

Question 1:

Can FCC Cabinet as matter of urgency fully staff the Members services office especially for new Members for at least 6 Months.

Response:

During the recent lockdown restrictions new ways of working for the service were required. Member Services have had to adapt to performing tasks remotely and to providing appropriate support to Members remotely. The types of enquiries didn't change, and still include:

- information on allowances and claims,
- the best phone number or name of officer or email address for different departments and services,
- IT issues such as passwords etc,
- inviting the Chair to events, or to visit someone for an anniversary etc.
- ordering business cards,
- who's on which committees,
- when a meeting or workshop is taking place.

As we have moved out of restrictions, there has been an assumption that working practices would revert to pre-pandemic ways. However, since the election, with meetings continuing to be held remotely or in hybrid format, Members have not been regularly attending County Hall in any numbers (except on full council days). Consequently, there hasn't been significant demand for physical support from Member Services delivered in County Hall. Members, new and returning are now more familiar with using electronic means of communication and accessing information via the Infonet.

In light of the financial challenges facing the Council all services have been set savings targets to achieve. The service also lost a long standing member of the team who took up a new role with another organisation. The Democratic Services Manager is currently reviewing working practices to ensure that Councillors receive the support they need cost effectively and within the budget parameters for his service.

It is recognised that where there is a meeting which has the option for attendance in person at County Hall, there is likely to be a need for Member Services to be available in person for support. However as the majority of members continue to work remotely the need for in person service is greatly diminished, bearing in mind that councillors can if they require, still phone for support whilst in County Hall.

Question 2:

Can Council be advised when County Hall will be vacated?

Response:

As Cabinet Member for Governance and Corporate Services including Health and Safety and Human resources, can I thank Cllr Attridge for raising the question.

The position remains complex for a number of reasons not least because we need to understand in some detail the future working model and establish a set of principles and from there work through a number of detailed scenarios. The current and future situation relating to accommodation across the public estate generally is creating a degree of debate informed in the main by the ways of working which flowed from the pandemic for example remote, flexible and agile working, all established on the basis that there would be less fixed desk working and increased flexibility where people worked.

These matters are informing our current thinking and developing strategy, what is critical is the future size of our corporate office accommodation, we currently have three sites, Mold being one, but as everyone knows it is at the end of its current economic working life. Questions which are at the forefront of current thinking relate to the need to retain three office buildings, and on this premise how big would a new 'County Hall' be, from that answer flows how much would it cost, or could a rather more radical approach be considered for example, could what is in County Hall, staffing wise be accommodated in the other two offices with a more flexibly provided Council Chamber, etc.

There are a number of constraints currently to some of this thinking which will present further challenges on such issue if the current data centre and the future provision of such services and equipment.

As work develops reports will be brought back for Cabinet and Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration and comment.

Question 3:

Will Cabinet agree to a public interest report on all FCC leaseholds across Flintshire to assure Members that we are doing business with ethical people.

Response:

As Cabinet Member for Governance and Corporate Services including Health and Safety and Human resources, can I thank Cllr Attridge for raising the question.

The Council already has duties and obligations set out in the Equalities Act and applies these in its existing procurement policies so whilst not directly linked to the specifics of the question establishes a comparable principle.

On a more practical point however, it simply isn't possible for us to establish the ethics of the people who lease properties from us. For example if we sought to question people on their view how would we know whether the views espoused were sincere? Moreover there is perhaps a more fundamental question about the desirability or feasibility of someone exercising what would necessarily be a highly subjective judgement on someone who has outdated, but not illegal, views about, say, the role of women in society.

There are, however, existing mechanisms for redress where someone does breach existing laws. Where a person feels that they are being discriminated against by reason of their gender, ethnicity etc. then they can, depending on whether the behaviour amounts to a criminal offence, report the issue to the Police. If it does not then they can seek help from the Equality Advisory Support Service or they can complain to the Council, which would then have a concrete example of behaviour in respect of which it could consider taking action.

An independent inquiry into all FCC leases across Flintshire would be labour intensive and potentially unproductive due to the difficulties outlined above. I can, however, confirm that a piece of work is to commence around new leases and the streamlining and modernisation of them and we will seek to consider this particular aspect in this work stream.