

Minute of Meeting Cross Party Sounding Board

Date	Time	Venue
Thursday, 12 September 2019	12:30	Corporate Meeting Room 1, Council Headquarters, Renfrewshire House, Cotton Street, Paisley, PA1 1AN

Present

Councillor Tom Begg, Councillor Paul Mack, Councillor Eileen McCartin, Councillor Iain Nicolson

Chair

Councillor Nicolson, Convener, presided.

In Attendance

L McIntyre, Head of Policy & Commissioning; L Adamson, Communications & Public Affairs Manager and A Armstrong-Walter, Strategic Partnerships & Inequalities Manager (all Chief Executive's); K Graham Head of Corporate Governance and L Belshaw, Democratic Services Manager (both Finance & Resources).

Apologies

Councillor Paterson

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest intimated prior to the commencement of the meeting.

Sederunt

Councillor McCartin entered the meeting during consideration of the following item of business.

1 Exempt Items

There was submitted a report by the Director of Finance & Resources relative to a proposed change to the distribution of exempt reports.

The report intimated that the Council and its Boards could decide that any of the reports submitted on an agenda should be exempt from the over-riding requirement that all Council and Board meetings and the consideration of any items at a meeting were held in public. The grounds on which such a decision could be taken were limited to the 15 categories set out Schedule 7A of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973. The number of reports that were exempt was relatively small. The recommendation from officers that a report should be exempt would be made based on the risk to the Council but also in some circumstances to the business affairs of a person or organisation which wished to undertake business with the Council. In 2019 there had been three incidents of exempt reports being released to the local press.

The report set out why it was important that such reports be protected from publication and the consequences for any person who had deliberately released such information. In order to reduce the risk of exempt information being released into the public domain, the report proposed that any proposal to have a report classified as exempt be agreed with the Head of Corporate Governance in the first instance, prior to the report being discussed with the relevant Convener. In addition the report proposed that access to exempt reports was given only to Board members, the Leader and Depute Leader of the Council and appropriate officers; that these be available on an electronic basis only; and that any elected member who was not on the Board and who wished access to the relevant report, would be required to justify to the Head of Corporate Governance why they should have access.

The Board recommended that the proposals as outlined in the report be agreed, with the addition of the leaders of the opposition groups and parties to the proposed distribution; and that the Head of Corporate Governance would consider requests from any elected members not on the distribution list to be given access to the relevant report. In addition it was suggested that these proposals be provided to the leaders of the opposition groups and parties for their consideration prior to the suggested actions being implemented.

DECIDED:

(a) That the following proposals to reduce the risk of exempt information being released be recommended for implementation, and provided to the leaders of the opposition groups and parties for their consideration prior to implementation:

(i) That any proposal to have a report classified as exempt be agreed with the Head of Corporate Governance in the first instance, prior to the report being discussed with the relevant convener;

(ii) That access to exempt reports is given only to Board members, the Leader and Depute Leader of the Council, leaders of the opposition groups and parties, and appropriate officers;

(iii) That exempt reports be available on an electronic basis only; and

(iv) That the Head of Corporate Governance would consider requests from any elected members not on the distribution list to be given access to the relevant report.

2 Participatory Budgeting

There was submitted a report by the Chief Executive relative to the most suitable methods for raising awareness of participatory budgeting amongst elected members in order that suitable training arrangements could be made.

The report intimated that participatory budgeting was the distribution of small grants to community and voluntary organisations via community voting events. Mainstream participatory budgeting enabled local people to directly influence the spending of mainstream council budgets. CoSLA and the Scottish Government had worked together to develop a framework that at least one per cent of local government budgets would be subject to participatory budgeting by the end of 2021. This was calculated from the revenue budget, less council tax intake, which was estimated to be approximately £3.2 million in Renfrewshire.

It was noted that in Renfrewshire a pilot participatory budgeting exercise was currently underway with the Youth Challenge Fund grants, formerly distributed by Local Area Committees. This exercise would be completed by Autumn 2019 and an evaluation would be available by the end of 2019. Officers were working to develop an approach for mainstream participatory budgeting within the Council in order to meet the one percent requirement by the end of March 2021.

It was proposed that as a first step to raising members' awareness of participatory budgeting, briefing sessions, lasting no more than ten minutes, be arranged prior to Council meetings. This was agreed.

It was further proposed that member development, more generally, be considered at a future meeting of the Cross Party Sounding Board. This was agreed.

DECIDED:

- (a) That as a first step to raising members' awareness of participatory budgeting, briefing sessions, lasting no more than 10 minutes, be arranged prior to Council meetings; and
- (b) That member development be considered at a future meeting of the Cross Party Sounding Board.

3 Climate Change Emergency

Under reference to item 9 of the Minute of the meeting of the Council held on 27 June 2019, there was submitted a report by the Chief Executive relative to the Council decision to declare a climate emergency and the establishment of a cross-party working group to explore options for action and to make recommendations to the Council by the end of financial year 2019/20.

The report sought views of members on the establishment of the working group, including membership, frequency of meetings and specific areas of interest/focus in order to ensure that this group had the right approach and membership and was able to work at pace to report back with recommendations to the Council within the agreed timescale.

It was proposed that the members of the Cross Party Sounding Board form the core membership of the climate emergency working group; that group leaders be asked if they wish to nominate a substitute or alternative member to the group, that officers make

recommendations to the group in terms of which key stakeholders should be invited to become members of the group; that the group determine its timetable to allow it to meet frequently, in order that its findings may be reported to the Council as soon as possible; that in terms of key areas for discussion, in the first instance there be a definition of 'climate emergency'; that officers undertake an audit of all work being done by Council services in terms of climate activities for presentation to the working group; that other areas for consideration could be recycling/disposal of waste; the extent of what could be achieved by planning/building control; and the implications of increased flooding and plant growth arising from climate change. This was agreed.

DECIDED:

- (a) That the members of the Cross Party Sounding Board form the core membership of the climate emergency working group; that group leaders be asked if they wish to nominate a substitute or alternative member to the group;
- (b) That officers make recommendations to the group in terms of which key stakeholders should be invited to become members of the group;
- (c) That the group determine its timetable to allow it to meet frequently in order that its findings may be reported to the Council as soon as possible;
- (d) That in terms of key areas for discussion, in the first instance there be a definition of 'climate emergency'; that officers undertake an audit of all work being done by Council services in terms of climate activities for presentation to the working group; that other areas for consideration could be recycling/disposal of waste; the extent of what could be achieved by planning/building control; and the implications of increased flooding and plant growth arising from climate change.