

CONSTITUTION AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE
22 JANUARY 2020

Minutes of the meeting of the Constitution and Democratic Services Committee of Flintshire County Council held at County Hall, Mold on Wednesday, 22 January 2020

PRESENT: Councillor Ted Palmer (Chairman)

Councillors: Chris Bithell, Jean Davies, Rob Davies, David Healey, Gladys Healey, Joe Johnson, Paul Johnson, Mike Peers, Michelle Perfect, Vicky Perfect, Neville Phillips, Ian Smith, David Wisinger and Arnold Woolley

SUBSTITUTES: Councillors: Patrick Heesom (for David Williams) and Tim Roberts (for Clive Carver)

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors: Ian Roberts, Carolyn Thomas and David Williams attended as observers

IN ATTENDANCE: Chief Officer (Governance), Democratic Services Manager and Democratic Services Officer

Councillor Tim Roberts was welcomed to his first committee meeting since becoming an elected Member.

21. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

22. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 November 2019 were submitted.

Councillor Peers suggested that resolution (c) of minute number 18 read 'That the Committee's view is that it would be more practical for any increases...' etc. On this basis, the minutes were moved and seconded by Councillors Arnold Woolley and Jean Davies.

RESOLVED:

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

23. COMMITTEE REVIEW

The Democratic Services Manager presented a report on the review of committees which, following consultation with Group Leaders, had resulted in the following recommendations:

- To reduce the number of Members on Overview & Scrutiny committees from 15 to 12 and to reduce the number of those committees from six to five by disaggregating the remit of the current Organisational Change Overview & Scrutiny Committee. Group Leaders had asked that four options for sharing the workload amongst the remaining five committees be put to all Members and co-optees.
- To reduce the number of Members on the Planning Committee from 21 (the legal maximum) to 17.
- To reduce the number of Members on the Constitution & Democratic Services Committee from 21 to 16 (not 18 as shown in the report).

All agreed changes would be recommended to Council on 27 February 2020 to take effect from the Annual Meeting.

Due to the low response rate and no clear preference, the Constitution & Democratic Services Committee was asked to select a preferred option from the four in the report.

The Chief Officer (Governance) explained that Group Leaders had recognised the need to improve attendance and participation at meetings, with fair representation of all political groups on the larger committees. Further points raised by Group Leaders had been acknowledged by the Leader who had agreed to reduce the number of Cabinet Members on the Planning Committee.

Copies of the current political balance arrangements were circulated, together with a revision showing the proposed changes excluding the three small committees from the calculation to ensure that the smaller political groups were not disadvantaged. The Chief Officer advised that, under the legislation, any Member voting against the political balance proposals at the Annual Meeting would result in a re-calculation to include the three small committees on which all political groups were currently represented.

Councillor Bithell welcomed the report which would help some political groups to fill their allocations on committees. On reducing the number of Overview & Scrutiny committees, he spoke in support of Option 4 with the theatre moving alongside education and leisure and the North Wales Fire & Rescue Authority (NWFRA) moving to Community & Enterprise.

Councillor Peers spoke in favour of Option 1 having received the highest number of votes from the consultation. He said that the theatre should remain with Corporate Resources and that Economic Development remain with Community & Enterprise, with Public Protection areas - including the NWFRA, Emergency Planning, etc - under Environment to reflect portfolio structures.

In thanking officers for the report, Councillor Heesom spoke in support of Option 1 and the reduced membership, but suggested that the Corporate Resources and Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committees should retain 15 Members each on account of their extended remits.

Councillor Johnson also welcomed the review and the reduction in membership which could help increase participation. In response to comments, the Chief Officer commented on mechanisms to encourage Member engagement such as substitutions, joint committee meetings and Members attending to observe meetings which could provide an opportunity to contribute without voting.

As Chairman of the Education & Youth Overview & Scrutiny Committee, Councillor David Healey welcomed the inclusion of the theatre under its remit and was supported by Councillor Bithell.

Following the discussion, Councillor Peers proposed Option 3 which he felt covered the main points raised by Members with the caveat that Emergency Planning and Civil Contingencies be with Environment & Economy. This was seconded by Councillor Wisinger.

In referring his earlier concerns about membership numbers on specific committees, Councillor Heesom said that he would support the recommendation on the basis of officers' comments on use of substitution and Members' right to speak (and not vote) when observing committees. The Democratic Services Manager said that permission for observers to speak at committees was entirely at each Chair's discretion.

Councillor Johnson asked about voting on all four options to which the Chief Officer provided advice on the procedure. On being put to the vote, Option 3 was carried.

The second recommendation in the report was moved and seconded by Councillors David Healey and Neville Phillips.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee recommends to Council:
 - that the number of Overview & Scrutiny Committees be reduced from six to five from the Annual Meeting and,
 - a preferred option for the disaggregation of the current Organisational Change Overview & Scrutiny Committee's responsibilities to the five remaining Overview & Scrutiny committees, based on the four set out in the appendix.
- (b) That the Committee recommends to Council the reduction in Members on the five Overview & Scrutiny committees, the Planning Committee and the Constitution & Democratic Services Committee, which will take effect from the Annual Meeting.

24. MEMBER DEVELOPMENT AND ENGAGEMENT

The Democratic Services Manager presented the latest progress report on Member Development and Engagement events which had been held since the last update in October. As an update on future events, all Members had been invited to a Climate Change workshop on the morning of 25 February or an evening session on 5 March 2020. Further workshops would be arranged on the Capital Programme, Council Plan, Domestic Violence and Social Value. Members were encouraged to put forward suggestions for training and development on other topics.

Councillor David Healey proposed a workshop on Section 106 obligations and Strategic Industrial Locations (SILS) to provide clarity to Members on developer contributions. This was seconded by Councillor Bithell. Councillors Heesom and Peers spoke in favour of the workshop, with the latter suggesting more focus on pre-application planning work such as consultation with Highways.

Councillor Peers commended the recent workshop on County Lines but expressed concerns at the low attendance given the importance of this topic. He asked that Councillor David Healey consider sharing the presentation slides with the Education and Youth Overview & Scrutiny Committee and also circulate to Secondary School Head Teachers.

Councillor Healey, who had also attended the workshop, welcomed the opportunity to raise awareness and requested that the item be scheduled on the Forward Work Programme.

Councillor Johnson suggested recording training sessions to benefit Members who were unable to attend. The Democratic Services Manager advised that the County Lines workshop would be repeated on a number of occasions and that all Members would be invited. On Councillor Smith's suggestion for an evening session, he would make enquiries of North Wales Police who were responsible for delivering the workshop.

Councillor Roberts, who was present in the public gallery, highlighted County Lines as a major concern across all communities, with pupils permanently excluded from schools at risk. He asked that the report considered at the recent Public Services Board meeting be anonymised and shared with Members to highlight that this was an issue affecting everyone.

Councillor Jones, who was also present, commended the numerous training sessions on County Lines which had been well attended and said that further slots could be requested via Fiona Mocko. She said that a link on the training session was available from Fiona to share with Members.

Councillor Bithell cited County Lines/child sexual exploitation as a widespread issue spreading from cities to towns and villages.

The recommendations were moved by Councillor Heesom and seconded by Councillor Healey.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee notes the progress with Member Development and Engagement events since the last report;
- (b) That the suggested training on Section 106 contributions and County Lines be actioned; and
- (c) That if Members have any further suggestions for future Member Development and Engagement, they are invited to contact the Head of Democratic Services to discuss them.

25. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There were no members of the press or public in attendance.

(The meeting started at 2pm and ended at 3.10pm)

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Chairman