

CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE
14 JULY 2010

Minutes of the meeting of the Constitution Committee of Flintshire County Council held in County Hall, Mold on Wednesday, 14 July, 2010.

PRESENT: Councillor A.M. Halford (Vice Chair in the Chair)

Councillors: J.B. Attridge, D. Barratt, R.C. Bithell, J.C. Cattermoul, V. Gay, G. Hardcastle, P. G. Heesom, H.D. Hutchinson, R. P. Macfarlane and A. Woolley.

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Eng. K. Armstrong-Braun, A.J. Davies-Cooke and J.E. Falshaw.

SUBSTITUTE: Councillor R.G. Hampson for A.P. Shotton

APOLOGIES: Councillors: R.J.T. Guest, Q.R.H Dodd, N. Phillips, L.A. Sharps and N.R. Steele-Mortimer.

IN ATTENDANCE:

Chief Executive, Head of Legal and Democratic Services, Democracy and Governance Manager, Member Engagement Manager and Committee Officer.

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor V. Gay declared a personal interest in item 4 relating to Member Champions.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 26 April, 2010, were submitted.

Matters Arising

The Democracy and Governance Manager advised that action had been taken to implement the decisions on page 3 of the minutes.

RESOLVED

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

3. MEMBER CHAMPIONS

The Democracy and Governance Manager introduced a report the purpose of which was to consider recommendations from the Member Champions Task and Finish Group. He provided background information and referred to the key considerations detailed in the report.

The Democracy and Governance Manager explained that prior to the first meeting of the Task and Finish Group each Member Champion had been given the opportunity to discuss their role with him. He advised that this had then informed the report to the Task and Finish Group which met on the 28 May 2010 and a copy of the minutes of that meeting were attached as an appendix to the report. The Democracy and Governance Manager asked the Committee to consider the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group as set out in paragraphs 3.04 to 3.08 of the report. He also requested that Members considered the Model Role Description for Member Champions which was distributed during the meeting.

Councillor R.C. Bithell questioned the need for Member Champions in the Authority. He referred to the functions of Executive and Scrutiny and expressed the view that all Members were adequately able to champion matters which concerned their Wards and those areas which were of special interest to them. He referred to the individual skills, specialist knowledge and experience acquired by Members and commented that this should be more fully utilised. Councillor A. Woolley indicated his willingness to appoint Member Champions outside the Executive but expressed the view that Champion roles absorbed into the Executive would not be conducive to improvement.

During the ensuing discussion a number of concerns and comments were raised by Members over entitlement to allowances and approved duties for Member Champions. Members also expressed the view that the proposal to appoint Member Champions introduced a further unnecessary tier of hierarchy. In his response to Members' comments the Democracy and Governance Manager gave an assurance that there was no intention to detract from the role of the Local Member.

Councillor V. Gay gave an overview of her role as a Member Champion for Older People and informed Members that she viewed it as helping the relevant Executive Member in a specialised and time consuming area. She expressed the view that making an Executive Member a Member Champion could lead to the Member's workload becoming overloaded.

The Chief Executive advised Members that there was no requirement by the Welsh Assembly Government to have Member Champions, however, if Members decided to make such appointments discussion would need to take place about which roles would need to be covered. He also made reference to roles and responsibilities and the need for third parties to clearly understand the role and status of the Member Champion.

In conclusion Councillor R.C. Bithell put forward a proposal that Members should not continue with Member Champions in Flintshire County Council. Members voted on the proposal and recommended that the Authority discontinued the practice of Member Champions.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee recommended that the practice of Member Champions be discontinued.

4. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

The Democracy and Governance Manager introduced a report the purpose of which was to give further consideration to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee structure pursuant to the decision at the Council's annual meeting.

The Democracy and Governance Manager provided background information and referred to the key considerations in the report. He advised that at the Co-ordinating Committee meeting on 3 June it was decided to recommend to the Constitution Committee that the existing number of Overview and Scrutiny Committees be retained and that officers review all the Committees in an attempt to define synergies. He also reported that the Coordinating Committee had decided that the Committee Chairman should write to all Members to ask that they provide their views and evidence on whether they thought there was a need to reduce the number of Overview and Scrutiny Committees and their responses to the Chairman's letter were summarised in Appendix 4 to the report. The Democracy and Governance Manager asked the Committee to consider what representation it wished to make to the Council on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee structure.

The Chairman invited the Member Engagement Manager to express his views on the Committee structure prior to Members' observations. The Member Engagement Manager advised that he continued to advocate having four functional Scrutiny Committees as this had worked well in the past, however, he did not intend that the role of scrutiny be reduced but that it works more effectively.

During a discussion Members put forward their views. Councillor J.B. Attridge expressed the opinion that the Authority should retain the status quo and that a recommendation be made to the Executive that a review of resources be undertaken to ensure that scrutiny could function effectively. Councillor A. Woolley also echoed the sentiments made by Councillor Attridge and emphasised the importance and increasing need for scrutiny. Councillor P. Heesom commented that there was a need for greater Member input into the scrutiny process. He suggested that Members actively put forward issues for scrutiny and, where appropriate, that elected members be co-opted onto Committees to provide specialist knowledge in terms of Ward matters. Councillor D. Barratt expressed concerns regarding duplication or loss of membership should the Corporate Management and People and Performance Committees be combined into one Corporate Committee.

Councillor R.P. Macfarlane referred to the bleak financial outlook and the difficult decisions which lay ahead in terms of service delivery and indicated that it was not the appropriate time to reduce the number of Committees. Councillors R.G. Hampson and G. Hardcastle also indicated a wish to retain the existing number of Scrutiny Committees.

The Chief Executive acknowledged the comments and concerns expressed by Members. In summarising the debate he referred to the strong indication by Members that they wished to retain the existing number of

Overview and Scrutiny Committees and suggested that some revisions could be made around the specific titles and terms of reference for the Corporate Management and People and Performance Committees. He also referred to the need for greater emphasis on future efficiencies and financial choices, and scrutiny of external bodies.

Referring to the suggestion by Councillor Heesom for further Member input into Committee agendas the Member Engagement Manager explained that Members were given the opportunity and encouraged to add items onto the Forward Work Programme for future consideration and that the arrangements which existed for Members to be co-opted onto committees had not been changed.

Councillor J.B. Attridge put forward a proposal that the Authority should retain the existing number of Overview and Scrutiny Committees and that the Executive review the resources of Scrutiny to ensure it is able to function effectively. After further discussion the Committee unanimously agreed the following:

RESOLVED

- (a) To retain the existing number of Overview and Scrutiny Committees but with 15 members on the Co-ordinating Committee and for the Co-ordinating Committee to review the terms of reference of the various Committees; and
- (b) That the Executive review the resources of Scrutiny to ensure it is able to function effectively.

5. DURATION OF MEETING

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and finished at 11.20 am.

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Chairman

SUMMARY OF DECLARATIONS MADE BY MEMBERS
IN ACCORDANCE WITH FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S
CODE OF CONDUCT

CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE		DATE 14 July 2010
MEMBER	ITEM	MIN. NO. REFERS
Councillor V. Gay	Member Champions	4