

- Present:** Councillor Geoff Ellis (*in the Chair*)
- Councillors:** Tony Gray, Ronald Hills, Adrianna McNulty, Ric Metcalfe, Edmund Strengiel, Katie Vause and Loraine Woolley
- Independent Person(s):** Chris Elkington and Roger Vine
- Apologies for Absence:** Councillor Gill Clayton-Hewson

26. Confirmation of Minutes - 8 December 2014

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 8 December 2014 be confirmed.

27. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

28. Code of Conduct: Cases Review

The Legal and Democratic Services Manager:

- a) presented a report containing information on recent cases relating to other local authorities' codes of conduct.
- b) highlighted that members should identify any issues raised within the report as being relevant for further consideration with regard to their impact upon members.
- c) invited members' questions and comments.

Members:

- emphasised the need for councillors using social media to exercise both caution and common sense in order to avoid causing any offence.
- discussed the case in which a councillor had taken money from residents for services that had not been delivered.

The Independent Person noted the particular risks associated with services such as Twitter which allowed for instantaneous communication with members of the public.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

29. Committee Structure and Terms of Reference

The Legal and Democratic Services Manager:

- a) presented a report regarding the Council's committee structure.
- b) explained that the report was provided in order to give members the opportunity to consider the manner in which the Council's committees and panels interacted with each other.

- c) drew members' attention to the Council's scrutiny arrangements in comparison with other local authorities noting the potential for overlap between the Council's respective scrutiny committees.
- d) invited members' questions and comments.

Members:

- noted that the Housing Appeals Panel and Personnel Appeals Panel should also be incorporated into any discussion regarding the Council's committee structure.
- agreed that there was overlap between scrutiny committees, discussed the status of the Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee, and stated that the structure should remain as it stood.
- noted that the Planning Committee operated in a particularly effective and non-partisan manner.
- discussed the status of the Commons Advisory Panel. While the constitution of the Commons Advisory Panel made clear that its role was solely advisory, some members were concerned that it held disproportionate power and status in comparison with other advisory panels.
- highlighted the scrutiny of shared committees with other local authorities as being insufficient at present.

RESOLVED that officers be requested to provide a further report detailing:

1. any proposals for specific changes to the committee structure.
2. information in relation to the scrutiny of shared services with other local authorities.

30. Petition Scheme Review

The Democratic Services Officer:

- a) presented a report regarding the Council's petition scheme.
- b) explained that the Council had originally introduced its petitions scheme in response to legislation which had since been repealed.
- c) invited councillors' views regarding the operation of the scheme, focussing upon the signature thresholds for debating petitions at Council meetings and the requirement for signatories to provide both their name and address.
- d) invited members' questions and comments.

Members:

- agreed that the Council's petition scheme was operating effectively and that no changes to it were required.
- emphasised the importance of the Council being open to receive petitions from residents.
- noted that the signatory thresholds remained at an appropriate threshold given the population of the city.
- stated that if a matter were of suitable importance the Council would be minded to debate a petition even it fell short of the required number of signatories.

RESOLVED that no changes be proposed to the Petition Scheme.

31. Member Development Update

The Democratic Services Officer:

- a) presented a report updating the Committee on member development.
- b) noted the member development events that had been undertaken since the previous update and those planned for the forthcoming year.
- c) drew members' attention to the Council's plans for the induction of any councillors newly elected in the forthcoming local elections.
- d) highlighted the Council's recently revised member induction pack and invited members' comments regarding any potential improvements or amendments to it.
- e) advised that officers were keen to receive any suggestions from members for future development areas.
- f) invited members' questions and comments.

Members welcomed the revised member induction pack, noting that the document was an excellent starting point for new councillors.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

32. Work Programme Update

The Democratic Services Officer:

- a. presented the current Ethics and Engagement Committee work programme for consideration by members.
- b. invited members' questions and comments.

The Vice-Chair:

- a. presented a proposal to invite sixth-form students to attend a democracy event hosted by the Council.
- b. explained that the purpose of such an event would be to encourage young people's interest in democracy and to encourage people to register to vote.
- c. outlined the proposal for a session incorporating both education and debate for young people, including potential input from relevant guests.
- d. invited members' questions and comments.

Members:

- discussed the proposal and welcomed the intention to engage with young people.

- raised concerns regarding the potential challenges in arranging such an event at relatively short notice and questioned whether the event would be delivered more effectively if arranged for the summer of 2015.
- questioned whether the Council had sufficient resources to support the proposal.
- noted previous difficulties experienced in engaging with local schools.
- emphasised that any participation by members should be in accordance with political proportionality and that any external panel guests should not be political figures.

The Independent Person noted the forthcoming general election and suggested that it would be beneficial for any session to take place before rather than after the election.

RESOLVED that:

1. the work programme be approved.
2. work proceed on arranging an event for young people to take place before the start of the pre-election period.