

## Report Constitution committee 29 April 2021

### Appendix 2

Role of spokesperson.

The IRP have recommended in their report remuneration for a spokesperson role. The report broadly realigns the allowances for scrutiny with the allowance for a spokesperson.

It should be noted some but not all committee style constitutions of other councils recognise this role.

If the role attracts significant remuneration you would anticipate the role would be identified and responsibilities articulated in the constitution. The proposed remuneration is a special responsibility allowance of £4200 equivalent to the role of a vice chair of a service committee.

It would appear the main purpose of the special responsibility allowance is to address the scrutiny function within the service committee. The one scrutiny committee (as set out in the November 2020 Council report) mainly deals with external bodies (e.g. health, police and crime).

The main internal scrutiny is to take place within the six new service committees (and the Finance sub). It followed that Scrutiny SRA payments needed to be allocated within these committees.

In governance terms and special responsibility allowance terms the spokesperson role has the responsibility of leading internal scrutiny of a service committee decision making. It is not an opposition role for the purpose of opposing the administration.

The IRP noted the recommendations made by the allowance's panels in Brighton and Hove and Nottinghamshire concerning SRA payments to lead opposition members within their committee structures, the Panel was clear that a similar approach was appropriate in Cheshire East.

If the reason for the remuneration is to underpin and to facilitate the democratic viability of the council, achieved by giving due weight to the roles of the opposition/non-administration groups and the scrutiny function. Any writing in of the role into the constitution or description must be based on an internal scrutiny function.

The IRP report described this as opposition spokesperson as it would normally be expected that the opposition would take the lead in relation to the scrutiny of proposed decisions emanating from the administration.

The Committee should note in various member sessions two concerns were often articulated. A) The capability and capacity of a committee to self-scrutinise itself and B) the need to select the right member sometimes described in terms of experience or skill set. Although described 'opposition' spokesperson. Members have also stated that previous challenge by scrutiny chairs from the same political group has been effective.

Additionally, Professor Leach (IRP report author) opined 'I would expect them [opposition spokesperson] to have a separate pre-meeting meeting with the chief officer(s) concerned, at which they could ask any questions regarding items on the agenda. This would enable them to make evidence-based interventions, where appropriate, at the committee meeting itself, which would (if deployed responsibly) add to the quality of the debate and make the scrutiny process a meaningful one.'

### Suggested Role definition

#### Scrutiny / Opposition/ Group SPOKESPERSON

A Committee has collective responsibility for the decisions that it makes. To ensure each decision is appropriately considered each Service Committee will have a spokesperson.

The role of the spokesperson is to champion the principles of open, timely efficient and affordable decision making in accordance with legal obligations and the needs of the residents of Cheshire East.

A spokesperson will be expected to:

- To work with the Committee chairperson to facilitate the efficient and timely conduct of the committee business.
- To inform, discuss and where appropriate agree with the Chairperson an approach to contentious issues which support the principles of openness, timely, efficient decision making which meets the needs of the residents of Cheshire East
- To work with the Chairperson to provide recommendations for training, development, and improved learning for all committee members.
- Champion the effective scrutiny of the Committee decisions and to support the democratic process by ensuring that the activities of the administration are examined, tested and where appropriate promote consideration of alternative options.
- To ensure the committee decisions and administration respects and reflects the policy, budgetary and constitutional and policy framework of the Council.
- To contribute to policy development and the operational role of the committee, from the perspective of non-administration groups
- To meet regularly with relevant senior officers and receive briefings on the work programme of the committee and share information with Councillors from other Groups
- To be the committees' first political point of contact for non-administration Councillors
- To establish and maintain effective working relationships with Chief Officers, Heads of Services and other key officers.
- To support key officers in the delivery of reports to the committee which meet the needs of Councillors to make informed decisions.
- To champion Cheshire East Councils programme for Brighter Futures and encourage positive behaviour and challenge inappropriate conduct in the Committee.