



Democracy and Standards Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Democracy and Standards Committee held at Jeffery Room, The Guildhall, Northampton on Thursday 9 March 2023 at 6.00 pm.

Present:

Councillor Suresh Patel (Chair)
Councillor Andrew Grant (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Mike Warren
Councillor Daniel Cribbin
Councillor Danielle Stone
Councillor Andrew Kilbride

Substitute Members:

Councillor Sally Beardsworth (for Councillor Jonathan Harris)
Councillor Nigel Hinch (for Councillor Laura Stevenson)

Also Present:

Councillor Phil Bignell
Councillor Ian McCord

Apologies for Absence:

Councillor Jonathan Harris
Councillor Cecile Irving-Swift
Councillor Laura Stevenson

Officers:

Catherine Whitehead, Director of Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer)
Paul Hanson - Head of Democratic and Elections
Tracy Tiff, Deputy Democratic Services Manager
Marina Watkins, Committee Officer

66. **Declarations of Interest**

None advised.

67. **Minutes**

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the Democracy and Standards Committee held on 12th January 2023 be approved and signed as a correct record.

68. **Chair's Announcements**

None advised.

69. **Proposed changes to Committees**

The Director of Legal and Democratic presented the report which had been deferred from the meeting of the committee held in January. It was pointed out that paragraph 6.4 was left from the previous report and should be ignored. The report detailed the recommendations from two external reviews in relation to the Council's governance arrangements. The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) carried out a review of the Council's scrutiny function, whilst the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) carried out a peer review of the Council's' planning service.

The proposal was to divide People Scrutiny Committee into two committees, with one covering adults and health and the other covering children and education. The three area planning committees would be replaced by two non-area committees.

Consideration was given to the report with the following points raised:

- The Chair of Strategic Planning advised that he was in favour of the reduction in the number of committees and that discussions had taken place with the Chairs of the Daventry and South Northants area committees
- Nine members on each of the local planning committees was too small and eleven was preferable
- The start time of each committee could be set at Council or left to each committee to decide
- The view was expressed that there had been little member consultation on the proposed changes
- Decisions should not be taken until the PAS report had been made public.
- Consideration would be given to the likely number of applications to be covered by each planning committee to balance the workload
- There were concerns regarding how the north and south of Northampton would be split as this could affect political representation in these areas
- Clarification was required on what applications are submitted to Strategic Planning Committee and which are referred to the local planning committees
- The PAS report recommended planning committees should have no substitutions as it was not generally considered good practice
- It was appreciated that no substitutes at all could potentially lead to an inquorate meeting if there were apologies and declarations of interest in an item, therefore two substitutions were recommended
- A large number of substitutions could result in the nature of a committee being altered for applications
- Discussion took pace regarding how the allocation of two substitutes could work with regards to political group representation.
- It was pointed out that the planning committees were quasi-judicial and should be non-political.

Councillor Stone proposed that the local planning committees have a membership of eleven, with substitution arrangements remaining the same as currently and the situation to be reviewed in six months. The proposition was seconded by Councillor Sally Beardsworth. On being put to the vote, the proposition was declared failed.

The Vice-Chair suggested that recommendations 3.1 a, b and c and h, l and j were approved, recommendation e) be approved in principle, subject to further consideration by the committee, with the remainder deferred until after the Cabinet meeting on 11th April.

The Chair advised that an additional meeting of the Democracy and Standards Committee would be arranged for April in order to consider the matter further.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee:

- i) Holds an additional meeting in April to further consider matters
- a) Noted the conclusions and recommendations within the report from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) and the proposed guidance documents and notes which will be prepared to give effect to the recommendations.
- b) Approved the splitting of the People Scrutiny Committee to create two new Committees one for Adults and one for Children as set out in paragraph 5.9 below.
- c) Approved the reduction in the number of members of the Scrutiny Committee to 11 members per Committee.
- e) Recommended, in principal, the abolition of the existing three local area committees and establish two new Development Control Committees to work across the North of West Northants and the South of West Northants.
- h) Agreed that Planning Committees should be set up as webcast meetings, wherever webcast facilities are available.
- i) Agreed that across all committees site visits would be held where there are planning reasons for doing so and that site visits will be arranged by Democratic Services and Members will be accompanied by a Planning Officer on site.
- j) Agreed that the Planning Protocol be amended to reflect the above.

That the following items be deferred to the next meeting:

That the Committee

- d) Note the conclusions and recommendations of the report from the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) in relation to Planning Committees.
- f) To retain the Strategic Planning Committee and the Planning Policy Committee as currently structured.
- g) That each of the new Development Control Committees will have 9 members.

70. Updates to the Constitution

In response to questions the Director Legal and Democratic undertook to consider and provide clarification on the criteria to decide which applications are submitted to Strategic Planning Committee and which are referred to the local planning committees for the next review of the Constitution. With regards to a number of live applications, the Monitoring Officer would discuss the situation with the Assistant Director of Planning.

Following a discussion regarding the transparency of members allowances increases, the Director Legal and Democratic advised that the members' allowances

scheme allowed for indexed annual increases as agreed by the Independent Remuneration Panel. The scheme had been agreed by Council.

The issue of potential misuse of voting systems was raised. It was noted that this was difficult to police but misuse of the system could lead to Code of Conduct complaints. It was suggested that a note be added to the Constitution indicating that any misuse of the voting system could lead to action being taken.

RESOLVED:

That the Democracy and Standards Committee:

- a) Noted and approved the updates to the Constitution as set out in Section 5; and
- b) Recommended the updates to Council for approval.

71. Councillor Development Programme 2023 -2025 - Progress report

The Deputy Democratic Services Manager outlined the update report and reminded members to complete and return their questionnaires.

RESOLVED:

That the Democracy and Standards Committee:

- a) Noted the progress undertaken on developing a Councillor Training Programme for 2023/24.
- b) Noted that monthly all Councillor briefing sessions have been added to the Councillor meeting calendar in regular time slots and topics for each session included when agreed.
- c) Considered other potential opportunities to deliver and promote learning and development opportunities for Councillors.

72. Boundary Review - verbal update

The Deputy Democratic Services Manager advised that the recommendation had now been published by the Boundary Commission, which had recommended 75 members with a mix of 1, 2 and 3 member wards. Members' were able to feedback directly to the Commission.

The Director Legal and Democratic advised that communication would take place with parishes with regards to warding arrangements. The Council would now need to undertake a Community Governance review.

RESOLVED:

The Democracy and Standards Committee noted the verbal update on the boundary review

73. Review of Committee Work Programme 2023-24

Consideration was given to the Democracy and Standards Committee 2023-24 Work Programme.

It was noted that an additional meeting of the Committee would be scheduled for April.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee Work Programme is noted.

74. **Urgent Business**

None advised.

The meeting closed at 7.35 pm

Chair: _____

Date: _____