



GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

MEETING : Tuesday, 14th January 2020

PRESENT : Cllrs. Williams (Chair), Taylor (Vice-Chair), Coole, Hanman, Hilton, Lewis, D. Norman and Stephens

Others in Attendance

Managing Director

Corporate Director

Solicitor, One Legal

Democratic Services and Elections Officer

APOLOGIES : Cllrs. Field

7. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

8. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 October 2019 were confirmed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

9. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (15 MINUTES)

There were no public questions.

10. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS (15 MINUTES)

There were no petitions and deputations.

11. CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Paid Service which proposed a number of changes to the Council's Constitution to address issues and reflect reviews in relation to contract rules, the Councillor Code of Conduct, Employee Code of Conduct and Councillor/Officer protocol, petitions and procedures for dealing with the budget debate at Council.

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The Corporate Director presented the report and advised that some changes were minor drafting improvements and some reflected changes previously agreed by Council.

The Committee's attention was particularly drawn to the following proposed amendments:

Article 13 – Finance, Contracts & Legal Matters – Preamble (p.42)

Following an audit report, it had been proposed that an increase be made to the level of officer delegation from £10,000 to £25,000.

Part 3B – Council Functions (p.48)

The delegation to allow officers to appoint or nominate individuals to outside bodies

Part 3 – Committees and Appointments (p.57)

Inclusion of a decision made by Council to authorise the Head of Paid Service to amend the Constitution to ensure compliance with political balance to decide the size of Committees and allocation of seats during an event which may cause a change in the political balance of the Council, following agreement with all Group Leaders. When Group Leaders are unable to agree, this would be determined by full Council.

Part 3 – Assets & Property (p.69 & 70)

The Council had acquired a significant amount of land and a suggestion had been made to increase the delegated threshold for disposals from £50,000 to £100,000. This would now apply to annual values over £100,000.

Part 3 – Executive Functions (p.74)

Proposal to delete the detailed description of Cabinet Portfolios as functions change periodically.

Part 4 – Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (p.92)

Where a Member had a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest, they would be required to withdraw from the meeting (including from the public area/gallery) during the consideration of that item of business. Where their interest was an "other interest", Councillors would be able to participate on the same basis as members of the public.

Councillor Coole said this would give Members fewer privileges than members of the public. The Managing Director said this would ensure the Member was not able to influence the debate.

The Committee agreed to the proposed amendments.

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Part 4 – Council Budget Flowchart (p.96)

A revised flowchart (as shown on page 359 of the agenda) had been proposed following discussions with Group Leaders. The procedures had been based on the model used by the County Council.

Councillor Stephens argued that there should be no time limits for the opening speeches of the Leader of the Council or Group Leaders. He also said that each amendment should be debated and voted on separately, not least because it would also be unfair to speak on amendments en bloc to 3 minutes.

Councillor Hilton agreed that Group Leaders should not be time limited and added that some amendments may need to be addressed to Council which would cause difficulties if Group Leaders were limited to 10 minutes.

Councillor Lewis commented that each debate should be voted on separately and suggested the time limit for the Leader of the Council and Group Leaders be increased to 20 minutes. Provisions could be made for the Chair to allow flexibility if required.

Councillor D. Norman suggested that the time limit for back benchers be increased to 5 minutes.

The Committee agreed to increase the time limits for the Leader of the Council and Group Leaders to 20 minutes and debate on amendments en bloc to 5 minutes. Each amendment would be voted on separately.

Part 4 – Contract Rules (p.143)

Amend threshold to £25,000 and other changes to reflect modern procurement practices.

Part 4 – Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules (p.171)

Removal of reference to committee size.

Part 5 – Codes and Protocols (p.210)

Following an Internal Audit report of the Council's Employee Code of Conduct, recommendations had been made to review and update the document. For consistency an opportunity had been taken to review the Councillor Code Conduct and the Protocol on Councillor/Employee Relations.

The Corporate Director advised that the revised three codes (as seen on pages 335, 339 and 339) had been significantly reduced to remove unnecessary information. These would be presented to the Audit & Governance Committee on 20 January 2020 and to the Trade Union Consultation meeting on 21 January 2020 for their comments and feedback. Recommendations would then be made to Council.

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Once the proposed amendments had been approved, they would be in place for the May 2020 elections.

The Managing Director advised that following CIPFA guidance, a report would be presented to the Audit & Governance Committee to seek approval for the appointment for an Independent Member to each Committee. Once approval had been sought, this would be implemented from May 2020.

Members' Working Group Protocol (p.275)

This section to be deleted.

Councillor Hilton suggested the deletion of the corporate priorities on the Foreward (page 17). The Committee agreed to this.

Questions by Members (p. 84)

The Committee were notified of a potential new rule relating to notice of questions by Members.

The Corporate Director advised that if the Committee wished to support a new obligation to give prior written notice of questions to Cabinet, an amended procedure would require that a written copy of the question be delivered to the Head of Paid Service by 10.00am, four clear working days before the date of the meeting. Exceptions would apply if the Mayor or Chair was satisfied that the matter was urgent, and the person responding to the question agreed and on the basis the question had been delivered 30 minutes before the start of the meeting.

Following discussion and a vote, this proposed change was not supported.

Councillor Coole requested the Constitution be amended to reflect gender/neutral pronouns.

Councillor Stephens requested for each of the Group Leaders to be provided with a hard copy of the Constitution once amended.

General Purposes Committee **RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND** to Council that the proposed changes to the Constitution, as set out and amended above, be adopted.

12. POLITICAL BALANCE ON COMMITTEES - REVIEW

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Paid Service to make changes to the size and membership of Committees to ensure statutory political balance following a change in the Conservative Group.

It was noted that Councillor Nigel Hanman had resigned from the Conservative Group and would now sit as an Independent Member. There was currently no overall control and the Mayor would have the casting vote at meetings of full Council.

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In response to a question from Councillor Coole, it was confirmed that the Mayor or a Committee Chair would have a second or casting vote in the event of a tie.

General Purposes Committee **RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND** to Council:

- 1) To reduce the size of all Committees by one with immediate effect
- 2) To approve the proposed changes to membership of Committees as set out in the report

Time of commencement: 6.13 pm hours

Time of conclusion: 7.00 pm hours

Chair