



**West  
Northamptonshire  
Council**

## **Democracy and Standards Committee**

Minutes of a meeting of the Democracy and Standards Committee held at Council Chamber, The Guildhall, St Giles Street, Northampton, NN1 1DE on Thursday 29 July 2021 at 6.00 pm.

Present            Councillor Suresh Patel (Chair)  
                      Councillor Andrew Grant (Vice-Chair)  
                      Councillor Fiona Cole  
                      Councillor Gareth Eales  
                      Councillor Jonathan Harris  
                      Councillor Cecile Irving-Swift  
                      Councillor Andrew Kilbride  
                      Councillor Laura Stevenson

Officers            John Murphy, Solicitor  
                      Tracy Tiff, Deputy Democratic Services Manager  
                      Catherine Whitehead, Director of Legal and Democratic (Monitoring  
                      Officer)  
                      Geoff Wild, Deputy Monitoring Officer  
                      Marina Watkins, Committee Officer

### **1. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Councillor Daniel Cribbin.

### **2. Declarations of Interest**

None advised.

### **3. Chairman's Announcements**

The Chair welcomed members to the first meeting of the new Committee and advised that Councillor Adam Brown would be contacting members with regards to his work on Localism.

Motions agreed by the former Authorities had been collated and it was agreed that they be circulated to the Committee by email for discussion at the next meeting.

### **4. Constitution Review**

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

The Deputy Monitoring Officer outlined the report and added that the review of the Constitution would be subject to tight timescales. August was not the ideal time to

carry out a consultation exercise but time was of the essence, with the review requiring completion by the Council meeting in December.

It was suggested that a cross party Task and Finish Panel of five members be set up to lead the review process.

Councillor Jonathan Harris queried whether the timescale could be extended to allow for further consultation. Parish Councils should also be consulted on the review.

The Monitoring Officer advised that the current Constitution was developed during transition and that it was always intended to be subject to review therefore if more time was provided for the review, it would be necessary to make further interim changes to enable effective governance in the interim.

Councillor Fiona Cole considered that consultation was fundamental and queried whether a delay until January would be beneficial.

The Deputy Chair considered the speed with which the Constitution was put together by the Shadow Authority was exceptional, but the document did need tweaking. Public engagement may be limited but was still important. There should not be too much of a delay. The Constitution was a living document that would evolve and change over time.

The Committee agreed that public consultation was important but noted the tight timescale. The Monitoring Officer pointed out that there was currently no Council meeting in January, and the February meeting was for budget matters.

Councillor Jonathan Harris was keen that the views of NCALC and Parish Councils were sought as they could be slightly different. The Deputy Monitoring Officer would arrange for the questionnaires to be placed on the Council's Consultation Hub and would ask the Communication Team to raise awareness.

A Task and Finish Panel was agreed with the following membership: Councillors Patel, Irving-Swift, Eales, Cole and Harris.

Meetings would take place at 4pm on Monday 6<sup>th</sup> September and at 5pm on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> September.

The recommendations submitted in the report were agreed.

**RESOLVED:**

That:

a)a Constitution Review Task and Finish Group be established to conduct a review of the Council's Constitution and subsequently make recommendations to the Committee for onward recommendation to Cabinet and Full Council;

- b) Councillors Suresh Patel, Fiona Cole, Cecile Irving-Swift, Gareth Eales and Jonathan Harris be appointed to the Task and Finish Group in accordance with the recommended composition set out at paragraph 6.3;
- c) the draft Terms of Reference of the Constitution Review Task and Finish Group as set out in Appendix A be agreed;
- d) the proposal set out in Appendix B and the review principles set out in paragraph 6.5 be endorsed;
- e) a consultation programme for the Constitution review to be conducted via the Consultation Hub during August be approved;
- f) the anticipated timeframe for the review as set out at paragraph 6.8 be noted.

## 5. **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 Monitoring Officer outlined the report.

Councillor Cecile Irving-Swift queried whether the complaints could be RAG rated in order to give some indication of the severity or otherwise. The Monitoring Officer advised that they could be classified under different sections of the Code.

In response to a question from Councillor Gareth Eales, the Monitoring Officer advised that all complaints were confidential unless upheld. In the interests of natural justice, no one would be told unless there was merit in the complaint. Should a complaint be investigated, then an Investigating Officer would be appointed. At this point the Member would be encouraged to advise their Group leader of the situation as there was the potential for press coverage.

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.

## 6. **Local Government Boundary Review**

Consideration was given to the report of the Monitoring Officer regarding the Local Government Boundary Review.

The Monitoring Officer outlined the report and highlighted that there were a number of wards across the County with a 10 or 20% population variance, which would

trigger a boundary review. An initial meeting had been held with the Chief Executive of the Boundary Commission and the deadline for the draft submission was now August rather than April. There were currently 93 Councillors on the Council and the first task would be to decide on the level of representation considered appropriate. The entire Review needed to be completed before 2024 in order to run the election on the new boundaries.

A Task and Finish panel would be set up but would not need to meet immediately but it would be useful to identify members so that information could be shared with them.

The Monitoring Officer explained that the review would be in two parts – the consultation on the current and proposed size of the Council, and then reviewing the boundaries. Each element was overseen by a different body.

The recommendation submitted in the report were agreed.

**RESOLVED:**

That:

- a) a Local Government Boundary Review Task and Finish Group to prepare the necessary submissions in relation to Council Size and Ward Boundaries when required before consideration by the Committee and Full Council be established;
- b) Members of the Committee to the Task and Finish Group in accordance with the recommended composition set out be appointed;
- c) the draft Terms of Reference of the Boundary Review Task and Finish Group as set out in Appendix B be agreed;
- d) the guidance for preparation of the submission on Council size and agrees to have regard to the guidance in relation to the preparation of the draft submission is noted.

7. **Urgent Business**

None advised.

The meeting closed at 6.55 pm

Chair: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_