



**West
Northamptonshire
Council**

Democracy and Standards Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Democracy and Standards Committee held at The Jeffery Room, The Guildhall, Northampton on Thursday 30 September 2021 at 6.00 pm.

Present	Councillor Suresh Patel (Chair) Councillor Andrew Grant (Vice-Chair) Councillor Fiona Cole Councillor Daniel Cribbin Councillor Gareth Eales Councillor Cecile Irving-Swift Councillor Andrew Kilbride Councillor Laura Stevenson Councillor Sally Beardsworth
Substitute Members:	Councillor Sally Beardsworth
Apologies for Absence:	Councillor Jonathan Harris
Officers	Geoff Wild John Murphy Tracy Tiff, Deputy Democratic Services Manager Marina Watkins, Committee Officer

8. Declarations of Interest

None advised.

9. Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the Democracy and Standards Committee held on 30th September be approved and signed as a correct record.

10. Chair's Announcements

None advised.

11. Review of the Constitution

Consideration was given to the report of the Deputy Monitoring Officer regarding the review of the Constitution.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer advised that two very thorough and intensive task panel meetings had been held in order to review the Constitution and responses received from the consultation exercise. The consultation response had been very positive with responses received from members, parish councils, NCALC and members of the public. The views had been taken into account by the task panel. The substantive areas of change were highlighted to the Committee.

Councillor Beardsworth queried how the Constitution could be made more user friendly. In response, the Deputy Monitoring Officer advised that it had been simplified as much as possible but much of the document was set out in law. The Chair added that the task panel had discussed the issue at some length.

Councillor Daniel Cribbin queried whether a guide could be produced for the public detailing how to address Council. The Deputy Monitoring Officer advised that public participation was a major issue. A four page section at the beginning of the document covered this issue and could be used elsewhere in order to simplify matter for the public. Councillor Gareth Eales considered that such a document could be made available on the Council's website.

The Chair explained that the proposed changes to the Constitution would now be considered by Cabinet and the Executive Leadership Team, before returning to the Democracy and Standards Committee in November and finally Council on 2nd December.

The Chair requested that the Committee gave consideration to the start and finish time of meetings of the Full Council. It was generally considered that 10.30pm finishes were too late, particularly with some participants then having to travel home to more rural areas. Councillor Cecile Irving-Swift suggested that close of business at 9.30pm might be more suitable.

Councillor Sally Beardsworth noted that there were currently six Council meetings each year, which was often the only chance of the Opposition to hold the Administration to account. Councillor Gareth Eales pointed out that an additional meeting could be arranged if necessary.

The Committee agreed that Council meetings should end at 9.30pm.

In response to a question from Councillor Sally Beardsworth regarding the increase in spending limits, the Chair advised that the matter would be discussed further. Councillor Beardsworth also queried the number of Councillors of each of the three Scrutiny Committees, and why only one had representatives from all parties.

The recommendations submitted in the report were agreed.

RESOLVED:

The Democracy and Standards Committee:

- a) Notes the responses to the consultation programme;

- b) Acknowledges the work of the Task & Finish Group;
- c) Endorses the proposed amendments to the Constitution;
- d) Recommends the revised Constitution to Cabinet for comment and further consideration.

12. **Carried Motions on Notice – Predecessor Councils**

Consideration was given to the report of the Deputy Democratic Services Manager regarding the Local Government Boundary Review.

Following a discussion, the Deputy Monitoring Officer advised that the Motions would be forwarded to the appropriate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, with a report back to Council in December.

The recommendation submitted in the report were agreed.

RESOLVED:

that the Democracy and Standards Committee:

- a) Notes the carried motions from the previous six years from the predecessor councils: Daventry District Council, Northampton Borough Council, Northamptonshire County Council and South Northamptonshire Council.
- b) Forwards the collated motions, as attached at Appendix A, to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committees for comment.
- c) Recommends that the Council publishes motion updates annually on its website in future, to provide members of the public and councillors with the facility to access motions that have been passed at Council meetings, without having to go through the minutes of each meeting.

13. **Statistics - Code of Conduct Arrangements**

Consideration was given to the report of the Deputy Democratic Services Manager regarding the Code of Conduct Arrangements Statistics.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer outlined the report for the Committee to note. The intention was for any emerging themes to be identified and action taken to address such issues.

Councillor Sally Beardsworth considered that the Standards regime should be able to impose stronger sanctions. The Deputy Monitoring Officer explained the sanctions currently available and that government response and further legislation would be required in order impose stronger sanctions, such as suspension.

Should a Code of Conduct investigation arise, a sub-committee hearing would be held in private, following which sanctions could be imposed if the complaint was

upheld. The Chair pointed out that the Council had appointed Independent People to assist in Code of Conduct matters.

The recommendations submitted in the report were agreed.

RESOLVED:

That:

- a) the statistics in relation to the number of complaints received and dealt with in respect of the Code of Member Conduct are noted;
- b) the Committee receives statistical data in relation to the number of complaints received and dealt with in respect of the Code of Member Conduct, twice a year.

14. Local Government Boundary review

The Committee were asked to appoint members to the Local Government Boundary Review Task Panel.

RESOLVED:

That Councillors Suresh Patel, Andrew Grant, Daniel Cribbin, Jonathan Harris, Gareth Eales and Ian McCord be appointed to the Boundary Review Task and Finish Panel.

15. Urgent Business

None advised.

The meeting closed at 6.33 pm

Chair: _____

Date: _____