

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
DATE: TUESDAY, 11 SEPTEMBER 2012
REPORT BY: DEMOCRACY & GOVERNANCE MANAGER
SUBJECT: ELECTED MEMBER SURVEY

1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.01 To consider the results of the survey of elected Members undertaken during June.

2.00 BACKGROUND

2.01 Attached as appendix 1 is the survey that was sent to all Members on the 7 June seeking responses by the 29 June 2012. Approximately two thirds of Members responded by the deadline and appendix 2 gives the detailed analysis of these responses.

2.02 Section 6 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 requires the Council to have regard to guidance issued by the Welsh Government relating to the times at which meetings of the Council and its committees and sub committees meet. In June such guidance was issued and this stated that all local authorities should review the times at which meetings are held at least once in every term, preferably shortly after the new Council is elected. It went on to indicate that the rule of thumb should be that meetings will be held at times, intervals and locations which are convenient to its Members and as far as it is practicable, have regard to equality and diversity issues. A copy of the relevant part of the guidance is attached as appendix 3.

2.03 Section 7 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 requires local authorities to secure the provision of reasonable training and development opportunities for its Members. The Member survey therefore included asking Members if there were any skills or topics they would wish to include in the Member training programme for 2012/13.

2.04 The start of the new Council is a good opportunity for ascertaining the wishes of Members as to whether they want to receive their agendas and reports electronically or have paper copies. The last three questions in the survey covered this.

2.05 The results of the survey were considered at the political Group Leaders meeting on the 9 July 2012 prior to consideration by the Democratic Services Committee at its meeting on the 24 July 2012. The Democratic Services Committee resolved to forward the results of the Member survey to County Council.

3.00 CONSIDERATIONS

3.01 The responses to the first three questions show a preference for meetings to be held in the morning rather than the afternoon with little support for evening meetings. The preferred starting times are 10.00 am for morning meetings, 2.00 pm for afternoon meetings and 6.00 pm for evening meetings.

3.02 Paragraph 1.12 of the statutory guidance states that when conducting a survey account should be taken on whether particular times caused difficulties for councillors with particular characteristics. For this reason question 8 asked for details of personal circumstances that limit a Member's ability to attend meetings. In response several Members referred to their employment commitments and some others to their caring responsibilities. The full list of the responses given are in appendix 2. Whilst the responses from those in employment favoured evening meetings, other responses indicated evening commitments that would prevent their attendance.

3.03 Paragraph 1.13 of the statutory guidance refers to considering whether there may be advantages to rotating meeting times due to an impossibility of pleasing all Members all of the time. At present the Planning and Development Control Committee starts at 1.00 pm as experience showed that commencing at 2.00 pm led to meetings ending in the evening. At present the only committee that normally meets in the evening is the Standards Committee.

3.04 The vast majority of responses to the survey favoured meetings being held at County Hall, Mold. The Lifelong Learning Overview & Scrutiny Committee has however, recently unanimously resolved that where appropriate to an item on its agenda it will meet at that location rather than in County Hall.

3.05 Questions 5 and 6 relate to the preferred frequency of different types of meetings. For meetings of the County Council the largest number of responses indicated eight times a year with approximately equal numbers suggesting either six or twelve times a year. For the cabinet there was an overwhelming majority in favour of meeting twelve times a year. For individual Overview & Scrutiny Committees there was a similar but smaller preference for each committee meeting twelve times a year. In relation to other committees the most popular response was for them to meet six times a year. These preferences are broadly in line with the average frequency of meeting in the last Council.

- 3.06 Question 7 was seeking Members preference for when the different types of meetings should be held. There was a large majority in favour of Cabinet and Council meetings being held on Tuesdays with a smaller majority in favour of Wednesdays for Overview & Scrutiny Committees. For other committees there was a small preference for Monday meetings. The Council may wish to resolve that Cabinet and Council meetings should normally continue to be held on Tuesdays with committee meetings normally held on Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday. It may also wish to consider that in view of the survey results Council meetings should be held in the morning.
- 3.07 Questions 9, 10 and 11 relate to the number of committees that Members believe it is practical for them to serve upon and whether there should be any limit. There was a mixed response to whether there should be any limit on the number of committees a Member serves on. There was however, a slight majority in favour of limiting the number of committees a Member serves on with this limit being between two and four committees. Council may consider that this is best left to individual Group Leaders when allocating committee places to members of their group.
- 3.08 Question 12 was seeking suggestions for any skills or topics that Members wish to include in the Member training programme for 2012/13. IT, planning and financial matters were topics that were suggested by more than one Member. These are all being catered for in the arrangements that have been put in place for the current year.
- 3.09 The last questions in the survey relate to the despatch of agendas and reports. It shows that there are a majority of Members in favour of receiving a mixture of some electronically and some paper copies. In relation to paper copies there is a clear majority in favour of having them posted only if that Member has not collected them from their pigeonhole in Member Services by the Friday lunch time.
- 3.10 In view of the cost of postage having recently increased it is important that as many Members as possible receive their papers electronically or collect paper copies from Member Services. It is more environmentally friendly and quicker for agendas and reports to be sent electronically. Work is ongoing in relation to identifying a suitable electronic device that can be issued to all Members and at that time there will need to be a review of the arrangements concerning the despatch of paper copies. In the meantime Council may consider that the wishes of individual Members should be complied with.

4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.01 For Council to consider the results of the Member survey, the suggestions in paragraphs 3.05, 3.06 and 3.09 and make any appropriate changes to existing practice.

5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.01 The Member training budget is £13,707.

6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT

6.01 None as a result of this report.

7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

7.01 The greater use of electronic agendas and reports is more environmentally friendly than paper copies.

8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT

8.01 This is an important consideration when determining the timings of meetings.

9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

9.01 None as a result of this report.

10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED

10.01 None as a result of this report.

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

11.01 With Group Leaders and their deputies.

12.00 APPENDICES

12.01 Appendix 1 - Member survey
Appendix 2 - detailed analysis of survey
Appendix 3 - timing of Council meetings guidance

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985
BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

The results of the Member survey

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