

Meeting:	THE COUNCIL
Date:	21, June, 2012.
Subject:	Area Committees
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Background.

1. This report is presented following the Council's decision on the 17th May, 2012 to have further discussion regarding the establishment of area committees.
2. The debate on the future of the area committees was commenced side by side with discussion on the establishment of area forums as part of the community improvement agenda with the intention of empowering the local member, improving the engagement with communities, achieving better results for the area and making better use of members' and officers' resources.
3. In establishing the Central Planning Committee there was a reduction in the items before the area committees and by now the change to the Cabinet means that a number of matters which formerly went to area committees are now the responsibility of the Cabinet.
4. There is need for the Council to come to a decision whether to establish area committees in the new structure or not, and if established, which terms of reference to give them, bearing in mind that some matters are now the responsibility of the Cabinet.

Considerations.

5. There are a number of considerations appropriate for the Council to consider when discussing the matter.
6. The discussion on area forums – If it is the Council's wish to consider the aspirations and the wishes of the different areas in determining priorities, a way needs to be found to establish those aspirations and wishes and establishing forums on the basis of smaller geographical areas than the area committees and not constituted as a formal committee could be a means of achieving this.
7. Purpose and intent of area committees – In order to identify the workload of the area committee if established, a detailed analysis was carried out of what had been discussed in the area committees over the past two years identifying those matters that will no longer be possible to decide at area committees and the nature of the remaining items.
8. From the matters discussed, it was seen that the majority, namely 58% were reports for information only, i.e. annual reports, work programmes and plans, minutes of sub-committees, etc.

9. 41% of the matters before the area committees were matters requiring decisions. These are divided to 29% which are now matters for the Cabinet and 12% which are matters either which go to the full Council for decision (e.g. the electoral regional boundary review) or to the Planning Committee (paths and orders).
10. One item was identified as a local matter for discussion, the closing of the Meirion Unit, Dolgellau Hospital, although this could be a topic for a Notice of Motion to the full Council.
11. It can be seen therefore that the main focus of the committees for the past two years was receiving information. Although they received many items for discussion and decision, the change to Cabinet means that from now on they will not have a key role in the Council's decision making process.
12. Effective use of resources – Frequently, the same matters were discussed in the three area committees, e.g. annual service reports, which is an ineffective use of members and officers time and costs.
13. The change to cabinet system – As the responsibility for achievement is clearly in the hands of the Cabinet members, there is a need to establish firm arrangements to challenge and to hold them to account. This is done through the scrutiny committees. It is fair to query the purpose of calling the Head of Department to the area committee to give an account of his/her work in an annual report when the main responsibility is with the Cabinet member.
14. Importing information – The back bench members express a clear desire to have more information on
 - a) matters within their wards;
 - b) matters on the Council services in general.
15. It is the intention of the Cabinet to establish surgeries where back bench members can discuss matters causing them concern within their wards and generally enquire about services. Also, when the information portal has been established, it will be necessary to arrange for services annual reports to be put into it for the use of each member as well as sending a list of local events to each local member.

The way forward

16. Many of the proposals (e.g. area forums, surgeries, the information portal) are not yet fully developed and it is difficult to be certain that the members' aspirations will be met.
17. Therefore, it is recommended that the Cabinet Member establishes a cross-party working group, with representation from each area, to develop the ideas and bring firm proposals back to the Council in October.
18. In the meantime, it is recommended that area committees be established for Arfon, Dwyfor and Meirionnydd, without operational powers, and on a temporary basis with the matter to be considered again at the October Council meeting.

RECOMMENDATION

- a) To establish a cross-party working group with representation from each area to bring firm proposals to the table for a procedure that will meet member requirements.
- b) To establish area committees for each of the areas of Arfon, Dwyfor and Meirionnydd, without operational powers, for a defined period until the Council meeting in October.
- c) To discuss the matter again at the Council meeting in October.