

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Democratic Services Committee held in Conference Room 1a, County Hall, Ruthin on Friday, 15 February 2013 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Gwyneth Kensler, Barry Mellor (Chair), Merfyn Parry, Arwel Roberts and Gareth Sandilands

ALSO PRESENT

Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer (RGW), Democratic Services Manager (SP) and Committee Administrator (SLW)

Observer – Scrutiny Co-ordinator (RE)

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Martyn Holland, Bob Murray and Peter Owen

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No Members declared any personal or prejudicial interests in any business identified to be considered at the meeting.

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

No items were raised.

4 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the Democratic Services Committee meeting held on 13 December, 2012 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes be received and approved as a correct record.

5 COMPARISON OF RESOURCES FOR SCRUTINY IN NORTH WALES

The Democratic Services Manager (DSM) presented the report (previously circulated) regarding the resources available to each local authority and examples of how they were deployed.

The report had been requested during the previous Democratic Services Committee meeting, to compare resources for the Scrutiny Committees across North Wales.

The report provided detailed information pertaining to the Scrutiny functions of each North Wales Council in their respective annual reports.

Following a request from Committee, the Head of Legal & Democratic Services (H:L&DS) confirmed he would enquire as to the amount of the training budget and report back.

To set up a Joint Scrutiny meeting would be an extremely intense process. Denbighshire currently had no increased capacity but would require re-arranging work patterns to deal with this.

Guidance had been received from Government that there was intent behind the measure for a more open and transparent involvement for members of the public with scrutiny. A Task & Finish Group to which members of the public or voluntary organisations could attend was suggested. If Task & Finish Groups were to be set up, this would have an impact on resources and Joint Scrutiny would have a large impact on resources. A report was to be presented at Council Briefing to enable all members to take part within the discussion. The issue would also be taken to the Political Groups for discussion prior to Council Briefing in November.

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator (SC) confirmed the scrutiny leaflets had been distributed. The SC had also looked into the information being placed in The County Voice. If a matter was raised via the leaflets, it would be presented to the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group to consider whether it was suitable for Scrutiny or whether the issue should be passed on to Ward Members, Member Area Groups or Customer Services.

RESOLVED that subject to the above, report was received and approved.

6 RESULTS OF TIMINGS OF MEETINGS SURVEY

The Democratic Services Manager (DSM) presented the report (previously circulated) assessing the results of the Timings of Meetings Survey.

The draft timetable of meetings for the period May 2013 – May 2014 was discussed. Meetings had not been scheduled during school holidays where possible. There would be an August recess as in previous years. Meeting cycles for some Committees had been planned to coincide with known business. The Corporate Governance meeting on 27 September: a request had been received to defer by 2 days to facilitate the production of the statement of accounts.

Approximately 30 completed surveys had been received from Members. A majority of surveys received stated a preference for morning meetings. Ruthin as a venue had been a preferred choice. It was requested a list of who had actually responded would be useful and the DSM confirmed he would collate and distribute this information.

RESOLVED that subject to the above, the following were received and endorsed:-

- (i) Draft timetable of Committee meetings, and

(ii) The appropriate timing of meetings (based on the responses from the survey of Members and co-opted Members)

7 UPDATE ON FINAL STATUTORY GUIDANCE:

The Democratic Services Manager (DSM) presented a verbal update on Joint Scrutiny issues and processes for supporting Annual Reports.

The DSM clarified there was no further update of final statutory guidance regarding annual reports by Members. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services (H:L&DS) explained that each local authority must have arrangements in place for Members to be able to prepare an annual report of their activities over the last 12 months. A template would be devised for use by Members. Once the annual reports were completed, there would be a vetting process in place to ascertain only relevant information had been included within the document.

It was recommended that all Members should be informed of the prospect of annual reports to enable them to keep notes of their work to ease the pressure when it came to the annual report composition.

Whilst it would not be compulsory for Members to draw up the reports, it could become an expectation that Members would complete them..

RESOLVED *that subject to the above, the information be received and noted.*

8 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Democratic Services Manager (DSM) gave a verbal report regarding the Democratic Services Committee Forward Work Programme and requested future issues for deliberation by the Committee.

Members queried whether the meeting on the 24 May would be quorate as Councillors Gwyneth Kensler, Barry Mellor and Arwel Roberts were unlikely to be available, and asked that other Members of the Committee be contacted to confirm their attendance.

RESOLVED *that the Forward Work Programme information be noted.*

The meeting concluded at 11.10 a.m.