

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

SELECTION AND MEMBER SERVICES COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Selection and Member Services Committee held in the Darent Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday, 5 March 2015.

PRESENT: Mrs A D Allen, MBE (Chairman), Mr G Cooke, Mr M C Dance, Mr J A Davies (Substitute for Mr P B Carter, CBE), Mrs T Dean, MBE, Ms A Harrison, Mr R A Latchford, OBE, Mr B E MacDowall and Mr B J Sweetland

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs A Beer (Corporate Director Human Resources), Ms D Fitch (Democratic Services Manager (Council)), Mr P Sass (Head of Democratic Services) and Mr P D Wickenden (Democratic Services Manager (Members))

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

4. Minutes - 26 January 2015
(Item 3)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 26 January 2015 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

5. Review of support for Elected Members
(Item 4)

(1) Mr Cooke introduced a report which proposed changes to the support received by all Members. The proposal consisted of three elements, support from Democratic Services, support on a broader basis from Information & Communication technology (ICT) and support to Members at a District level.

(2) Members discussed the report and asked a number of questions on the report which included the following, these were responded to by Mr Cooke and officers:-

- Members asked to be provided with Job Descriptions for the new roles
- A number of Members questioned the need for support from graduate(s) from the graduate scheme when there was a very efficient research service provided by the staff in the Information Point, which was not fully utilised by Members. Members were reminded that these officers were part of the libraries services who also provided the "Ask a librarian" service to the public. Mr Cooke acknowledged the good work of officers in the Information Point but it had been suggested that a more integrated approach could be taken to providing support to members via the Information Point and Member Services. Mr Cooke confirmed that support via the graduate scheme was part of a bidding process and there was no guarantee that this would be successful. He was confident that there was adequate work for someone with that level of expertise to support Members in carrying out their roles.

- In relation to the proposed dedicated ICT support within Democratic Services, concern was expressed about how such support would be provided when this officer was absent. In addition, how would continuing professional development and career progression be assured for the individual in this dynamic area of work. Mr Cooke acknowledged that that this role could be shared amongst other ICT colleagues, although it was important for Members to have a named contact for ICT queries.
- It was suggested that the number of Members still requiring secretarial support to produce letters etc. was limited.
- Although it was acknowledged that a briefing on the proposed changes to Member support had been given to group leaders, information had not been made available for them to share with their group in order for all Members to have an informed view.
- Mr Cooke stated that paper before the Committee dealt with Members' support and did not include details of the media and community engagement officers' consultation proposals. He apologised for this and stated that he would be willing to come back to the Committee with more details of these proposals if necessary but, in the meantime offered to have meetings with all political groups to discuss these proposals.
- In relation to the Community Engagement Officer posts it was clarified that currently there were 12 posts, of which 9 were currently filled. The current consultation proposed the creation of 7 Media and Community Officers and 1 team leader.
- Concern was expressed about the appropriateness of combining the media and community support roles and it was considered that different skills were required for these two roles. Also the feasibility of officers in this new role to be able to separate out working to the administration in relation to media support but in relation to their Community support role they would be working to all 84 Members was raised.
- Mrs Beer confirmed that staff had been told that the consultation would end on 16 March and that the subsequent recruitment activity would begin on 30 March and the revised structure implemented as soon as possible after that. She mentioned that there were a lot of staff whose futures were uncertain and therefore it was hoped that the process could be concluded as swiftly as possible. Mr Cooke acknowledged that this process could be delayed slightly to allow for further consultation but it was important to balance this against the importance of providing certainty to affected staff.
- It was suggested that there be a Member briefing so that all Members could come long and hear how this is going to affect them. Mr Cooke expressed the view that it would be more productive to meet with a smaller group of members toward the end of March.

(3) RESOLVED that the Cabinet Member carry out further meetings with Members by the end of March, if possible, on the following proposals and if necessary submit a further report to this Committee before proceeding with implementing any specific proposals:

- a) the recruitment of additional staff to support the elected Member in terms of support at the Members' Desk as described in section 3 of the report;

- b) a dedicated member of staff for technological support to all Members and Democratic Services being transferred from ICT fully funded to Democratic Services; and
- c) the reconfiguration of Member support at a District level.

6. County Car Service - Proposed Increase to the rate of pay for casual drivers
(Item 5)

(1) Mr Cooke introduced a report, which invited the Committee to consider an increase to the rate of pay for casual drivers for the County Cars and the opportunity to link this to the staff pay award in future years.

(2) Members agreed that these drivers did an excellent job and as they had not received an increase in the hourly rate paid under their zero hours contract since 2007 it was timely to consider doing so now.

(3) Members discussed the level of this increase and whether it should be linked to some mechanism to provide an automatic update in future.

(4) RESOLVED that the hourly rate for casual drivers of the county cars be increased to £12 per hour with effect from 1 April 2015 and that the Head of Democratic Services be authorised to review this on an annual basis taking into account the current market rate, and, as necessary, in consultation with the Cabinet Member, increase to the rate of pay for these casual drivers.