



Democracy and Standards Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Democracy and Standards Committee held at The Jeffery Room, The Guildhall, Northampton on Thursday 12 January 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 Jonathan Harris
Councillor Andrew Kilbride

Substitute Members:

Councillor Stephen Hibbert (for Councillor Cecile Irving-Swift)
Councillor Nigel Hinch (for Councillor Laura Stevenson)

Also Present:

Councillor Adam Brown

Apologies for Absence:

Councillor Cecile Irving-Swift
Councillor Laura Stevenson

Officers:

Catherine Whitehead, Director of Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer)
Sarah Hall, Deputy Director Law and Governance
Paul Hanson, Head of Democratic and Elections
Marianne McCarthy, Solicitor
Tracy Tiff, Deputy Democratic Services Manager
Marina Watkins, Committee Officer
Jed Scoles, Political Assistant to the Labour Group

58. Declarations of Interest

None advised.

59. Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the Democracy and Standards Committee held on 20th October 2022 be approved and signed as a correct record.

60. **Proposed amendments to the Constitution**

i) Updates to the Constitution – Council Procedure Rules

The Director of Legal and Democratic presented the report which had come forward following a meeting with Group Leaders and Deputy Leaders last year.

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

- The proposal to move the start time of Council meetings to 5pm should be raised with the equalities committee to ensure that those with caring responsibilities etc were not adversely affected.
- The 5pm start could also affect those with full time jobs.
- It was questioned whether the authority could negotiate with employers regarding time off for council meetings.
- Council meetings could make better use of time management, particularly at the beginning of the meetings
- The Committee decided not to further restrict the number of motions allocated to each group
- Opposition group Motions should take priority
- Motions shall be taken in the following order: largest opposition group, second largest opposition group, third largest opposition group and then Motion submitted by a member of the administration group
- The mover of a motion should be limited to a five minute speech and all other speeches to two minutes. The two minute time limit should also apply to asking questions of Portfolio Holders.
- The Committee agreed with the guillotine moving to 9.15pm due to the earlier start time
- It was noted that some Councils provide the blessing 15 minutes prior to the meeting so that those wishing to can partake – this would be looked into

RESOLVED:

The Committee:

- a) Noted the overarching aims and objectives of meetings Full Council and considered how the Council Procedure Rules might be updated to support these aims;
- b) proposed that a start time of 5pm be agreed for meetings of the Full Council
- c) Proposed that the guillotine at Full Council be moved to 9.15pm
- d) recommended to Council that the priority order for consideration of Motions is: Labour, Lib Dem, Independent, Conservative
- e) delegated authority to the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee, to draft any proposed changes in such a way that they are capable of being presented to Council as recommendations.

ii) Proposed changes to Committees

The Director of Legal and Democratic outlined the report detailing 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 report of the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) had been considered by the Scrutiny Committees and it was proposed that recommendation A be accepted, which referred to the preparation of guidance documents relating to the recommended changes.

The review of the planning function covered the whole service and would be submitted to a future Cabinet meeting along with an action plan.

Following a discussion, the following points were made:

- The proposal to split the remit of People Overview and Scrutiny Committee made sense due to the significant service areas currently within its scope
- Consideration should be given to opposition members being appointed as the Chair or Deputy Chair of Scrutiny Committees
- The proposal was to increase the number for Scrutiny Committees from 3 to 4, with 11-12 members on each committee
- It was imperative that the Local Area Planning Committees should enable remote access for speakers.
- A 4pm start time for Planning Committees could result in the loss of some knowledge and experienced members due to work commitments
- The proposals for the Planning Committees were still under consideration, with decisions yet to be made. A further report on the issues would be brought back to Democracy and Standards Committee in March
- Issues were raised regarding the Call-in procedure for Planning Committees which the Director of Legal and Democratic advised could come forward as a separate report

The Committee agreed to accept recommendations a) and h), whilst deferring the remaining recommendations to the March meeting

RESOLVED:

The Democracy and Standards Committee:

- 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 would be prepared to give effect to the recommendations.
- h) Agreed that site visits will 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.

That the following recommendations be deferred to the March meeting:

- b) Approve the splitting of the People Scrutiny Committee to create two new Committees one for Adults and one for Children or one for Health and one for People as set out in paragraph 5.9 below.
- c) Approve the reduction in the number of members of the Scrutiny Committee to 9 per Committee.

- d) Note the conclusions and recommendations of the report from the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) in relation to Planning Committees.
- e) Reduce the number of Planning Committees from 5 to 4 (including Planning Policy Committee).
- f) Agree that the standard start time for Planning Committees is 4 pm.
- g) Agree that Planning Committees should, wherever possible, be webcast.
- i) Agree that the Planning Protocol be amended to reflect the above.

61. Statistics - code of Conduct Arrangements - Annual Review

The Deputy Director Law and Governance provided an update on the number of complaints received and dealt with, in respect of the Code of Conduct Arrangements.

Six complaints were outstanding and one had been referred to an independent investigator. A past complaint had been closed due to the parish councillor resigning. The councillor had since been re-instated and consideration was being given as to whether there was any merit in re-opening the original complaint.

In response to a question, the Deputy Director Law and Governance advised that the subject Member was made aware of complaints and asked for their views.

It was highlighted that a large number of the complaints received were in relation to parish councillors. It was questioned whether this was a training issue. Discussions were ongoing with NCALC as to whether additional support could be provided in this regard.

RESOLVED:

The Democracy and Standards Committee:
Noted the statistics in relation to the number of complaints received and dealt with, in respect of the Code of Member Conduct.

62. Carried Motions on Notice - Predecessor Councils

The Committee considered comments from Councillor Jonathan Harris and Danielle Stone regarding carried Motions from Predecessor Councils.

Councillor Stone considered that a number of legacy Motions covered important matters. Councillor Harris added that further work was required to ascertain whether the Motions had been implemented and in need of being put forward as a new Motion.

The Director of Legal and Democratic advised that any Motions not in the process of being implemented, would need to be brought back for re-adoption. Research would be carried out to find out how other Unitary Authorities dealt with legacy Motions. Suggestions would be made on how to proceed. The Deputy Leader advised that there may be scope for the Conservative group to assist with bringing forward appropriate Motions

RESOLVED:

The Democracy and Standards Committee noted the discussion regarding legacy Motions. The Director of Legal and Democratic would report back to a future meeting on the issue.

63. Councillor Development

The Deputy Director Law and Governance provided an update on member training for the Committee's information and sought support for the classification and requirements in relation to the member training programme. It was proposed to develop a full members' development programme.

Discussion took place regarding the most effective way to identify members' training needs whilst acknowledging that there were 93 members and a limited budget. The preference was for discussions through the political groups and individual committees. A survey could be produced to cover general areas such as finance and housing.

It was noted that external courses could provide valuable information as well as useful networking opportunities.

RESOLVED:

The Democracy and Standards Committee:

- a) Approved the introduction of a four-year rolling Councillor development programme, with a programme being approved and scheduled for 2023-2025 (years 3 and 4); following which a full four year Councillor development programme for 2025-2029 will be produced for the Committee's consideration.
- b) Noted that monthly all Councillor briefing sessions will be added to the Councillor meeting calendar in regular time slots and topics for each session included when agreed.
- c) Agreed that identifying training needs for Councillors is carried out via the political groups, individual committees and a short survey

64. Committee Work Programme 2023/2024

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

RESOLVED:

That the Committee Work Programme is noted.

65. Urgent Business

None advised.

The meeting closed at 7.25 pm

Chair: _____

Date: _____