

CONSTITUTION AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE
21 JUNE 2018

Minutes of the meeting of the Constitution and Democratic Services Committee of Flintshire County Council held in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Mold on Thursday, 21 June 2018.

PRESENT: Councillor Rita Johnson (Chair)

Councillors: Marion Bateman, Chris Bithell, Clive Carver, Bob Connah, Jean Davies, Rob Davies, Ian Dunbar, David Healey, Joe Johnson, Mike Peers, Paul Shotton, David Williams, David Wisinger and Arnold Woolley.

SUBSTITUTES: Councillor Vicky Perfect for Michelle Perfect

APOLOGIES: Councillors: Aaron Shotton, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance, Ted Palmer, Neville Phillips and Ian Smith

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors: Bernie Attridge, Christine Jones and Patrick Heesom (as observers)

IN ATTENDANCE: Chief Officer (Governance), Democratic Services Manager, Senior Manager Human Resources & Organisational Development, and Democratic Services Officer

1. APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIR

Councillor Joe Johnson nominated Councillor Marion Bateman as Vice-Chair of the Committee and this was duly seconded.

Councillor Bob Connah nominated Councillor Arnold Woolley and this was seconded.

On being put to the vote Councillor Marion Bateman was appointed Vice-Chair of the Committee.

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Marion Bateman be appointed Vice-Chair of the Committee.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

None were received.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 April 2018 were submitted.

Accuracy

Page 3, Councillor Clive Carver asked that the minutes be amended to record that Councillor Jean Davies had been present at the meeting.

RESOLVED:

That subject to the above amendment the minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. EXTENDING THE CARE FIRST SCHEME TO COUNTY COUNCILLORS

The Democratic Services Manager introduced the report to inform the Committee of the employee Care First service which could be extended to provide support to Members. He provided background information and explained that whilst County Councillors were not employees, they were part of the County Council and it was reasonable from a well-being perspective to extend access of the service to them.

The Democratic Services Manager referred to the main considerations, as detailed in the report, and explained that the service was free of charge to the individual and available 24 hours a day throughout the year by phone or online. He advised that Care First was designed to provide information and support to individuals with a wide range of work, family, and personal issues.

Councillor Paul Shotton supported the initiative to extend the service to Members.

Councillor Mike Peers commented on the matter of confidentiality and asked if the Authority was provided with information regarding users of the service. The Senior Manager, Human Resources & Organisational Development, explained that the Authority was not advised who accessed the service without the individual's consent but statistical information was provided to assist the Authority to identify any developing areas of concern its workforce may have within or outside the workplace with a view to providing support if needed.

Councillor Chris Bithell said the Authority had a duty of care to all its staff and spoke in support of the service which he said included school based employees.

In response to a question from Councillor Ian Dunbar concerning the provision of on-going support, the Senior Manager, Human Resources & Organisational Development explained that Care First advisors were professionally qualified to provide continued support or passport to other appropriate services if required.

In response to a comment from Councillor Clive Carver concerning resource implications, the Democratic Services Manager advised that the Care First service could be extended to Councillors at a cost of £1.76 per head as part of the Authority's existing contract. This was an annual flat rate payment which did not alter on usage.

The Senior Manager, Human Resources & Organisational Development reported that the Care First service was welcomed and promoted by the Trades Unions and was part of an all Wales programme offered to all local authorities.

She explained that the service enhanced existing provision across the Council to support the health and well-being of its employees

RESOLVED:

That the Care First service which was available to employees also be made available to County Councillors.

5. CALL IN DURING THE BUDGET PROCESS

The Chief Officer (Governance) introduced the report to consider whether to impose any limitations on the use of call-in during the budget setting process. He provided background information and advised that a range of options existed for placing limits on call-in such as:

- prohibited call in for budget decisions; or
- limiting call in to issues that have not already been considered by an Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC); or
- limiting call in to stages 1 and 2 of the new budget process so that the final 3rd stage can be delayed

In addition to the above the Chief Officer (Governance) advised that the Committee may consider that no change was required and therefore decide status quo.

The Chief Officer explained that the new budget process allowed Members to consider proposals at all Member workshops and at Overview and Scrutiny Committees at each of the 3 stages. If a Member was concerned about a budget proposal at stages 1 or 2 then it could be deferred for further detailed consideration at a later stage. He continued that this should be sufficient to enable detailed scrutiny of proposals, although at times it was not always clear what the full implications of a decision would be especially when considering the potential cumulative impact.

