

Constitution Committee

Date of Meeting: 6 April 2021

Report Title: Amalgamation of the Council's Member Forum and Panels

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Jill Rhodes, Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Corporate Services

Senior Officer: Brian Reed, Head of Democratic Services and Governance

1. Report Summary

1.1. The Committee is invited to:

1.1.1 Agree to amalgamate the Council's three informal member panels; the Brighter Future Members' Forum, the Member Technology and Development Panel and the Members' Enquiries Service Panel, into one body;

1.1.2 Agree the terms of reference for the new Panel, to be known as the "Members' Input Panel"; and

1.1.3 Agree that the Head of Democratic Services and Governance should agree the number of Panel members in consultation with the chairman and vice chairman of the Committee; based upon political proportionality, excepting that the Panel should have representation from all of the Council's political Groups.

2. Recommendations

2.1. That the Members' Input Panel replace the Brighter Future Members' Forum, the Member Technology and Development Panel and the Members' Enquiries Service Panel;

2.2. The terms of reference for the Members' Input Panel appended to the report be approved; and

2.3. Membership of the new Panel be agreed as per paragraph 1.1.3 of the report.

3. Reasons for Recommendation

3.1. The merger of the three existing panels will create efficiencies, avoid duplication, and will promote a more holistic approach to the support provided to Members.

4. Background

4.1. Cheshire East Council currently has the following informal member bodies;

- the Brighter Future Members' Forum, established to provide a political steer and joint advocacy of the Brighter Future Transformation Programme objectives;
- the Member Technology and Development Panel, which considers Councillors' needs in respect of their IT and personal development; and
- the Members' Enquiries Service Panel, which monitors the operational aspects of the Members' Enquiries Service, and suggests improvements to the service.

4.2. Over the last twelve months, the work of the three bodies has begun to overlap and potentially, will overlap with the role of the new service committees post May 2021.

The Proposal

4.3. The Brighter Future Members' Forum discussed a proposal to amalgamate the Forum and the existing Panels into one body in May and November 2020. The Forum agreed to the merger, in principle, provided that the cultural role of the Forum was not diminished.

4.4. In November, the Forum indicated that it wished to hear the views of the chairman and members of the other Panels and the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, before reaching a conclusion. A meeting between the three chairmen took place on 17 December 2020, who were in support of the proposal. The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee also considered the proposal on 7 January 2021 and made the following recommendations:

- that the amalgamation of the three panels be supported;
- in relation to the proposed workstreams of culture, ICT, members' enquiries, community engagement and governance; a sixth workstream of risk management be added;
- the minutes of the amalgamated panel be circulated to all members of the Council; and

- the amalgamated panel be formalised by the Constitution Committee.

4.5 The Forum considered the proposal again at its meeting on 9 February 2021, having regard to the Scrutiny Committee's feedback and its recommendations. The Forum confirmed its support for the merger.

4.6 It was agreed that the primary role of the new body would be to focus on how Councillors engage with the Council (in line with the work streams set out in its terms of reference), and to help and advise the Council to support Members in the operational aspects of being a Councillor.

4.7 As the Panel would have no decision making powers, it was requested and agreed that appropriate wording be added to the terms of reference to provide a clear pathway for referring matters requiring a decision to the appropriate decision-making body of the Council.

4.8 To promote the work of the Panel and inform Members of its discussions, it was agreed that a mechanism would be put in place to raise awareness of the Panel's work programme so that Members could feed in their views. The actions and recommendations arising from its meetings would also be circulated to Councillors.

5. Implications of the Recommendations

5.1. Legal Implications

- 5.1.1. The new Panel will continue to be non-decision making, with recommendations submitted to the appropriate decision-making body.

5.2. Finance Implications

- 5.2.1. Efficiency savings can be achieved by reducing the number of meetings held.

5.3. Policy Implications

- 5.3.1. None identified.

5.4. Equality Implications

- 5.4.1. None identified.

5.5. Human Resources Implications

- 5.5.1. None identified.

5.6. Risk Management Implications

5.6.1. Adding a sixth workstream of risk management will enable the Panel to identify, manage and mitigate those risks which may impact on the delivery of its own objectives and outputs.

5.7. Rural Communities Implications

5.7.1. There are no direct implications for rural communities.

5.8. Implications for Children & Young People/Cared for Children

5.8.1. There are no direct implications for children and young people.

5.9. Public Health Implications

5.9.1. There are no direct implications for public health.

5.10. Climate Change Implications

5.10.1. A reduction in the number of meetings will help the Council to reduce its carbon footprint and achieve environmental sustainability by reducing energy consumption.

6. Ward Members Affected

6.1. Implications are borough wide.

7. Consultation & Engagement

7.1. Reports on the proposed merger have been shared with the Chairs and membership of the Brighter Future Members' Forum; Member Technology and Development Panel; Members' Enquiries Service Panel and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

8. Access to Information

8.1. The terms of reference for the Brighter Future Members' Forum, the Member Technology and Development Panel and the Members' Enquiries Service Panel have been considered as part of the report.

9. Appendices

9.1. Appendix A, draft Terms of Reference, Members' Input Panel.

10. Contact Information

10.1. Any questions relating to this report should be directed to the following officer:

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