

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

24 JULY 2012

Minutes of the meeting of the Democratic Services Committee of Flintshire County Council held at Delyn Committee Room, County Hall, Mold, CH7 6NA on Tuesday, 24 July 2012

PRESENT: Councillor Robin Guest (Chairman)

Councillors Chris Bithell, Derek Butler, David Cox, Ian Dunbar, David Evans, Veronica Gay, Patrick Heesom, Joe Johnson, Paul Shotton, Owen Thomas and Arnold Woolley

APOLOGIES: Councillors Clive Carver, Glenys Diskin, George Hardcastle, Rita Johnson, Neville Phillips and Ian Roberts.

IN ATTENDANCE: Head of Legal and Democratic Services (for minute numbers 1 to 4), Democracy and Governance Manager (for minute numbers 5 to 8), Member Engagement and Committee Officer

1. VARIATION IN ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Chairman indicated that there would be a change in the order of the agenda and the item on the Head of Democratic Services would be brought forward.

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

The Chairman sought nominations for a Vice-Chair for the Committee.

RESOLVED:

That Councillor J.M. Johnson be appointed Vice-Chair of the Committee.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

There were no declarations of interest.

4. HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services introduced a report to enable the Committee to designate a Head of Democratic Services in accordance with the Local Government Measure 2011.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services provided background information and advised that the final statutory guidance in respect of the requirement was attached. He gave an overview of the role of the Head of Democratic Services.

Members were informed that the Guidance also referred to how resources were to be made available to ensure that the Council complied with its obligation

under the Measure. In practice the Head of Democratic Services would make recommendations to the Democratic Services Committee which in turn would negotiate with the Cabinet so that Council could approve the level of resources to be provided.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services advised that there was only one position that would meet the criteria, namely the post of Democracy & Governance Manager. During discussion he responded to the queries raised by Members concerning the term of appointment and the additional demands of the post.

RESOLVED:

That the Democracy and Governance Manager be designated as the Head of Democratic Services in accordance with the Local Government Measure 2011

5. STATUTORY GUIDANCE ON THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (WALES) MEASURE 2011

The Democracy and Governance Manager introduced a report to inform the Committee of those parts of the statutory guidance relating to the training and development of Members and the Democratic Services Committee. He provided background information and gave an overview of the main considerations as detailed in the report.

Councillor R.C. Bithell expressed disappointment concerning the need to address the new provision in the guidance that local authorities be encouraged to appoint a Member Development Champion. He proposed that the Chairman of the Democratic Services Committee be appointed as Member Development Champion and this was agreed by Members.

Members were informed that when the Council was consulted on the draft statutory guidance it made no representations about the provisions dealing with the training and development of Members. The final version of the statutory guidance contained some changes from the draft guidance and these were detailed in appendix 2 of the report. Members were advised that the Member training budget of £13,707 was not just for purchasing external training and it was recommended to the Committee that £5k of it be made available for that purpose.

The Democracy and Governance Manager referred to the existing arrangements for Members in receipt of special responsibility allowances to have an annual review meeting. He advised that the current process could be broadened to facilitate all Members having such an annual review which would comply with the requirements of the Measure and guidance subject to the liaison with the Welsh Local Government Association recommended in the guidance. This was agreed by Members and became the resolution of the Committee.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the provisions in the statutory guidance be noted;

- (b) That the Committee recommends to Council that the Chairman of the Democratic Services Committee be appointed as Member Development Champion pursuant to the statutory guidance;
- (c) That £5K is made available from the Member training budget for purchase of external training; and
- (d) That the existing arrangements for Members receiving special responsibility allowances having annual review meetings be extended to cover all Members.

6. FEEDBACK ON MEMBER DEVELOPMENT EVENTS

The Democracy and Governance Manager introduced a report to provide the Committee with feedback on Member development events held since the County Council elections.

The Democracy and Governance Manager provided background information and advised that the phase 1 Member induction programme was attached to his report and detailed the events that were cancelled due to insufficient Members booking and the number of Members that attended the other events. All Members had been invited to the phase 1 programme and Member feedback from the events was also attached to the report. Overall feedback was good and the Committee was asked to make observations on their experience or suggestions for improvement for future events.

Councillor R.C. Bithell expressed disappointment on Members' poor attendance at the induction events citing Corporate Parenting as a specific example. He emphasised the importance of refresher training for existing Members and the benefit that was gained by new Members sharing the experiences of returning Members during such sessions. Councillor V. Gay suggested that it may be helpful if political Group Leaders were provided with a record of Members' attendance at training events.

It was agreed that political Group Leaders be asked to encourage all Members to attend training events and be informed of the attendances from their group. Members also agreed that feedback on Member Development Events be reported to future meetings of the Committee.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the observations of Members in response to feedback on Member development events be noted;
- (b) That political Group Leaders be asked to encourage all Members to attend training events;
- (c) That political Group Leaders be informed of the attendances from their group;
- (d) That feedback on Member Development Events be reported to future meetings of the Committee.

7. ELECTED MEMBER SURVEY

The Democracy and Governance Manager introduced a report to provide the results of the survey of elected Members undertaken during June. Two thirds

of Members had responded and the report provided detailed analysis of the responses received.

The Democracy and Governance Manager provided background information and gave an overview of the main considerations in the report. He referred to the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 which required 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. The Measure also required Councils to secure the provision of reasonable training and development opportunities for its Members.

Councillor D. Evans commented on the personal circumstances which limited a Member's ability to attend meetings and cited employment commitments as a specific example. He proposed that a further survey be undertaken of those Members that were in employment to seek their opinions. Councillor V. Gay seconded the proposal and when put to the vote this was lost.

During discussion the despatch of agendas and reports and the cost of postage was raised. The Democracy and Governance Manager responded to the queries and concerns expressed by Members and referred to the feedback from the pilot use of tablets which had been undertaken by a group of Members and reported to the February meeting of the Member Development Working Group.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee forward the results of the Member survey to Council.

8. FUTURE MEMBER TRAINING

The Democracy and Governance Manager introduced a report to inform the Committee of planned future Member training in 2012/13. He advised that an initial Member development programme for 2012/13 had been previously agreed by the Member Development Working Group and was attached to his report. Phase 2 of the Member induction programme would run from September to end of December and the topics identified for inclusion were attached to the report.

The Democracy and Governance Manager reported that feedback from Member development events indicated there had been comparatively poor attendance at the Phase 1 Member induction events. This was raised with political Group Leaders and it was proposed that for Phase 2 the individual details for each topic would be provided explaining what would be covered and why Members should attend, together with a booking form.

RESOLVED:

That the report on phase 2 of the Member induction programme and the Member Development Programme 2012/13 be noted.

9. PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There were no members of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 3.50 pm and ended at 5.20 pm)

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Chairman