finished at 11.10 am)

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Chairman