Councillor Chris Bithell expressed the view that the current arrangements were adequate and did not need changing. He proposed status quo for the time being.

Councillor Ian Dunbar said he saw merit in each of the three options put forward above and suggested that they all be considered with a view to providing one combined option which could be put forward for further consideration.

Councillor Mike Peers referred to the Welsh Audit Office scrutiny report and said the contents should be considered before making any change to the current arrangements and supported the status quo position. He commented that more work needed to be undertaken on the budget consultation process and said that a timeline was needed for the budget setting process in March 2019.

Councillor Arnold Woolley drew attention to the last paragraph on page 17 of the report and reiterated the statement that "ultimately it is a matter for Councillors to decide whether to submit a call in request". He concurred that the

system was to an extent “self-policing” and that Overview and Scrutiny Committees were quick to reject any call-in which lacked merit.

During discussion Members expressed further views in support of retaining the current position. When put to the vote the proposal by Councillor Chris Bithell for status quo for the time being was agreed by the Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee recommends status quo to County Council in relation to call in.

6. AUDIT AND OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY LIAISON GROUP

The Democratic Services Manager introduced the report to inform of the arrangements for liaison between the Audit and Overview and Scrutiny functions. He advised that following a meeting between officers for Internal Audit and Overview & Scrutiny, it was agreed that there was merit in resurrecting the liaison meeting approach, with the Chair and Vice-Chair of Audit Committee and each of the six Overview & Scrutiny Committees being invited to attend, alongside officers from both teams. Meetings would be scheduled on a quarterly basis and would ensure that issues of interest to both Audit and Overview & Scrutiny, such as the management of strategic risk, were properly dealt with. The Committee was asked to support the initiative.

Councillor Woolley suggested that the wording “if required for good reason” be included at the end of the recommendation.

When put to the vote the Committee supported the initiative and agreed that the wording “if required for good reason” be included in the recommendation.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee supports regular meetings of the Audit and Overview & Scrutiny Chairs and appropriate officers if required for good reason.

7. MEMBER DEVELOPMENT UPDATES

The Democratic Services Manager presented the Member Development update report to inform the Committee of recent and forthcoming Member development events and initiatives. He explained that following last year’s elections the Induction Programme was designed to provide new and returning Members with essential knowledge to function effectively as Councillors. Regular update reports on progress on the Member Development events had been reported to the Committee and if Members had any suggestions for future events they could contact the Democratic Services Manager to discuss.

The Democratic Services Manager drew attention to the Member Development events held in May and June 2018 and to the further events to be held during July and September this year, as detailed in the report. He also referred to the training to be made available to Members on Domestic Violence Awareness and a workshop to be held on 17 September, on Corporate Parenting

which would include a presentation on Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) awareness. Members were reminded that in addition to the Welsh language training offered through Coleg Cambria, they were welcome to participate in the staff lunchtime Welsh Conversation Group.

Councillor Chris Bithell commented on the low attendance at Member Development events which had been held during the day. He expressed appreciation for the Welsh Language Conversation Group sessions which Members were invited to attend.

In response to the comments on attendance the Democratic Service Manager acknowledged that the issue of low attendance at some Member Development events, for a number of reasons, was an on-going problem. He explained that morning, afternoon and evening sessions were provided where possible to accommodate Members' needs, however, the provision of evening sessions for all training events was not possible. The Democratic Services Manager explained that the Chief Executive had said that if a Member was unable to attend a training session that he/she was specifically interested in, officers could provide a condensed one-to-one session to address that need.

Councillor Paul Shotton suggested that Group Leaders could address the issue of low attendance at development events with Members.

In response to a concern raised by Councillor David Healey regarding planning matters and Town and Community Councils, the Democratic Services Manager agreed to write to all Clerks of Town and Community Councils to inform that meetings of the Authority's Planning Committee are available for the public to view on webcast on the Authority's website with the corresponding agenda and application reports.

Councillor Mike Peers suggested that all Member Development events be included on the weekly diary which was provided by the Member Services team to Members in advance of the scheduled meetings and events being held.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the progress with Member Development events be noted;
- (b) That suggestions for future Member Development events be discussed with the Democratic Services Manager; and
- (c) That the Democratic Services Manager writes to all Clerks of Town and Community Councils to inform that meetings of the Authority's Planning Committee are available for the public to view on webcast on the Authority's website.

8. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There was one member of the press and no members of the public in attendance.

(The meeting started at 2pm and ended at 3.00pm)

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Chairman