
POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Virtual Meeting held Via Skype on Thursday, 26 November 2020 from 7.00pm - 7.54pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Lloyd Bowen, Mike Dendor, Alastair Gould (Chairman), Ann Hampshire, Pete Neal, Ken Rowles, Julian Saunders, Sarah Stephen, Ghlin Whelan (Vice-Chairman) and Corrie Woodford.

OFFICERS PRESENT: David Clifford, Janet Dart, Philippa Davies and Bob Pullen.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Mike Baldock, Cameron Beart, Derek Carnell, Roger Clark, Steve Davey, Tim Gibson, Ken Ingleton, Elliott Jayes, Denise Knights, Richard Palmer, Hannah Perkin, David Simmons and Tony Winckless.

APOLOGY: Councillor Benjamin Martin.

281 INTRODUCTION

The Chairman explained that the meeting would be conducted in accordance with the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panel (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Policy and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 No. 392.

In welcoming all Members and members of the public, the Chairman explained which Swale Borough Council officers were in attendance.

282 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 14 October 2020 (Minute Nos. 187 – 190) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record subject to recording that Councillor Corrie Woodford was present at the meeting.

283 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

284 CHANGE IN ORDER OF BUSINESS

The order of business was changed as minuted.

285 MATERNITY POLICY FOR COUNCILLORS

The Deputy Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing introduced the report which proposed the inclusion of some additional paragraphs in the Members' Allowances Scheme within the constitution to clarify the provision of parental, adoption and sickness leave for councillors. The Deputy Cabinet Member explained that the

paper followed-on from one presented to Council in September 2019 where it was resolved to actively work towards improving equality and diversity, and to improve accessibility to Local Government to under-represented groups. She said the objective for the additional paragraphs was to ensure that Members could take appropriate leave when required. The Deputy Cabinet Member stated that currently 8% of councils in the country had constitutional commitments to parental leave. She highlighted the four additional proposed paragraphs for inclusion in the constitution and welcomed questions from the committee.

In the debate that followed, Members raised the following points:

- Supported the initiative;
- it was important to get the wording right;
- suggested that extra wording ‘as long as they were still a councillor’ be added to paragraph two of the proposed addition;
- suggested the period of six months be extended, if the birth was earlier than expected;
- considered it was appropriate to continue the Member allowance, but the Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) should not be paid to the Member whilst they were absent, but instead be awarded to the Member who stood-in;
- paragraph (4) stated that the replacement Councillor would receive an SRA, and so there was a cost implication to the Council;
- welcomed the initiative which would ensure that Members would not be disadvantaged and encourage more people to be Councillors, and it would improve diversity; and
- there would be some financial implications from this proposal.

The Deputy Cabinet Member responded to some of the points that had been raised. She referred to paragraph (4) and highlighted that there would be an allowance for the person taking on the role of the Councillor who was absent. She said that Swale Borough Council (SBC) was in the bottom 10 of a list of councils in the country in terms of diversity representation, and that it was important to improve this. The Deputy Cabinet Member said that it was a small step in terms of financial implications, but a big step in terms of encouraging a more inclusive environment.

Members made further comments which included:

- Clarification was needed on the wording of paragraph (4) as, with reference to paragraph (2), it looked as though there would be a doubling-up of payment;
- agreed with the proposals but needed to recognise that an SRA payment was a specific payment for someone doing a particular role and there should not be a ‘double’ payment;
- paragraph (4) could be better phrased;
- positive that this brought parity with employed status;
- needed to consider that if a Member did not return to work, that an element of the monies received should be returned;
- there should be no barriers to stop people becoming councillors;
- it seemed that the Committee agreed in principle to the proposals;

- would this be presented to the General Purposes Committee (GPC) as a constitutional change?; and
- considered that people would become Councillors whether the proposal was in place or not.

In response, the Deputy Cabinet Member explained that she did not consider the principle of the proposal was a driver as such, but removed a barrier and encouraged diversity. She highlighted that there were only eight women out of 47 Councillors at SBC. The Deputy Cabinet Member explained that the recommendations were supported by the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) and by the Local Government Association.

The Head of Policy, Communications and Customer Services acknowledged the comments that had been made and the consensus of opinion in agreement to the principle of the proposal. He advised that the wording of the additional paragraphs had been suggested by the IRP, and he said that the LGA's wording on this could be looked at to clarify the points that had been raised. The Head of Policy, Communications and Customer Services outlined the process once the proposals had been considered by the Committee and said a report would be submitted to the GPC and then to Full Council.

Councillor Lloyd Bowen proposed that the general principle of the paper was supported by the Policy Development and Review Committee (PDRC), and it be referred to GPC for consideration and compared with LGA wording to clarify the points raised by the Committee. This was seconded by Councillor Sarah Stephen and on being put to the vote, Members agreed.

Resolved:

(1) That the general principle of the paper was supported by the Policy Development and Review Committee, and it be referred to the General Purposes Committee for consideration and compared with LGA wording to clarify the points raised by the Committee.

286 CABINET ADVISORY COMMITTEES WORKING GROUP

Councillor Tim Gibson, Cabinet Advisory Committees (CAC) Working Group member, introduced the to-follow update which gave a summary of the matters discussed at the two Working Group meetings which had been held on 5 and 18 November 2020.

He highlighted the main points on the update and advised that the next steps were to consider the CAC's terms of reference and the resources that were needed.

The Cabinet Member for Planning welcomed the update and was interested to hear in their final report how the Group had decided upon the three proposed advisory committees, which he had originally suggested.

A Member thanked the Working Group for the work they had completed so far. He had some concerns about CACs and asked where themes such as the Area Committees and parental leave would sit within the three suggested committees?

The Member considered there was still an over-riding need for the PDRC, for areas that did not naturally sit within the three advisory committees. The Member requested that Area Committees be added as an item for consideration at the next PDRC meeting.

The Policy and Performance Officer explained that the Working Group had looked at the issue of where certain themes would be placed, and it was considered that the two themes outlined above would fit within the finance portfolio.

Resolved:

(1) That the update be noted.

287 OVERARCHING ENFORCEMENT POLICY

The Policy and Performance Officer introduced the report which explained that a new overarching enforcement policy had been developed and the report sought the Committee's comments on the proposed new policy. He said that this would sit above all the other service-specific enforcement policies within the Council. The policy would replace the old policy already on the Council website which was out-of-date.

A Member drew attention to paragraph 3.11 of the policy which set-out that information and advice would be provided in plain English and the Member questioned whether this was ever implemented. The Member also suggested that going forward to increase diversity, this type of information be provided in other languages. The Policy and Performance Officer explained that the term plain English was standard and referred to all documentation provided by the Council. In terms of alternative languages, such as braille etc. there was another overarching policy which dealt with this on every publication from the council and on the website. The Member questioned whether paragraph 3.11, in that case, needed to be included within this policy.

Recommended:

(1) That the report be noted, and Cabinet consider the points raised by the Committee.

288 ADJOURNMENT OF MEETING

The meeting was adjourned from 19.15 to 19.20 as the Chairman had IT connectivity problems. The Vice-Chairman took over as Vice-Chairman-in-the Chair for the rest of the meeting.

Chairman

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All Minutes are draft until agreed at the next meeting of the Committee/Panel