

Governance Committee

10 May 2023 – At a meeting of the Governance Committee held at 2.15 pm at County Hall, Chichester PO19 1RQ.

Present: Cllr Bradbury (Chairman)

Cllr Wickremaratchi, Cllr Baxter, Cllr Burrett, Cllr Lord, Cllr O'Kelly, Cllr Waight, Cllr Hunt and Cllr Urquhart

Apologies were received from Cllr A Jupp and Cllr Marshall

Also in attendance: Cllr Lanzer

Part I

36. Declarations of Interest

36.1 None declared.

37. Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee

37.1 Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2023 be approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

38. Independent Remuneration Panel Review 2023/24

38.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Law and Assurance on whether it wished to offer any guidance to the Independent Remuneration Panel on its planned review of member allowances in 2023/24 (copy appended to the signed minutes). The Director reminded members that the Panel would make its recommendations to the full Council in due course for decision.

38.2 Members raised five areas for consideration in the review as set out below:

- (1) Whether allowances such as the carers allowance are at a suitable level to attract working people or those with families, to include a review of the carers allowance hourly rate for both child care and dependent adults which may have been outpaced by inflation and also to see if the allowance for child care is appropriate for those with two or more children.
- (2) Whether the subsistence allowances in Schedule 3 of the scheme are relevant given that members are not employees.
- (3) As this is the first review since the Covid-19 pandemic with more working from home and changes to workloads, community expectations and ways of working, whether this should mean a change to the considerations to be taken into account when assessing the basic allowance.

- (4) On page 10 of the current scheme in relation to the rates for use of a private car, whether paragraphs 6(a) and (b) should be combined to make them simpler and remove duplication.
- (5) Make it clear that the private car rate on page 10 of the scheme (and other allowances if applicable) follow the HMRC rate (as stated in the earlier section on amendments to the scheme).

38.3 Following a vote it was agreed that points (1), (3), (4) and (5) should be put to the IRP.

38.4 Resolved – That the IRP be asked to look at points IRP (1), (3), (4) and (5) in minute 38.1 above as part of its review for 2023/24.

39. Review of Webcasting

39.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Law and Assurance on the annual viewing figures for Council/committee meetings webcast during 2022/23 (copy appended to the signed minutes). It was asked to review the one-year trial of webcasting Health and Wellbeing Board meetings and recommend to the County Council that they should continue to be webcast.

39.2 The Head of Democratic Services introduced the report and said that in paragraph 4.1 the text should read 'In 2022/23 this was exceeded by **10 hours**'. She commented that, although the proposal was to continue to webcast Health and Wellbeing Board meetings, there would not be an obligation to webcast meetings if the venue chosen for a particular meeting is not suitable for this.

39.3 The Cabinet Member for Public Health and Wellbeing attended the meeting as Chairman of the Health and Wellbeing Board. He commented that he believed that since the pandemic there is a much greater awareness of health and wellbeing and the County Council is a much more of an equal partner with the Health and the voluntary sector. The webcast viewing figures for the Health and Wellbeing Board put it ahead of all the scrutiny committees. This showed there is a real public interest which the Council should capitalise on to improve the public health agenda.

39.4 Whilst there is a cost to webcasting, members recognised the importance in terms of openness and transparency of the work of the Council which benefitted both residents and staff as well as reducing travel to meetings.

39.5 The Committee supported the continued webcasting of Health and Wellbeing Board meetings and noted that this does not commit the County Council to webcasting in a venue where it is not currently available.

39.6 Resolved –

- (1) That the webcasting viewing figures for 2022/23, as set out at Appendix 1, be noted;

- (2) That the review of the one-year trial of webcasting Health and Wellbeing Board meetings be noted; and
- (3) That the County Council be recommended that Health and Wellbeing Board meetings should be added to the list of meetings where there is a presumption that they will be webcast.

40. Electronic Signatures - Standing Order amendment

40.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Law and Assurance on proposed changes to Standing Orders on Procurement and Contracts to enable the use of electronic signatures so that documents can be formally concluded electronically, for recommendation to the Regulation, Audit and Accounts Committee (copy appended to the signed minutes).

40.2 The Director of Law and Assurance confirmed that when the proposals are considered by the Regulation, Audit and Accounts Committee they will include a recommendation to increase the value threshold for the use of the seal as an alternative to the use of a signature alone.

40.3 Members asked about cyber security in relation to the new application. The Director of Law and Assurance said it has a very high specification and that only a small number of systems had met the Council's requirements. There will also be an internal security protocol in terms of who can access the system, enforced by the Director.

40.4 Members asked if there is any government advice on threshold for signatures and whether the Council is an early adopter of electronic signatures for contract. The Director of Law and Assurance confirmed that external advice had been used and the procurement route had used a Crown Commercial framework agreement. He said the Council is a relatively late adopter due to the need to be reassured about security measures.

40.5 In response to a question as to whether the system includes an audit trail the Director confirmed the system will generate an automatic audit trail as opposed to the current manual log.

40.6 Members asked about the benefits of signatures under seal and the Director explained that the period of limitation is 12 years as opposed to six and that there are also different remedies available to courts for documents signed under seal as opposed to those signed by hand or electronically.

40.7 Resolved – That the proposed changes to Standing Orders on Procurement and Contracts to enable the use of electronic signatures within the scope set out in the report, be endorsed for recommendation to the Regulation, Audit and Accounts Committee.

41. Date of Next Meeting

41.1 The Committee noted that the next meeting of the Committee will be held at 2.15 pm on 26 June 2023 at County Hall, Chichester. Planned agenda items include:

- Annual appointments
- Member Development Group Annual Report
- Annual attendance statistics

The meeting ended at 2.52 pm

Chairman