

CONSTITUTION AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE
25 OCTOBER 2017

Minutes of the meeting of the Constitution and Democratic Services Committee of Flintshire County Council held in the Delyn Committee Room, County Hall, Mold on Wednesday, 25 October 2017

PRESENT: Councillor Rita Johnson (Chair)

Councillors: Glyn Banks, Marion Bateman, Chris Bithell, Clive Carver, Bob Connah, Jean Davies, Rob Davies, Ian Dunbar, David Healey, Ted Palmer, Mike Peers, Michelle Perfect, Neville Phillips, Paul Shotton, David Williams, David Wisinger and Arnold Woolley

SUBSTITUTE: Councillor: Dave Hughes (for Ian Smith)

APOLOGY: Councillor Joe Johnson

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors: Patrick Heesom and Christine Jones

IN ATTENDANCE: Chief Officer (Governance); Democratic Services Manager; and Democratic Services Officer

6. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None were received.

7. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 June 2017 were submitted.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

8. INDUCTION REPORT

The Democratic Services Manager presented a report on the development of the Member induction programme following the elections.

Following positive feedback on the generic induction sessions for new and returning Members, a draft programme of Member Development briefings had been prepared to provide Members with specific skills and knowledge needed to carry out their roles. The programme was subject to continual review, for example, additional workshops on Transport Policy and the North Wales Growth Deal had been scheduled for November in response to Member requests. There was also an opportunity for new Members to attend a regional event held by the Welsh Local Government Association.

Councillor Chris Bithell welcomed the approach to the induction programme which had aimed to accommodate as many Members as possible. He requested

details on the number of attendees at the induction sessions and how many individuals had not attended any, in particular new Members. The Democratic Services Manager confirmed that new Members had each attended at least one induction session. He agreed to provide the information in a report to the next meeting including a breakdown by timeslots, as requested by Councillor Glyn Banks.

In response to comments from Councillor Arnold Woolley, it was explained that Overview & Scrutiny training had been given at each of those individual committees and was also covered in the Constitutional Matters induction session.

Councillor Mike Peers asked whether development sessions on the Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 should be brought forward, as this topic had been raised by Wales Audit Office (WAO) as an area of particular focus during the recent discussion groups. The Democratic Services Manager would seek clarification as this had not been identified as a priority by WAO.

Councillor Bithell stressed the importance of all Members and officers understanding their responsibilities on safeguarding and referred to the sessions to be delivered before Overview & Scrutiny and Audit committee meetings. It was explained that the sessions were open to all Members and that those unable to attend would be given an opportunity to take part in a mop-up session.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the Committee notes the Member induction programme held after the elections; and
- b) That the Committee supports the approach to Member Development for the rest of the municipal year, as detailed in Appendix A to the report.

9. MEMBER SURVEY ON MEETING TIMES

The Democratic Services Manager presented a report on Member consultation for committee meeting times, along with a proposed survey form. He set out the proposed approach to invite elected and co-opted Members to submit their opinions on preferred times and weekdays, including the option for evening meetings.

Councillor Chris Bithell referred to the potential cost implications of holding evening meetings and suggested twilight meetings between 5-7pm as a more cost-effective alternative. The Democratic Services Manager agreed to include this option in the survey as it may help to avoid clashes with Town/Community Council meetings. He also agreed that the 9am and 10am timeslots should be shown as separate options, as requested by Councillor Clive Carver.

On twilight meetings, points were raised by Councillor Marion Bateman and Neville Phillips on the implications for staff working arrangements and the prospect of clashes with School Governor meetings.

Councillor Mike Peers said that only the membership of individual committees should be entitled to vote on those meeting times. The Chief Officer explained that

any new arrangements would apply to meetings throughout the whole of the current Council term during which time memberships may change. He also pointed out that a Member wishing to be on a particular committee may be unable to do so due to the current arrangements.

In support of wider consultation, Councillor Bithell pointed out that other Members often attended Overview & Scrutiny meetings as observers.

Councillor Peers proposed that Members be asked to only vote on committees on which they served, including substitutes where these existed. This was seconded by Councillor Arnold Woolley. On being put to the vote, this was carried.

As an alternative to the survey, Councillor David Williams proposed that Members of each committee should vote on their preferred arrangements for that committee at the start of each year. He was advised that the Social & Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee had previously taken this approach by agreeing on a mix of morning and afternoon meetings to encourage attendance.

The Committee then considered Councillor Williams' proposal to consult individual committees on their preferences. This was seconded by Councillor Woolley and supported by the Committee.

The Chief Officer clarified that an item would be scheduled for each committee to consider the pattern of meetings and to ask whether the membership (including substitutes) wished to vote on paper or electronically. In addition, all Members would be surveyed on the meeting pattern of full Council.

It was explained that the survey results would be reported back to the Committee and that time was required to incorporate any changes into the Schedule of Meetings for 2018/19 prior to consideration by full Council on 1 May 2018.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That Members be asked to vote only on arrangements for committees on which they serve, including substitutes where these existed; and
- (b) That an item be scheduled for each committee to consider how they wish to vote on their preferred pattern of meetings.

10. SHARING INFORMATION WITHIN THE COUNCIL

The Chief Officer (Governance) presented a report on a proposed review of rules within the Constitution on sharing information. The aim was to clarify what levels of information could be shared inside the Council to meet the needs of Members and to comply with legislation.

The recommended approach was to establish a cross-party working group led by the Vice-Chair of the Committee (in the absence of the Chair) with representation by the Cabinet Members for Social Services, Housing and Education as the portfolio holders handling the most sensitive data.

The proposed review was welcomed by Members who recognised the importance of safeguarding against the pitfalls of sharing information.

The Chief Officer confirmed that he would attend meetings to provide advice to the working group, along with other relevant officers. He recommended that the working group adopt a staged approach to allow detailed consideration and understanding of the topic. The rules would then be shared for consultation prior to seeking adoption by Council in May 2018. He agreed to contact Group Leaders on the membership on the working group.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That a working group be established to re-write the rules for officers and Members contained within the Constitution on how information is shared inside the Council;
- (b) That the working group should consist of up to 8 members including the Chair or Vice Chair of the Committee, Cabinet Members for Education, Housing and Social Services (whose portfolios handle the most sensitive personal data) plus 1 member from each of the other political groups; and
- (c) That the working group be asked to report to the Constitution and Democratic Services Committee in time for it to make recommendations to the Annual Meeting of Council in May 2018.

11. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT

The Democratic Services Manager presented the draft Overview & Scrutiny Annual Report for 2016/17 for consideration. He circulated a suggested foreword for the report, in tribute to the late Councillor Ron Hampson as the longest-serving committee Chairman, on which Members spoke in support.

Following suggestions by Councillor Mike Peers, it was agreed to incorporate in the report a preface giving details on how an item could be submitted to Overview & Scrutiny. In the section on call-in meetings, reference to the committee voting on the options available would be included.

On Appendix 1 to the report, Councillor Chris Bithell questioned the accuracy of some of the membership dates which the Democratic Services Manager agreed to amend accordingly.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the suggested foreword be included in the Annual Report; and
- (b) That, subject to the amendments put forward by Councillors Bithell and Peers, the Committee approves the report for submission to Council at the next meeting.

12. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

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

(The meeting started at 2pm and ended at 3.15pm)

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Chair