

Committee: FULL COUNCIL

Date: 19 March 2024

Title: Councillor surgeries

Purpose of Report

To review future councillor surgeries from April 2024

Recommendation:

Members to note the report and consider any recommendations emanating from discussions on this item.

Report:

1. At the Full Council meeting on the 15 November 2022 Members took the decision to run Councillor Surgeries.

*Members **RESOLVED** by 8 votes for, 5 against and 2 abstentions that the surgeries run from 10-30 hrs to 11-30 hrs every third Saturday of the month with each member of the council conducting two surgeries in the first 15 months.*

***Proposer** Cllr Sellers **Seconded** Cllr Hamilton*

2. A follow up report was taken to the Full Council meeting on the 16 May 2023 for members to consider. The following comments were made by members regarding the continuation of holding surgeries.

Discussions included; are they being held in the right location, they haven't worked in the past, some members work on a Saturday, could they be advertised in local shops, could they be held online in the evening, could they be held in a café/The Arts Centre/other location, and they give residents an opportunity to meet their local Town Councillor.

Officers will investigate the suggestions made and bring further information to a future meeting. Members were reminded that even if they vote against/abstained as the proposal was approved all members are expected to take part in the surgeries.

3. Officers have looked at other possible locations for the Saturday morning surgeries but currently that does not appear to be anywhere suitable that would allow a certain level of confidentiality should an elector wish it.
4. Information coming from the team at Somerset Council is that the Local Community Networks will work best when the residents' opinions of matters under consideration are being brought to the LCN meetings and not just what the councillors themselves are thinking. This corresponds to the results of community surveys that have been carried out when a number of the electors' opinions did not correspond with what some councillors were saying.

5. The use of Members surgeries is being promoted by Somerset Council through the Local Community Networks (LCN's) as a valuable tool to establish community awareness.
6. Over the year and a bit some of the Councillors have been more active than others in manning the surgeries. Out of a possible 13 sessions to attend with two members per session, each member has done the following.

GUNN, Michelle	2
HAMILTON, Brian	2
JAMES, Matthew	0
JENNER-HURFORD, Ben	2
KARCHUD, Joe	0
KEITCH, Val	2
MACKILLOP, Ian	4
MORRIS, Jonathan (Cllr since Jan 24)	0
OSBORNE, Sue	4
PAUL, Darren	0
SELLERS, Paul	2
SHEARMAN, Andrew	0
SHEPHERD, Stuart	1
TAYLOR, Leanne	5
TINSON, Neil	2

7. Sadly, it would seem that despite publicising each of the surgeries the people who attended have been relatively few. That said the fact that several have received valid advice and their queries followed up by officers does show they can be beneficial.
8. Several members have suggested other scenarios where members of the public could be engaged in setting up the upcoming surgeries. This has included moving the surgeries to a market day, having a stall in the Market House and then setting an appointment when they might come to the office.
9. It is for members to debate whether they wish to continue with the idea of surgeries, move venues or put the whole idea on hold for the time being.
10. Members to note the report and consider any recommendations emanating from discussions on this item.

Mark Tredwin
Town clerk
March 2024