

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

SELECTION AND MEMBER SERVICES COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Selection and Member Services Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday, 28 October 2021.

PRESENT: Mr N J Collor (Chairman), Mr M C Dance, Mr R W Gough, Mr A J Hook, Mr Lehmann, Dr L Sullivan and Mr B J Sweetland

ALSO PRESENT: Mr G Cooke and Mr P J Oakford

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr B Watts (General Counsel), Mr T Godfrey (Scrutiny Research Officer) and Mr A Tait (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

16. Minutes - 2 September 2021

(Item 3)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 2 September 2021 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

17. Member Induction Survey

(Item 4)

(1) The General Counsel introduced the report by saying that 15 Members had responded to the Member Induction Survey. Of these, 12 had been newly-elected. The induction process adopted after the May 2021 elections had needed to take account of the restrictions still in place in response to Covid-19. The survey had therefore been immensely valuable as it would enable officers to prepare the induction process for 2025 when it was hoped that there would no longer be any restrictions.

(2) In response to Members' comments, the General Counsel said that training on the Kent Code in respect of Member behaviours would be provided following discussions within the Standards Committee as part of a series of training events over the next few months.

(3) Members of the Committee commented that the mentoring of new Members was clearly recognised as being beneficial and that an approach to this needed to be embedded to ensure that it happened in 2025. A start could be made by identifying experienced Members who, subject to being returned at the next election, would be willing to make themselves available. The General Counsel replied that some mentoring would be political in nature and would be most appropriately carried out within the political groups. New Members also needed to be made aware of who they should contact for assistance with an enquiry on behalf of their constituents or a more general request for information. He suggested that a paper on the mentoring of new

Members be prepared in a year's time setting out a proposal for the Committee's consideration.

(4) Members commented that due to the restrictions in place following the elections, new Members had not had the opportunity to meet and get to know their colleagues and officers.

(5) It was suggested that the LGA provided a mentoring scheme which the General Counsel could formally seek to access. Further surveys on Member induction and development could be made prominently available at meetings of the County Council once a year to ascertain whether Members felt confident that they were able to contribute to the debate within and the work of the Council. This should include equalities - related questions.

(6) In response to Members' comments, the General Counsel agreed that he would ask a project team within Governance, Law and Democracy (GLD) to consider how best to provide information to Members that had previously been contained in the Members Diary. This should include the identification of relevant officers and a general indication of how Teams within the Directorates fitted together. He also undertook to communicate the views expressed on the need for easily accessible information to the inter-Directorate Team whose role was to consider the information provided in the Members' section of KNET. A future meeting of the Committee would be invited to consider a report on Member information communication issues once the GLD project team had completed its work. He agreed the project team's work would involve those Members who wished to contribute.

(7) Members noted that there was usually a Showcase Day following the elections with a mid-term refresher. This had not taken place due to the pandemic. Something similar could be provided in the Spring of 2022. The General Counsel replied that some of the ideas which had informed the cancelled Member Development Conference in April 2020 could be revisited and that this matter would be considered by the GLD project team.

(8) The Committee agreed that the Minutes of the meeting would record its thanks to Mrs Jill Kennedy-Smith and the Member Hub Team for their work in arranging Member training under the most trying of circumstances.

(9) RESOLVED that: -

- (a) the report be noted together with the outcome of the discussion summarised above;
- (b) the Member Development Sub-Committee be requested to take the report's findings into account when considering future induction periods; and
- (c) Mrs Jill Kennedy-Smith and the Member Hub Team be thanked for their work in arranging Member training under the most trying of circumstances.

18. Monitoring Officer's Update - Oral report *(Item 5)*

(1) The General Counsel introduced his report in his capacity as KCC's Monitoring Officer. He said that since the agenda papers had been published, Mr Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities had expressed the strong view that virtual meetings could be part of the way in which Councils could conduct their business.

(2) The General Counsel continued by reminding the Committee that he had written to the Secretary of State on behalf of KCC in November 2020 setting out the view that decisions on whether a Council's meetings were held physically or virtually should most appropriately be taken by the Council itself.

(3) The General Counsel asked whether the Committee wished him to write again to the Secretary of State in the light of his recent statement, re-iterating the County Council's view.

(4) Mr Gough said whilst recognising that different Members held different opinions on the question of whether meetings should be virtual or physical, the course of action proposed would find widespread agreement from everyone as, if the necessary legislation were to come into force, it would enable KCC to take its own decisions on a case-by-case basis. The potential value of allowing Members to join a meeting virtually had been underlined during the recent fuel crisis.

(5) Mr Sweetland said that some Members, especially those with underlying health concerns, would find it easier to attend virtually. In addition, those who were self-isolating during the pandemic would be able to participate.

(6) The Committee then discussed arrangements for the County Council meeting on 4 November. Dr Sullivan noted that there would be some 90 people taking part in the County Council meeting in the Chamber and asked whether the requirement for Members to be physically present in order to vote could be interpreted in such a way that their presence in County Hall would suffice provided that they were in the Chamber when votes were cast.

(7) The General Counsel replied that this was one of the possibilities that was being considered. He would be holding conversations with each of the Group Leaders and other Members. It was his role to ensure that every elected Member was able to participate legally and without concern for their personal safety.

(8) In response to a question from Mr Cooke, the General Counsel agreed to consider any issues arising from changes to the arrangements for Lateral Flow Tests and to include his findings in the note to all Members before the County Council meeting.

(8) Mr Hook suggested that speakers should be allowed to remain in a sitting position during County Council meetings rather than standing up, as was usually the case. This would partially mitigate the risk of spreading the virus.

(9) The General Counsel explained that Corporate Directors would be in the building but not the Chamber during the County Council meeting. This, taken together with those Members who sent their apologies, would free up space in the

Chamber and enable the seating plan to be arranged so that Members were not cramped together during the meeting.

(10) The General Counsel replied to a question from Mr Lehmann by saying that he would investigate with the Director of Public Health whether it would be possible to make Lateral Flow tests available at an earlier time on the day of the County Council meeting.

(11) RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the General Counsel be requested to write to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities re-iterating KCC's views on meeting arrangements for the County Council, its Committees and Sub-Committees; and
- (b) the comments made by Members of the Committee on arrangements for the County Council meeting on 4 November be noted.