

Minutes



Democratic Services Committee

Date: 17 September 2015

Time: 5.00 pm

Present: Councillors C Ferris (Chair), T Bond, M Evans, D Harvey, D Mayer & K Thomas

In Attendance: G Price (Head of Law & Regulation), R Jefferies (Head of Democratic Services), Elizabeth Blayney (Snr Overview & Scrutiny Officer) & J Howells (Democratic Services Support Officer)

Apologies: Councillors J Mudd

1 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 July 2015 were confirmed as a true record.

2 Scrutiny Committees

The existing Scrutiny Committees were established after the 2012 Local Authority Elections.

The discussion paper raised the possibility of a potential review of the portfolios of the Committees and put forward some initial thoughts to allow the Democratic Services Committee to consider which options deserved more detailed scrutiny.

A problem faced by scrutiny is that work programmes are not always focussed upon impact and outcomes and contain too many information reports. A re-focus of work programmes within three committees would achieve a more efficient and effective scrutiny and this is in the process of being carried out.

The three options to be considered were as follows:

- That there be no change
- That the committees be aligned to Corporate Director portfolios
- To look at options around aligning the committees with Cabinet portfolios

The report also asked the committee if they have other options by which the three existing committees can be reconfigured.

This report therefore asked the Committee

- Which options should be pursued no further
- What options deserve more detailed work
- Are there parameters within which the work should be carried out

The Head of Democratic Services confirmed that different committees would need to take different approaches to their work, depending upon the priorities within that portfolio.

Councillor Evans pointed out that scrutiny committees played an important role and considered that a ratio of three scrutiny committees to nine cabinet portfolios was insufficient. He believed more scrutiny committees were needed and they needed to meet more frequently than was currently happening. The Head of Democratic Services pointed out that there was no funding to support extra committees at this time. Any additional committees would lead to budget pressures.

A lengthy discussion took place on the various options suggested. It was agreed that options two and three were fairly similar. The Head of Democratic Services agreed to work further on options two and three and bring back to the committee at a future meeting for their consideration.

Agreed

That more work be carried out on options two and three and they be brought back to a future meeting of the Committee.

3 Review of the Constitution

At its last meeting, the Committee was informed that the Corporate Assessment contained a proposed action that stated:

- Reviewing and updating the Council's constitution, ensuring that roles, responsibilities and accountabilities are clear, and that all members understand and apply their respective roles in relation to each other without compromising independence;
- Empowering members to be more proactive and accountable for their roles and responsibilities;
- Strengthening decision-making arrangements to ensure transparency and appropriate safeguards are in place;

At a previous meeting the Committee agreed that a review of the Constitution should be undertaken and to address the above issues as part of that review. The Committee did not wish to be involved in line-by-line examination of the various sections of the Constitution where the fundamental principles were not changed in any way.

The report set out a proposed new structure for the Constitution that will provide a basis for the look and feel of the document. It was agreed that the new structure was far more logical as previously navigation of the Constitution had proved very difficult.

The Head of Law & Regulation confirmed that the existing framework of the Constitution had been prepared by the Welsh Assembly in 2001 but since then each local authority had made amendments to that framework therefore no two Constitutions in Wales were the same.

The Head of Democratic Services highlighted the reference made in the Corporate Review to the roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of the members of the Council. It was agreed that a report on this should be brought to a future Democratic Services Committee meeting.

Agreed

- I. That the proposed structure of the Constitution review be accepted
- II. That the issue of role descriptions form an early part of the review
- III. When the review is complete, to make recommendations to Council