

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

DATE: TUESDAY, 24 JULY 2012

REPORT BY: DEMOCRACY & GOVERNANCE MANAGER

SUBJECT: ELECTED MEMBER SURVEY

1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.01 To consider the results of the survey of elected Members undertaken during June.

2.00 BACKGROUND

2.01 Attached as appendix 1 are the questions in a survey that was sent to all Members on the 7 June seeking responses by the 29 June 2012. Approximately two thirds of Members responded by the deadline and appendix 2 gives the detailed analysis of the responses received.

2.02 Section 6 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 requires 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. In June such guidance was issued and this stated that all local authorities should review the times of which meetings are held at least once in every term, preferably shortly after the new Council is elected. It went on to indicate that the rule of thumb should be that meetings will be held at times, intervals and locations which are convenient to its Members and as far as it is practicable, have regard to equality and diversity issues. A copy of the guidance is attached as appendix 3.

2.03 Section 7 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 requires local authorities to secure the provision of reasonable training and development opportunities for its Members. The Member survey therefore included asking Members if there were any skills or topics they would wish to include in the Member training programme for 2012/13.

2.04 The start of the new Council is a good opportunity for ascertaining the wishes of Members as to whether they want to receive their agendas and reports electronically or have paper copies. The last three questions in the survey cover this.

3.00 CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.01 The responses to the first three questions show a preference for meetings to be held in the morning rather than the afternoon with little support for evening meetings. The preferred starting times are 10.00 am for morning meetings, 2.00 pm for afternoon meetings and 6.00 pm for evening meetings. The vast majority of responses favoured the meetings being held at County Hall, Mold. The committee may consider that the survey supports existing arrangements continuing except for Council meetings being held in the morning.
- 3.02 Questions 5 and 6 relate to the preferred frequency of different types of meetings. For meetings of the County Council the largest number of responses indicated eight times a year with approximately equal numbers suggesting either six or twelve times a year. For the Cabinet there was an overwhelming majority in favour of meeting twelve times a year. For individual overview & scrutiny committees there was a similar but smaller preference for each committee meeting twelve times a year. In relation to other committees the most popular response was for them to meet six times a year. These preferences are broadly in line with the average frequency in the last Council.
- 3.03 Question 7 was seeking Members preference for when the different types of meetings should be held. There was a large majority in favour of Cabinet and Council meetings being held on Tuesdays with a smaller majority in favour of Wednesdays for overview & scrutiny committees. For other committees there was a small preference for Monday meetings. The committee may wish to recommend that Cabinet and Council meetings continue to be held on Tuesdays with committee meetings normally held on Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday.
- 3.04 Question 8 was seeking details of personal circumstances that limit a Member's ability to attend meetings and a variety of such reasons were given. Several Members referred to their employment commitments and some others to their care responsibilities. A full list of responses given, are in the answers to question 8.
- 3.05 Questions 9, 10 and 11 relate to the number of committees that Members believe it is practical for them to serve upon and whether there should be any limit. Two thirds of those responding to question 9 believed it was practical to serve on either two or three committees. There was a mixed response to whether there should be any limit on the number of committees a Member serves on. There was however, a slight majority in favour of limiting the number of committees a Member serves on with this limit being between two and four committees.

- 3.06 Question 12 was seeking suggestions for any skills or topics that Members wish to include in the Member training programme for 2012/13. IT, Planning and Financial matters were the topics that were suggested by more than one Member. It is the custom and practice for there to be four Member Planning events a year, the topics being determined by the Planning Protocol Working Group. Finance has been identified as a topic in the Member induction/refresher briefings with the dates set for the 26th, 27th and 29th November 2012. In relation to ICT training, all Members of the Council were written to on the 8th May and invited to discuss the range of ICT training courses available. ICT was also included as a topic in phase 1 of the Member induction/refresher training but two of the three sessions were cancelled due to lack of numbers with six Members attending the third session.
- 3.07 The last questions in the survey relate to the despatch of agendas and reports. It shows that there are a majority of Members in favour of receiving a mixture of some electronically and some paper copies. In relation to paper copies there is a clear majority in favour of having them posted only if that Member has not collected them from their pigeonhole in Member Services by the Friday lunch time.
- 3.08 In view of the cost of postage having recently increased, it is important that as many Members as possible receive their papers electronically or collect paper copies from Member Services. It is more environmentally friendly and quicker for agendas and reports to be sent electronically. Work is ongoing in relation to identifying a suitable electronic device that can be issued to all Members and at that time there will need to be a review of the arrangements concerning the despatch of paper copies. In the meantime the committee may wish to recommend limiting paper copies to the committees a Member is on, Cabinet and Council.

4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.01 For the committee to consider the results of the Member survey and make any appropriate recommendations to County Council.

5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.01 The Member training budget is £13,707.

6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT

- 6.01 None as a result of this report.

7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

- 7.01 None as a result of this report.

8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT

8.01 None as a result of this report.

9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

9.01 None as a result of this report.

10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED

10.01 None as a result of this report.

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

11.01 With Group Leaders and their deputies.

12.00 APPENDICES

12.01 Appendix 1 - Member survey
Appendix 2 - detailed analysis of survey
Appendix 3 - timing of Council meetings guidance

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985
BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

Results of Member survey

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