

Minutes



Democratic Services Committee

Date: 17 December 2015

Time: 9.30 am

Present: Councillors C Ferris (Chair), M Evans, K Thomas, T Watkins and D Mayer

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

Apologies: Councillors D Harvey and J Mudd

1 Apologies for Absence

Noted above

2 Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2015 were confirmed as a true record.

3 Review of the Constitution: Role Descriptions

At previous meetings, the Committee had been 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".

In 2012 the Welsh Local Government Association drafted a set of generic role descriptions and person specifications for elected members. This was in response to the requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011. The Council has appended these generic descriptions to the website for information purposes only.

In light of the comments made in the Corporate Assessment review the Committee considered a report containing role descriptions which had been drafted specifically for Newport.

The terminology of the role descriptions was discussed by the Committee. The Head of Democratic Services confirmed that he had used the term role descriptions as opposed to job descriptions as he considered 'job description' too specific suggesting that certain skills were required for the role of councillors and if they did not possess these skills they could not hold that role. The Committee agreed that a councillor would grow into his or her role following training and through experience and therefore 'role descriptions' was more suitable term than 'job descriptions'.

After discussion the Committee agreed that the roles should be written in the third person as members were not making a declaration to fulfil these statements but were outlining to constituents what duties they would carry out in their role as councillor.

Several points were made including some statements being too wordy and others too vague. The Head of Democratic Services confirmed that he would work on some of the phraseology including changing first person to third person and circulate an amended copy to committee members.

Agreed

Head of Democratic Services to make amendments to the role descriptions and circulate to committee members for their comments.

4 Scrutiny Committee Structure

At a previous meeting the Committee had considered a discussion paper on a potential review of the portfolios of the Scrutiny committees. The Committee had agreed that further work needed to be carried out and brought back on the following options:

- Align committees to Corporate Director portfolios
- Aligning with Cabinet portfolios

Although the current Scrutiny system is working the Committee recognised that there was a need to rationalise the structure in order for it to work more efficiently.

A review of the Scrutiny work programme had been made by the Scrutiny team in September 2015 which had resulted in a number of new ways of work being implemented which had improved their work programme. These were changes to the ways in which Information reporting, Exception reporting and Workshop list were carried out.

Elizabeth Blayney, Senior Overview & Scrutiny Officer, made a presentation on the option of aligning the committee to Corporate Director portfolios which would result in:

- Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee
- People Scrutiny Committee
- Place Scrutiny Committee.

It was recognised that the People Scrutiny committee would be large as it would consist of Children and Young People, Adult and Community Services together with Education but there was a need to keep these three service areas together under one committee.

It was also pointed out that there would be occasions when members of People and Place scrutiny committees would need to attend the Corporate committee as some agenda items might affect all Scrutiny committees.

Whatever structure is put in place there is a need to look at the rationalisation of the work programme, focussing on key risks and priorities of the Council. Ideally scrutiny agendas should consist of three items to work efficiently but the present work programme results in each scrutiny committee having a minimum of five items per agenda. It was considered that work programming was the key to a successful scrutiny process.

There was a lengthy discussion on how the structure could be improved and it was accepted that a change of structure alone would not be enough to meet all the desired outcomes for scrutiny. There was a discussion about the possibility of one coordinating Scrutiny Committee supported by Sub Groups. The issues that would present – both positive and challenging were discussed.

The possibility of setting an annual work programme was discussed. Head of Law & Regulation confirmed that, whatever structure was adopted, it was a statutory right for councillors to request that items be included in a scrutiny agenda. The item would be put before the relevant committee who would make the decisions as to whether or not to take the matter forward.

Cllr Mayer considered that the support structure for Scrutiny needed to be reviewed.

Agreed:

That the option of aligning the Scrutiny Committees to the Corporate Directorate portfolios be referred to Council for approval.

5 Date of Next Meeting

Thursday 18 February 2016 at the earlier time of 5pm