

**Report To:** Council

**Date of Meeting:** 12 April 2016

**Lead Officer:** Democratic Services Manager

**Report Author:** Democratic Services Manager

**Title:** Committee Timetable 2017, Annual Review of Political Balance, and Appointment of Scrutiny Chairs

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**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 2017 in line with Council's decision to maintain an 18 month timetable, 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 2016/17 municipal year, subject to any changes notified by the Groups.
- (iii) That Council appoints 1 councillor to the Standards Committee

**4. Report details.**

**4.1 Committee Timetable**

The new municipal year begins with the Annual Meeting of Council in May. The current timetable of committee meetings continues until the end of 2016 and will be extended until the end of 2017 in accordance with Council's request to maintain an 18 month timetable. The draft timetable for 2017 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.

**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 deaths of Councillors Peter Owen and Richard Davies have reduced the size of the Conservative Group from 8 members to 7 and the Independent Group from 13 to 12. This reduction does not affect the political balance calculations for most of the committees other than the Corporate Health, Safety and Welfare Committee and SACRE where the Conservative Group would be entitled to 1 seat on each rather than either 1 or 2 (previously with 8 members each both the Conservative and Plaid Cymru Groups had the same political balance weighting so either (but only one of them) could take a second seat on those committees). The second seat would now be allocated to the Plaid Cymru Group.

The political balance of the Council will change slightly once again following by-elections in June for the vacant seats.

#### **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.

#### **4.5 Standards Committee**

The Council's Standards Committee membership includes 2 county councillors. Currently, Councillor Barry Mellor is appointed to this committee and Council is requested to appoint 1 more county councillor to the committee. There is no requirement for political balance in respect of this appointment.

#### **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 in 2015 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.

#### **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.