

GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 29 January 2014 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Mrs. Davison (Chairman)

Cllr. Scholey

Cllrs. Mrs. Cook, London, Mrs. Morris, and Walshe

An apology for absence was received from Cllr. Fittock.

23. Minutes

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting of the Governance Committee held on 5 November 2013 be approved and signed as a correct record.

24. Declarations of Interest

Councillor London declared an interest in that he was a member of a trade union and did not believe this was on his current disclosable interest form.

25. Actions arising from the last meeting

The actions from the last meeting were noted.

26. Review of Members' Allowances

The Head of Finance presented the report which reminded Members that at the Council meeting on 1 October 2013 the Governance Committee was asked to review the allocation of special responsibility allowances and consider all options within the budget available. The Committee had considered the issue of allowances for Vice-Chairmen at the meeting on 5 November 2013, and agreed that the Vice-Chairman of the Development Control Committee had unique responsibilities and these should be recognised through a special responsibility allowance. A Working Group had been established to further review the allocation of special responsibility allowances and was recommending that a special responsibility allowance should be paid to all vice-chairmen to reflect their share of the workload and level of responsibility. The Working Group recommendation was for the allowances for Chairmen agreed by Council on 1 October 2013, to now be 'top-sliced' by 20% and that amount be paid to the Vice Chairman.

In relation to the Audit Committee as there was currently no Vice Chairman no top slicing would take place at this moment in time.

The Committee further considered whether an allowance should be paid to the Chairman of Standards Committee as an allowance had not been agreed for this role at the meeting of Council on 1 October. It was proposed that as the Committee met only once a year only a proportion of the sum already paid to other Chairmen should be made. It was felt that half of this allowance would be most appropriate and this allowance would be top-sliced in the same way and paid to the Vice Chairman

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It was noted that the Scrutiny Chairman had been given an allowance at Council and that there was an error on the appendix to the report. This has now been rectified as set out below.

Resolved: That it be recommended to Council that, from the date of the resolution,

- a) an allowance be paid to the Chairman of Standards Committee, half of that currently paid to the other committee chairmen; and
- b) the allowances for all Chairmen be 'top-sliced' by 20% and paid to the Vice Chairman as set out below:

Description of Allowance	Proposed Allowances per Member/ Responsibility
	(£)
Chairmen	
Advisory Committees (x5) -	2,057
Audit – (*top sliced if a Vice Chairman appointed)	2,571*
Development Control	3,085
Governance	2,057
Health Liaison Board	2,057
Licensing	2,057
Sevenoaks Joint Transportation Board	2,057
Scrutiny	2,057
Standards	1,029
Vice Chairmen	
Advisory Committees (x5)	514
Development Control	771
*Audit (if a Vice Chairman appointed), Governance, Health Liaison Board, Licensing, Scrutiny, Joint Transportation Board	514
Standards	257

27. Openness and transparency on personal interests

The Chief Legal and Governance Officer presented a report which advised that the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) had published revised guidance on personal interests with respect to membership of trade unions which required a slight amendment to the Council's Code of Conduct. Also attached for information was additional guidance that had been published in relation to openness and transparency on personal interests, which confirmed that the DCLG's view was that a dispensation was not required to take part in the business of setting council tax or a precept, simply by virtue of being a homeowner or tenant within the Authority's area. The Committee noted this clarification.

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Resolved: That it be recommended to Council that

- a) the DCLG amendment underlined in red and highlighted in the Illustrative Text, as set out in Appendix A of the report be incorporated into the Sevenoaks District Council's Code of Conduct; and
- b) the amended Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) "guide for councillors" set out at Appendix B of the report regarding "Openness and transparency on personal interests", be noted.

28. Recording of meetings

The Chief Officer Legal & Governance presented a report outlining the recommendations of the working group who considered that the recording of Council meetings in the Council Chamber could be feasible as this was an area already wired for sound. The I.T. Department were looking into the practicalities some testing needing to take place and the costs evaluated. Members also discussed the need for a retention policy on the recordings. It was confirmed that storage would not be an issue.

Resolved: That the recording of meetings held in the Council Chamber be recommended for approval in principle subject to final details on feasibility and costings.

29. Review of New Governance Arrangements - Members' Survey

The Chief Officer Legal and Governance, presented a report detailing the "First Impressions of the New Governance Structure" questionnaire results and providing a summary of the initial views of the Working Group. The Governance Committee had been tasked with reviewing the new governance arrangements which were introduced at Annual Council in May 2013 in addition to looking at options such as the Committee System or a Hybrid Model requiring Secretary of State approval and to report back to Council by 1 April 2014.

The Working Group had agreed that a further simpler survey was needed to help clarify some points. The response to the first survey had also been disappointing. The Chairman had also contacted all deputy cabinet members and had received only two responses. Councillor Mrs Morris tabled a draft questionnaire which Members discussed and made a number of amendments to. Members thanked her for her work.

Members discussed the current 'pool' membership system of the Scrutiny Committee and agreed it was difficult to work and led to confusion. The Chief Officer Legal and Governance advised that whilst it had not been legally tested in the courts, the current system may not delineate sufficiently between the roles of Scrutiny and Cabinet. Members were in agreement that a fixed membership of 11 members not on any advisory committee would be more desirable and effective. A fixed pool would allow knowledge and training to be built upon. Legally there would be a clear demarcation between Cabinet and Scrutiny. Less cabinet advisory committees meeting more regularly

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may also be more appropriate and would allow a member to sit on more than one cabinet advisory committee.

It was agreed that the Working Group would need to meet again before the next committee meeting in order to formulate recommendations to be considered at that meeting ready to report to Council on 1 April 2014. Meetings of the working group were agreed as Thursday 13 February 2014 at 5 p.m., and Monday 24 February 2014 at 2 p.m.

Resolved: That the report be noted and the new questionnaire given to the Head of Transportation and Strategy to circulate as soon as possible with a two week return date.

30. Work Plan

The work plan was noted.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 8.17 PM

CHAIRMAN