

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, 29 June 2023.

PRESENT: Mr N J Collor (Chairman), Mr M C Dance, Mr R W Gough, Mr A J Hook, Rich Lehmann, Mr C Simkins, Dr L Sullivan and Mr D Jeffrey.

ALSO PRESENT:

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr J Cook (Democratic Services Manager), Mr B Watts (General Counsel), Mr T Godfrey (Senior Governance Manager), Mr J Clapson (Democratic Services Officer) and Miss K Reynolds (Democratic Services Officer).

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Apologies and Substitutes

(Item 1)

There were no apologies for absence. Mr Hook was in attendance virtually.

2. Declarations of Interests

(Item 2)

Mr Simkins declared an interest in agenda item 4, Outside Bodies Review.

3. Minutes

(Item 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 2023 were an accurate record and that they be signed by the Chair.

Mr Watts, provided Members with an update regarding the Member ICT Policy, he advised that the Policy would be circulated to Members once conversations with the Group Leaders had been concluded.

4. Outside Bodies Review

(Item 4)

1. Following his declaration of interest, Mr Simkins left the meeting for the duration of this item.

2. Ms Reynolds, Democratic Services Officer, introduced the item. She said that the number of Outside Bodies had increased over time, and it seemed timely to conduct a review. The review would update the information and details of the Outside Bodies, and look to confirm the role of the appointees. An Outside Bodies Protocol would also be developed as part of the review.

3. During consideration of the item the following points were noted:

- a. The training and support for Members who were appointed to an Outside Body was raised as something to consider as part of the review.
- b. Appointment to some Outside Bodies came with legal liabilities. It was important to ensure that the Members who were appointed to these Outside Bodies were appropriately informed and guided.
- c. The Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel's work related to an Executive function, appointments to Executive Outside Bodies were made by the Leader of the Council.
- d. Consideration would be given to the creation of a comprehensive list of all Outside Bodies, Joint Committees, Partnership Bodies, and arrangements with other Authorities.
- e. The Protocol would detail how Members could feedback information that arose during the conduct of their Outside Bodies duties.

4. RESOLVED to agree to:

- a. Support the proposal to review the list of Outside Bodies appointments made by this Committee.
- b. Request that the outcome of this review, and a draft protocol, be presented to this Committee at the conclusion of the review.

5. Appointment of Parent Governor Representative

(Item 5)

1. Mr Cook, Democratic Services Manager, introduced the report. He advised that a recruitment process was undertaken whenever a vacancy arose, and the Committee was being asked to confirm the appointment of the successful applicant.

2. During consideration of the item, the following points were noted:

- a. Parent Governors were entitled to claim back any relevant expenses incurred by attending meetings.
- b. An individual would not be eligible to sit on the Scrutiny Committee if they had a direct involvement with a school that was maintained by the local authority; they would have a relationship with the KCC, and this would cause a conflict of interest.

3. RESOLVED to agree to:

- a. Confirm the appointment of Holly Carter as Parent Governor representative on the Scrutiny Committee for a four-year term.

6. Petitions Review

(Item 6)

1. Mr Cook introduced the report and advised that it was felt a review was appropriate following recent discussions with Members. The number of signatures needed to meet the thresholds for debate at County Council and Cabinet Committees, was one of the areas raised as a concern. Mr Cook added that last time

the Petition Scheme was reviewed, the Committee had chosen not to make any significant changes.

2. Mr Cook provided Members with a presentation to give context around how the Petition Scheme currently operated. During the presentation the following points were noted:

- a. All petitions must go to Democratic Services to be verified.
- b. Before setting up a petition, organisers were encouraged to contact the Democratic Services team; they were available to offer advice and ensure that the petition was relevant to a service provided by KCC.
- c. The most common subject of a petition related to highways matters. The most common outcome of a petition was to issue a written response from the relevant Cabinet Member. Petitions were often about very localised issues.
- d. Petition organisers were encouraged to coordinate with others when similar petitions took place simultaneously.
- e. KCC's signature thresholds were compared to the thresholds at other councils. There was a significant degree of variation in the number of signatures required by each council.
- f. The Green and Independent Group (G&I Group) indicated that they wished for the threshold for County Council debate to be reduced from 10,000 to 2,000 signatures and for the threshold for Cabinet Committee debate to be reduced from 2,500 to 1,500.
- g. If the G&I Group proposed thresholds had been in place over the last 9 years, the number of petitions considered by County Council would have increased from one to ten, and the number of petitions considered by a Cabinet Committees would have reduced from eight to six.
- h. Consideration could be given to a mechanism that would handle small, localised petitions more effectively.

3. Members asked questions and made comments. The following points were noted during the discussion:

- a. The county populations needed to be considered when comparing other council's signature thresholds.
- b. The eligibility to sign a petition should be reviewed, for example, a signatory should have a local connection or be over a certain age. Currently KCC required signatories to live, work or study in the county; the Committee intentionally left the eligibility requirements relatively open when the Petition Scheme was reviewed last time.
- c. For small petitions, considered at a local meeting, the number of signatures should be comparable with number required at District/Borough Councils.
- d. If a petition related to an executive function, which was often the case, neither the County Council or Cabinet Committee could act upon the petition directly. They could only make recommendations to the Cabinet for consideration.
- e. 10,000 was a lot of signatures, people do a petition when they have been told to gather evidence that people want something. If the threshold was reduced, more voices would be heard.
- f. The G&I Group's suggested the threshold for County Council debate was proportionally in line with the Parliamentary threshold. This reduction would increase democratic engagement.

- g. Officers could send a survey to petition organisers to incorporate their experience and feedback into the review.
- h. There were some advantages to hosting petitions on the KCC ePetition system, it could be used to provide updates to those who have signed the petition. The ePetition user experience was an area that could be further explored as part of the review. There were reports that the KCC ePetition system was a cumbersome experience for users.
- i. In cases where there was a paper petition and an ePetition running simultaneously about the same issue, the number of signatures could be combined. There was petition guidance that advised people not to sign both petition formats as there would be checks for duplication.
- j. In cases when there were multiple petitions about a similar, but not identical issues, the number of signatures were not combined, however they would be grouped together to enable to decision maker to see what had been received.
- k. Part of the review would look at to handle multiple different petitions that had a strategic connection. The aim was to help ensure peoples voices were heard. It was recognised that petitions were often submitted as an act of last resort.
- l. There would always be the opportunity for an individual to submit a paper petition.

4. Members comments would be incorporated into the review and proposals would be brought back to the Committee for further consideration.

7. Monitoring Officer Update

(Item 7)

1. Mr Watts, General Counsel provided his update as follows:

- a. An article had been published following a recent LGA survey that found 95% of local authorities wished to have the option to hold statutory meetings in a hybrid or virtual format. Mr Watts offered to circulate the article for Members' information.
- b. From the Autumn of 2023 it was anticipated that the Darent Room would become available for meetings in addition to the Council Chamber. This would allow more than one meeting to take place on the same day when necessary. This was a better use of resources and would enable Members to potentially conduct more business while they were in the building.