

Report To: Council

Date of Meeting: 24 February 2015

Lead Officer: Democratic Services Manager

Report Author: Democratic Services Manager

Title: Committee Timetable 2015 / 16, Annual Review of Political Balance, and Appointment of Scrutiny Chairs

1. What is the report about?

This report contains information and requests decisions on committee-related issues.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

It is necessary for Council to approve a timetable for 2015/16 to enable meeting venues and resources to be confirmed, to publicise the timetable and to populate the Members' diary. As the new municipal year starts in May it is also appropriate for Council to consider changes in political balance and be aware of how Scrutiny chairing arrangements work.

3. What are the Recommendations?

- (i) That Council approves the draft timetable.
- (ii) That Council re-appoints the existing chair and membership of the Democratic Services Committee for the 2015 / 2016 municipal year, subject to any changes notified by the Groups.

4. Report details.

4.1 Committee Timetable

The new municipal year begins with the Annual Meeting of Council in May, when the current timetable of committee meetings ends. The draft timetable for meetings is attached as appendix 1 and also contains a committee-by-committee explanation of the factors behind the identification of suitable dates for each meeting.

An important new factor is the decision by members through the *Freedoms and Flexibilities* / budget workshops process requiring each committee to hold 1 less meeting per year to save on costs. The additional information contained in Appendix 1 itemises how this has been applied. It should be noted that on occasions urgent business arises that requires a committee to convene a special meeting and special meetings will still be held whenever they are required.

Whilst approving the current timetable members requested an extension to the timetable in future which would result in an 18 month schedule. The first table in

Appendix 1 contains the timetable for the 2015/16 municipal year whilst the second table covers the period May 2016 to December 2016.

4.2 Annual Review of Political Balance

The Council is required to consider at least annually how the membership of its committees relates to the political balance of the Groups. Changes to the membership of committees and the strength of the political groups mean that not all committees are currently politically balanced, and these are shown in appendix 2.

At the time of writing this report the recommendations in appendix 2 are relevant. The actual membership of each of the committees is shown in appendix 3 for information.

The recent death of Councillor Margaret McCarroll reduces the size of the Labour Group from 18 members to 17. This reduction does not affect the political balance calculations for any of the committees other than the Planning Committee where Labour would be entitled to 11 seats rather than 12 and the Independent's would gain a seat.

It is suggested that the current membership and political balance be retained until the Rhyl South West by-election has been held on the 19 March 2015, after which any changes in political balance can be implemented.

4.3 Democratic Services Committee

Section 11 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 requires the Council to appoint a committee to review the adequacy of provision by the authority of staff, accommodation and other resources to discharge democratic services functions, and to make reports and recommendations to the authority in relation to such provision.

The members of the Democratic Services Committee must be appointed by Full Council. There are to be no co-opted members. Under the Measure there may be no more than one member of the Cabinet on the Committee (who cannot be the Leader), but Council in May 2012 decided that the membership would be 11 councillors and would not include members of the Cabinet.

The Committee must be politically balanced and Council must appoint its chair who must not be a member of any of the political groups represented on the Cabinet. For Denbighshire, this means that the chair will be a member of the Labour group. The Labour group have nominated the existing chair, Councillor Barry Mellor.

The existing members of the Democratic Services Committee are shown in appendix 3.

4.4 Appointment of Chairs of Scrutiny Committees

According to the principles for allocating Scrutiny chairs in the 2011 Local Government (Wales) Measure the Groups represented in the Cabinet (Independents, Conservatives and Plaid Cymru) will be entitled to 1 of the 3 scrutiny chairs, and it will be for those groups to decide amongst themselves which of their eligible

members will be a chair. The Labour Group, as the only group which does not have members on Cabinet, is entitled to appoint 2 of the scrutiny chairs.

Neither the Measure nor the associated statutory guidance make provisions for changing or re-appointing scrutiny chairs, except where the political make-up of Cabinet changes or where a scrutiny chair is vacated for some reason. The appointment of chairs for the new municipal year is therefore a matter for the political groups to consider and to report any changes.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

The decisions and information arising from this report are central to the functioning of the democratic and committee systems which are essential elements of the Council's governance arrangements and contribute to the Council's corporate priorities.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

The costs of maintaining a committee system are covered within existing budgets but the Council has made a commitment through its *Freedom and Flexibilities* process to reduce the number of committee meetings being held to save the associated costs. Services throughout the Council may contribute to the meetings included in the timetable, usually by contributing information, reports and officer time.

7. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others, and has an Equality Impact Assessment Screening been undertaken?

The annual timetable of meetings is an established process and meets the aims of the Equality Act. The principal 'service users' are the members of the committees and supporting officers although the press and public are also able to attend most meetings the interest of individuals or groups is likely to depend on the topic under consideration.

A survey of councillors was conducted in 2012 on the timing and location of meetings and the results have been taken into consideration. The Council uses the most suitable meeting rooms whenever possible (in terms of access, parking, toilet facilities, public transport).

8. Chief Finance Officer Statement

There are no additional costs arising from the recommendations in this report. The reduction in meetings will help deliver the efficiency agreed in the budget process.

9. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

Failure to confirm a new meeting schedule and other committee-related issues in this report would be detrimental to the Council's governance arrangements.

10. Power to make the Decision

Schedule 12 of the Local Government Act 1972; Local Government and Housing Act 1989; Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011.