

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

SELECTION AND MEMBER SERVICES COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Selection and Member Services Committee held in the Online on Tuesday, 23 June 2020.

PRESENT: Mr B J Sweetland (Chairman), Mr R H Bird (Substitute for Mrs T Dean, MBE), Mr M C Dance, Mr D Farrell, Mr R W Gough, Mr E E C Hotson, Mr G Lymer and Mr C Simkins

ALSO PRESENT: Mr A H T Bowles

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

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

7. Membership

(Item 1)

The Committee noted the appointment of Mr C Simkins in place of Mr J P McInroy.

8. Minutes - 27 February 2020

(Item 4)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 27 February 2020 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

9. Presentation on the future of the Selection and Member Services Committee

(Item 5)

(1) The General Counsel gave a power point presentation. Its content can be viewed in the electronic agenda papers for this meeting on the KCC website.

(2) The General Counsel introduced his report by setting out the current remit of the Committee. He said that it was under-utilised, due to its limited role. This led to many of its scheduled meetings being cancelled.

(3) The General Counsel then said that there were many significant internal governance discussions that could and should take place in an open and formal environment. Selection and Member Services Committee was the natural forum for these to be held. He then gave examples of matters that the Committee's remit could well be extended to. These were:-

(a) Internal democratic processes during the COVID 19 pandemic.

(b) To what extent should the County Council revert to holding physical meetings and what potential advantages would there be in continuing with virtual

meetings in the future? For which committees (if any) would a virtual format be the most appropriate?

(c) Communications with Government. The County Council was very well placed to offer advice to the Government in response to consultation on possible future plans for local democracy. The Committee had an appropriate role in considering and recommending its content.

(d) Member Grants were a significant political and financial commitment made by the County Council. The General Counsel said that he could advise on the legality of the process whenever the legislation was clear. The Committee's role would be to develop the County Council's own guidelines in respect of what it considered to be appropriate use of this facility. This guidance should be supplemented by advice on the regulations on grants for Highways projects where Members had expressed concerns that confusing and contradictory advice was given by different officers.

(e) The Government was expected to grant County Councils new statutory powers, particularly in the area of Public Health. The democratic arrangements for oversight of such changes would need to be carefully considered.

(f) Preparations for the new Council in 2021 needed to be considered. Doing so in an open forum would be very useful for anyone seeking election. The matters for discussion under this heading would include the closedown period for the present Council as well as the post-election period.

(g) The General Counsel spoke in greater detail about facilities following the election. This included the allocation of accommodation and equipment such as computer software.

(h) The issue of Member Development was of great importance. The County Council needed to take an informed decision on whether training should be mandatory in the light of the increased legal risks as Members' roles became more complicated. The Committee should receive and discuss regular reports from the Informal Member Development Group (which might be replaced by a Sub-Committee) on induction training and the areas where specialised training was needed.

(i) The question of the appropriate type and use of technology was one which the Committee should address. This related to the virtual technology for meetings as well as to the need for provision of electronic software that ensured that no Member was disadvantaged.

(j) The role of Informal Working Groups was one which the Committee needed to debate. The work they undertook was significant. Outcomes should, for the sake of transparency, be directed to a single, easily-identifiable source such as Selection and Member Services Committee.

(k) Resourcing of meetings was a factor which should be a factor in the debate on the merits of physical and virtual meetings (see (b) above). The General Counsel estimated the average cost of holding physical meetings at £450 per

meeting. This needed to be weighed against the increased staff resources needed to facilitate virtual meetings.

(l) Decisions taken by the Monitoring Officer needed to be reported so that their content and implications could be discussed. The General Counsel described this as “Monitoring Officer Interface.”

(m) The Committee was the appropriate forum for consideration of the “cost of democracy,” including the Chairman’s Office and Virtual Meetings.

(n) It would be far better to consider support arrangements in terms of the allocation and potential re-allocation of staff resources and facilities *before* the election rather than reacting to the results afterwards. The latter approach had always been adopted in the past, leading to confusion and fear of job loss within the affected staff group. This needed to be avoided as all staff had the skills necessary to be appropriately re-allocated within the staff unit. The Committee should give a Member-led view on this principle.

(4) The General Counsel concluded his presentation by briefly summarising the Committee’s Terms of Reference before setting out the discussion points. These were:-

(a) Whether the Committee should expand its remit back to that intended in the Constitution and was willing to deal with the range of subject discussions in formal meetings?

(b) What information was needed (and in what format) in order for these meetings to be conducted?

(c) What support was needed and what should be the role of the Chairman of the Committee and the Support Officers?

(d) What meetings should the Committee hold? Should it utilise Sub-Committees and informal meetings in order to add pace to its work? Should the membership of the Committee be expanded? How would other Members be advised on progress?

(5) The Committee Members decided that the presentation slides would be sent to all Members of the Committee and the political groups. A meeting would be arranged in late July to consider a formal proposal from the General Counsel. This would be developed in the light of discussions within and between the political groups which he would facilitate. Members would also be invited to respond on an individual basis.

(6) RESOLVED that:-

(a) the presentation be sent to all Members of the Committee and the political groups;

(b) the report be noted as the basis for discussion within and between the political groups to inform a formal report on the future role of the Committee by the General Counsel at a meeting to be held in Late July 2020; and

- (c) Members be invited to respond to the General Counsel on an individual basis.

10. Selection Panel for the Member Remuneration Panel

(Item 6)

RESOLVED that the Selection Panel for Members of the Member Remuneration Panel be made up of 1 Honorary Alderman nominated by the Liberal Democrat Group and 2 from the Conservative Group.