

STANDARDS AND CONSTITUTIONAL OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 29 August 2018

Present: Councillor M McLaughlin (Chair)

Councillors B Mooney P Gilchrist
C Blakeley B Kenny
T Cox J McManus
G Ellis A Davies (In place of C Jones)

In attendance: Independent Members Prof R Jones, G Kerr and J McCosh

7 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Chris Jones. Councillor Angela Davies present as substitute.

8 MEMBER DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

9 WEBCASTING PROJECT UPDATE AND OPTIONS PAPER

The Deputy Monitoring Officer introduced a report of the Director: Governance and Assurance (Monitoring Officer) that provided the Standards and Constitutional Oversight Committee with an overview of the current status of, and progress made in respect of the Council's Webcasting Project; and feedback and comments from the Senior Leadership Team and the Members' Equipment Steering Group regarding the various options for consideration relating to the number of meetings to be webcast in the future, style of meeting minutes and staffing resource. The Deputy Monitoring Officer informed that the Committee's view was sought.

The Principal Committee Officer (designated Project Manager) informed the Committee of the reports purpose, namely:

- to provide an update on the project status;
- to provide feedback to the Standards and Constitutional Oversight Committee on the views of the Members' Equipment Steering Group (MESG) and Strategic Leadership Team (SLT); and

- to gather consensus on the options relating to number of meetings to be webcast, style of minutes and staffing of meetings.

Members were further informed that the results of the consultations would be fed back to the Director: Governance and Assurance and Monitoring Officer to aid departmental planning and restructuring.

The Principal Committee Officer provided a summary of Member project timeline from inception, through Capital Budget approval at Cabinet in February 2017, and subsequently at Council in March 2017. He added that a number of project variations had taken place during the tender process including, but not exclusively additional upgrades/replacement of defunct equipment i.e. the Wallasey Town Hall Council Chamber microphones and audio visual equipment in the Committee Rooms. Members were apprised that a Project Board had been established in October 2017, drawing together officers from ICT, Finance, Communications and Committee Services to oversee the project's implementation. In December 2017, further additional consultation on the project was undertaken with the SLT and the contract awarded, on schedule, in January 2018. Members noted that as a result of some challenges that had arisen during installation phase a number of benefits had arisen (upgraded equipment) and that even so, the first and subsequent webcasts had taken place as scheduled. Development of the system continued and a new electronic voting system had now been installed in the Wallasey Council Chamber and Members were invited to have sight of the display screen options and provide further feedback.

The Standards and Constitutional Oversight Committee were then informed of individual MESH member's comments on the Options proposals which had reached a reasoned consensus in favour of broadcasting as many meetings as practicable (to fully utilise the system based on the project expense, and to find out how good it can be), adding that reducing meetings in the future would be a more practical alternative than settling for 'second best' from the start.

In terms of 'Minute Style' the MESH member views were unanimous in supporting retention of the current house style, providing an easily checked permanent record of meetings. With regard to staffing, views were expressed that Option B (single clerk/web operator) would place too many demands on an individual officer.

The Principal Committee Officer concluded his verbal update informing that the Chief Executive was supportive of a proposal to webcast the majority of the Council's meetings held in public – a summary listing of which was circulated to the Standards and Constitutional Oversight Committee Members. The Chief Executive expressed no view on the options regarding minutes and staffing, content that the Director: Governance and Assurance would decide on these operational matters.

The Standards and Constitutional Oversight Committee then debated the Options Paper.

A Member expressed concerns over the cost of the entire project, and questioned its purpose particularly when taking into account the viewing figures as appended to the report, likening the project to that of the Wirral View newsletter. Another Member expressed a similar view, questioning the financial implications of staffing resources, and proposed a fully automated version of meeting recording using fixed cameras.

A Member countered that the system did allow for automated tracking, but felt that the openness and transparency of the meetings was important. In terms of viewing figures he felt that, after a quiet start, people would get into this new method of viewing meetings. He noted also that recent planning meetings had generated higher viewing figures i.e. issues of interest would guarantee better statistics.

A Member commented that since this was the very early days of webcasting Wirral's meetings, more data was required alongside some more promotion of the service. Another Member expressed support of Option A on all aspects of the report and webcasting of meetings in general, citing the televised reporting of parliament – adding 'try taking that away'.

The debate concluded with a general consensus that people were taking more interest in local politics, and should the Council decide to stop webcasting there could be a counter-challenge that it was 'hiding things'.

The Chair summarised the discussion stating that it was early days in respect of the webcasting of meetings, viewing figures were too low, but so were turnouts at elections, but the Council should continue to promote the project.

In terms of the Options contained within the report the Chair felt that a consensus had been reached and that Option A's be supported and the consultation views be fed back to the Director: Governance and Assurance.

Committee supported continued usage of the Webcasting, with a further review of viewing statistics at the end of the Municipal Year, and an update report from the Director: Governance and Assurance in terms of implementation of the Options proposals to be received at its November meeting.

10 **APPOINTMENT OF PANELS**

A report by the Director: Governance and Assurance and Monitoring Officer proposed that the Committee establish the Standards Panel and Standards Appeal Panel in accordance with the paragraph 9.5 of Article 9 of the

Council's Constitution and the Protocol for Dealing with Complaints against Members.

Appended to the report were the following appendices:

- Article 9 of the Council's Constitution;
- Members' Code of Conduct;
- Protocol for Dealing with Complaints against Members; and
- Procedure for dealing with matters before the Standards Panel and Standards Appeal Panel.

Resolved - That

- (1) a Standards Panel be formally established pursuant to paragraph 9.5 of Article 9 of the Council's Constitution;**
- (2) Membership of the Standards Panel comprise:**
Councillors M McLaughlin (Lab), C Blakeley (Con), P Gilchrist (Lib Dem) and Independent Member Prof RS Jones; and
Membership of the Standards Appeal Panel comprise:
Councillors B Kenny (Lab), T Cox (Con), D Mitchell (Lib Dem);
- (3) where a representative Member, confirmed under recommendation (2) above, is unavailable to attend a proposed meeting of the Standards Panel or Standards Appeal Panel but that meeting can be attended by all other persons required, then the relevant political group through their Group Leader/Deputy Group Leader or Party Spokesperson shall promptly confirm another representative member who is able to attend that meeting;**
- (4) the procedure for dealing with a matter before either the Standards Panel or Standards Appeal Panel set out at Appendix 4 to the report be agreed; and**
- (5) Members of the Standards Panel be consulted on provisional Panel meeting dates, subsequent to the closure of this meeting of the Standards and Constitutional Oversight Committee.**