

**Report To:** Council

**Date of Meeting:** 9 April 2013

**Lead Officer:** Democratic Services Manager

**Report Author:** Democratic Services Manager

**Title:** Committee Timetable 2013 / 14, Annual Review of Political Balance, Appointment of Scrutiny Chairs and Allowances for Voting Co-opted Members

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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 2013/14 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 next month it is also appropriate for Council to consider changes in political balance, Scrutiny chairing arrangements and payments to voting co-optees.

**3. What are the Recommendations?**

That County Council:

- (i) approves the timetable of meetings for 2013 / 2014 (appendix 1)
- (ii) Considers the recommendations to ensure the committees are politically balanced (appendix 3)
- (iii) Notes any changes in the appointment of scrutiny committee chairs that are agreed by the relevant political groups.
- (iv) Determines the appropriate maximum number of days that can be claimed for all co-opted voting members.

**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 in 2013 / 14 (appendix 1) was considered by the Democratic Services Committee in February. Extra dates for Council Briefing sessions will be added for after the Recess.

A survey was conducted during the second part of 2012 for councillors' and co-opted members' opinions on when and where they would like to hold their meetings. The survey was a requirement of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 and the Council is obliged to have regard to the results of the survey when planning

meetings. Information on the schedule and a summary of the results of the survey are attached as appendix 2.

Having regard to the results of the survey the current mix of mostly morning meetings but with some committees or panels meeting being held in the afternoon is retained. The Council does arrange a small number of evening meetings (for some of the Member Area Groups, for example). Often meetings will be held in County Hall but meetings will also be arranged for other venues in the county.

#### **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 3.

With the same number of members both the Conservative and Plaid Cymru Groups have the same political balance weighting so either (but only one of them) could take a second seat on a committee of 8 members. This can be resolved either by the availability of only one member from those Groups to take that second seat, or by looking at the overall political balance of both Groups over all the committees.

At the time of writing this report the recommendations in appendix 3 are relevant.

#### **4.3 Appointment of Chairs of Scrutiny Committees**

According to the principles for allocating Scrutiny chairs in the 2011 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.

Whilst scrutiny committees in Denbighshire previously appointed their chairs for a year, 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 advise of any changes.

#### **4.4 Remuneration of Co-optees**

The Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (IRPW) regulates payments for members and co-opted members. The IRPW had allowed co-opted members to claim payments for up to 10 days for attending meetings of committees on which they are voting members. From April 2013 the IRPW has decided to allow authorities to determine how many days can be claimed. It has also broadened the range of events that could be claimed to include authorised training events, conferences and pre-meetings with officers.

Denbighshire has 11 voting co-optees; 5 sit on the Standards Committee, 5 are education scrutiny co-optees and one is a lay member of the Corporate Governance Committee. Payments are £198 per day (defined as over 4 hours, or £99 for a half day which is less than 4 hours) or £256 / £128 for a co-opted chair.

As the education scrutiny co-optees are - whenever education issues are considered - members of each of the 3 scrutiny committees they would, under the rules for 2012 / 13 be eligible to claim for up to 30 meeting days per year i.e. the maximum of 10 meetings per committee x 3 committees = 30 days. Of course, not all scrutiny meetings include an education item on the agenda. Council is recommended to consider the appropriate maximum number of days that can be claimed for all co-opted voting members.

Standards Committee co-optees may have to attend additional meetings or hearings if required for dispensations as a matter of urgency and the Committee's Chair and Vice Chair attend the North Wales Standards Forum on a quarterly basis.

#### **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. Services throughout the Council may contribute to the meetings included in the timetable, usually by contributing information, reports and officer time.

#### **7. What are the main conclusions of the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) undertaken on the decision? The completed EqIA template should be attached as an appendix to the report.**

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 recent survey of councillors has been conducted 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. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?**

The Democratic Services Committee considered and noted the draft committee timetable in February. A wide range of officers involved in providing support and advice for the committees shown in appendix 1 have been consulted and members have been consulted on their preferences for the timing and location of meetings.

## **9. Chief Finance Officer Statement**

There are no additional costs arising from recommendations (i)-(iii) as noted in the report. Increasing the number of events that co-opted members can claim payment for (recommendation iv) will incur additional cost.

## **10. 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.

## **11. Power to make the Decision**

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