

## **DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**24 APRIL 2013**

Minutes of the meeting of the Democratic Services Committee of Flintshire County Council held at Delyn Committee Room, County Hall, Mold CH7 6NA on Wednesday, 24 April 2013

### **PRESENT: Councillor Robin Guest (Chairman)**

Councillors: Chris Bithell, Derek Butler, Clive Carver, Ian Dunbar, David Evans, George Hardcastle, Patrick Heesom, Tim Newhouse, Neville Phillips, Paul Shotton, Nigel Steele-Mortimer and Owen Thomas

### **APOLOGIES:**

Councillors: David Cox, Veronica Gay, Joe Johnson, Rita Johnson and Arnold Woolley

### **IN ATTENDANCE:**

Head of Legal and Democratic Services, Democracy and Governance Manager, and Committee Officer

## **25. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)**

There were no declarations of interest.

## **26. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 30 January 2013, were submitted.

### **Matters arising**

Councillor R.C. Bithell referred to his Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check and commented that he was not aware if a recheck had yet been undertaken. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services responded that he would review the current situation regarding Members' CRB checks.

### **Feedback on Member Development Events**

Councillor C.S. Carver asked if Group Leaders had been contacted concerning the attendance of Members at training events. The Democracy and Governance Manager confirmed that he had written to Group Leaders with the intent of securing improved Member attendance at such events.

### **RESOLVED:**

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

## **27. ANNUAL REPORTS BY MEMBERS**

The Democracy and Governance Manager introduced a report to inform of the current position on annual reports by Members. He provided background

information and reported that the Committee had previously considered consultation by the Welsh Government (WG) on draft guidance on annual reports and a response had been sent to the WG on 25 October 2012. The final version of the guidance was still awaited from the WG.

Members were advised that the draft guidance had anticipated that the first member annual reports would be published by the end of June 2013, however, representations had been made to the WG that as the final version of the guidance had not been issued the timescale should be altered to the end of September 2013. The Democracy and Governance Manager commented that whilst it was hoped that the timescale would be delayed it may not be and Members should prepare and consider the issues relating to such annual reports as there would be a need to proceed quickly once the final guidance was issued.

The Democracy and Governance Manager referred to the new arrangements under the Local Government (Wales) Measure for local authorities around the annual reports produced by Members and the publishing of such reports. He said that there ought to be some conditions imposed as to the content of the annual reports and these were as suggested in the report.

Members were asked to consider the conditions detailed in the report and either recommend or determine any further appropriate conditions on the contents of such reports for consideration by Council and Cabinet.

Councillor R.C. Bithell commented on the need for Members to have sufficient time to prepare for the task involved and commented that Members should wait until final guidance was received.

During discussion the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Democracy and Governance Manager responded to the queries raised regarding the need for Members to produce and publish annual reports and the appropriate content to be included.

Councillor P.G. Heesom proposed that the item be deferred until final guidance was received from the Welsh Government. The proposal was seconded by Councillor N.R. Steele-Mortimer and became the resolution of the Committee.

**RESOLVED:**

That the item be deferred until the authority receive final guidance from the Welsh Government.

**28. GRANT IN RELATION TO BROADCASTING OF COUNTY COUNCIL MEETINGS AND IMPROVING TOWN/COMMUNITY COUNCIL WEBSITES.**

The Democracy and Governance Manager introduced a report to inform of a grant the Welsh Government had awarded to the County Council. He provided background information and advised that the Council had been allocated £40K to assist with broadcasting and remote attendance plus an extra £500 in respect of each Town or Community Council in its area. The total funding for Flintshire was up to £57K.

The Democracy and Governance Manager referred to the importance the Welsh Government attached to the broadcasting of Council meetings to ensure that the profile of local government was raised and the public were informed and engaged concerning the decision making procedures of the Council. He advised that to claim the grant the Council would have to produce evidence of at least a pilot of webcasting a meeting by the end of March 2014. He also stated that a Member may be present at a meeting through remote attendance and guidance on this was expected from the Welsh Government during the Autumn. To obtain the grant funding the Council was required to have piloted remote attendance for at least one meeting prior to the end of March 2014.

The Democracy and Governance Manager had written to the Clerks of all Town and Community Councils to inform them of the availability of up to £500 for provision of or improvements to a website for each Town or Community Council.

During discussion Members welcomed the £500 grant funding for improvements and accessibility to Town and Community Councils on the internet. Members also expressed a number of views in support of and against the webcasting of meetings and remote attendance at meetings.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services and the Democracy and Governance Manager responded to the queries raised by Members concerning the arrangements for Town or Community Councils who did not currently have a website, and the security and maintenance of such websites.

Councillor Heesom proposed that the Committee noted the offer of grant funding that the Council had accepted in March 2013 and this was agreed by Members.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Committee note the grant funding that the Council had accepted.

**29. THE ANNUAL MEMBER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME FOR 2013/14**

The Democracy and Governance Manager introduced a report for the Committee to determine the Member Development Programme for 2013/14. He advised that a letter had been sent to Group Leaders and their deputies asking for suggestions for topics for the 2013/14 Programme.

The Democracy and Governance Manager advised that the annual member development programme could cover both topics and skills but was not intended to cover training or briefings specifically provided for members of a particular committee or to cover training provided to members by the Council's ICT training Staff. .

Referring to the annual review of training and development needs which was available to all members, the Democracy and Governance Manager advised this had led to Councillor V. Gay suggesting a training course to help members create and set up their own newsletters and/or community information websites. The Community Cohesion Officer had also indicated that he could arrange for an organisation known as "Communities 2.0" to offer training to members on iPad

basics and social networking to cover the practical use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter. The Democracy and Governance Manager advised that in addition to the initial programme for 2013/14 further topics could be included on the Programme during the year.

Members welcomed the two topics which had been put forward for the 2013/14 Programme. Councillor P.G. Heesom commented on the need for more enhanced training to specifically develop Members' ICT abilities and enable them to keep pace with developments.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) That the above two topics be included in the initial member development programme for 2013/14; and
- (b) That delegated power be given to the Democracy and Governance Manager in consultation with the Committee Chair to add other topics to the initial programme where appropriate.

**30. FEEDBACK ON MEMBER DEVELOPMENT EVENTS**

The Democracy and Governance Manager introduced a report to provide feedback on Member development events held since the last meeting of the Committee. He advised that attached to the report were graphs showing the feedback received from the last two Member development events held.

Members were invited to provide feedback on their experiences or suggestions for improvements for future development events. The Democracy and Governance Manager advised that a number of training sessions had been cancelled due to insufficient attendance for interactivity to take place at the training.

Councillor N. Phillips said it was regrettable that such events had to be cancelled due to poor attendance by Members and praised the commitment of Officers and trainers. During discussion a number of concerns were raised about non attendance and clashes with committee meetings, events and fora were cited as a possible reason. Members commented that the weekly diary produced by Members Services was helpful but it was not always up to date and did not reflect all Members' diary commitments. In addition concern was expressed regarding events that were cancelled at short notice which, particularly if an evening event, prevented Members from making an alternative arrangement to attend that training.

Councillor W.P. Shotton commended the Democracy and Governance Manager on the high standard of the training sessions provided which were an excellent source of information and guidance for Members.

**RESOLVED:**

That the feedback on Member Development Events be noted

**31. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE**

There were no members of the press in attendance.

**32. DURATION OF MEETING**

The meeting commenced at 3.40 pm and finished at 4.30 pm.

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**Chairman**