

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Date of meeting: 18 November 2020
Report of: Head of Democratic Services and Governance
Title: Amalgamation of Members Forum and Member Panels

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Cheshire East Council currently has three standing Member bodies; the Members' Forum, established to provide a political steer and joint advocacy of the Brighter Future Transformation Programme objectives; the Member Technology and Development Panel (MT&DP) which considers Councillors' needs in respect of their IT and personal development; and the Members' Enquiries Service (MES) Panel, which monitors the operational aspects of MES and suggests improvements to the service.
- 1.2 Over the last twelve months, the work of the three bodies has begun to cross over. A proposal has come forward from the Chairman of the Members' Forum to amalgamate the Forum and the two Panels into a single body to create efficiencies, avoid duplication and promote a holistic approach to the delivery of its objectives.

2. The Proposal

- 2.1 A proposal to merge the Forum and the Panels was initially considered at the Forum's meeting in May 2020; members present indicated that they would support the merger provided that the cultural role of the Forum was not diminished.
- 2.2 Taking the views of the Forum into account, terms of reference have been drafted for the new body, using as its framework the work streams set out in the Brighter Future Transformation Programme, albeit modified slightly to account for the Forum and the Panels' present responsibilities i.e.

Transformation workstreams

- Culture
- Estates and ICT
- Customer experience
- Commercial
- Governance

Proposed workstreams

- Culture
- ICT
- Members' enquiries
- Community engagement
- Governance

- 2.4 The inclusion of community engagement as a workstream reflects the current role of the Forum in respect of its interaction with internal and external stakeholders.

2.5 Having consulted with the (interim) Organisational Development Manager, Director of Transformation and Head of Audit and Risk Management on the draft terms, it was suggested that a sixth workstream of risk management be added, to enable the Group to identify, manage and mitigate those risks which may impact on the delivery of its objectives and outputs.

3. Proposed terms of reference – matters for consideration

3.1 The appendix attached to the report sets out draft terms of reference for the new body. To avoid any confusion with the current Forum or Panels, it is referred to throughout the document as 'the Group'. If the proposal to merge is accepted, a more formal title representative of its role will need to be identified.

3.2 Where common to all, the principles applicable to the Forum/Panels have been retained i.e.

- Membership will be 14 on a politically proportionate basis
- The Group will not be a formal decision-making body
- The Group will provide a collective cross-party political steer on the matter set out in the terms of reference

3.3 In respect of the remaining principles listed below, their relevance depends on how the role of the Group is envisioned going forward. Having mind to the cross-cutting nature of the Group, it is proposed that:

- the Group's recommendations should continue to be submitted for consideration to the appropriate decision-making body of the Council, as at present; and
- the frequency of its meetings should be set by the new Group.

3.4 Taken from the current Forum/Panels terms of reference, the following outputs are listed:

- The *Forum* will work with officer champions and will regularly attend the Brighter Future Community meetings
- The *Forum* will produce an annual report outlining key activity and outputs
- An activity and performance report from the *MT&DP/Forum* will be submitted to Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

3.5 It is suggested that the outputs for the new Group should be drawn from its own terms of reference and agreed at its first meeting.

- 3.6 At present, notes and actions arising from each of the three bodies are circulated only to the Members who sit on the body concerned. A request has been made for the notes and action points from Forum meetings to be made available to all Councillors, so that Members are kept abreast of discussions taking place on matters which directly affect them.
- 3.7 Assuming that the request also applies to the amalgamated Group, the circulation of notes/actions may encourage feedback and open its discussions to a wider audience. However, this may not be appropriate if the Group was asked to consider a proposal informally.

4.0 Summary and Recommendations

- 4.1 The Forum is invited to indicate its support for:
- a) the merger of the Members' Forum, the Member Technology and Development Panel and the Members' Enquiries Service Panel into a single body;
 - b) the proposed terms of reference attached to the report;
 - c) the addition of a sixth workstream (risk management) to enable the Group to identify, manage and mitigate those risks to the delivery of its objectives and outputs;
 - d) the principles set out in paragraph 3.2 on the structure and status of the Group;
 - e) the principles set out in paragraph 3.3 regarding reporting lines and frequency of meetings; and
 - f) whether the notes/actions arising from meetings of new Group should be circulated either to those Members who sit on the Group or to Councillors generally.

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