

COUNCIL CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE**Minutes of a meeting of the Council Constitution Committee held on Tuesday, 4th September, 2012 at 6.00 p.m. in the Civic Offices, Telford, Shropshire**

PRESENT: Councillors M.J. Smith (Chairman), K.S. Sahota (Vice-Chairman), G.M. Green, F.R. Picken and R.J. Sloan

CCC-1 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting of the Council Constitution Committee held on the 21st February, 2012 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

CCC-2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillors A.J. Eade and I.T.W. Fletcher

CCC-3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

CCC-4 TRANSPARENCY & PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY

The Democratic Services Manager presented the report of the Assistant Director: Law, Democracy & Public Protection which outlined a number of proposals for the Council to operate more transparently and in line with the Co-operative Council's values. The proposals were:

- a) Publication on the Council's website of information on Councillors who trade with the Council
 - b) Publication on the Council's Website of Councillor attendance figures for appointed meetings of the Council
 - c) Introduction of a 15 minute Public Question session at Full Council Meetings
 - d) Filming and/or Recording of Cabinet and Council meetings by members of the public on a trial basis
 - e) Use of Social Media by members of the public during meetings
 - f) Voluntary publication of Council expenditure over £100 reduced from the current level of £500
- a) Publication on the Council's website of information on Councillors who trade with the Council

Members heard that currently, details of councillors who have an interest in companies that receive payment from the Council are shown annually in the Final Accounts which go to Audit Committee. This information was theoretically available to anyone who may wish to access the information but was not easy to find.

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The proposal provided for the collection of the following additional information would be published within each administration (4 year period).

- The previous year's value and description of any payments received from the Council to any businesses/companies where that Member has an interest.
- The preceding years' values
- Cumulative values of payments

The additional information collected would provide better transparency by publication of additional details of any councillors who had an interest in businesses that benefited from trading with the Council. A report would be taken to Full Council via the Audit Committee and published on the Council's website.

Members were in agreement that this information should be published on the Council's website and that the information should be collected as part of the annual related party transactions data collection exercise. The first information would be available early in 2013.

b) Publication of Member attendance figures at meetings of the Council (commencing from start of 2012 Civic Year).

Attendance records showing councillors' attendance at meetings would be published on the Council's website on a quarterly basis. This would serve to provide a clear public record of some of the duties carried out by individual councillors.

Collection and publication of this information had also been suggested by a member of the public at a recent 'Meet the Community Panel' event. Publication of attendance data would be for attendance at meetings of the Council to which members were appointed at Annual Council and would provide further transparency and strengthen councillor accountability. Attendance data could be published for the first quarter of 2012/13 Civic year as soon as practicable and then quarterly.

Members approved the recommendation and further agreed that a list of councillors and their appointments to Outside Bodies should also be published in the interests of transparency.

c) Introduction of a 15 Minute Public Question session at Full Council Meetings

A suggested protocol for the introduction of a public question session at Council meeting was attached to the report. Most Councils now allowed public questions to be heard at some meetings. The protocol was relatively robust in order to avoid issues such as vexatious questions, personal attacks or the delivery of political

statements. Questions would need to be submitted 7 clear days in advance of Council meetings and a suggested timetable had been attached. Members supported the introduction of a public question session.

d) Filming/Recording of meetings of the Council by members of the public

A suggested protocol for filming/recording of meetings by members of the public was attached. One issue would be the suitability and size of meeting rooms, public galleries etc. However, the protocol contained some allowance for these factors and the Chairman would have absolute discretion to terminate or suspend filming if, in their opinion, continuing filming would prejudice proceedings. Advice that filming/recording was permissible would be included with meeting agenda papers.

It was suggested that some form of media training and perhaps advice on presentational skills for councillors would be desirable in view of the fact that meetings could be filmed. The Assistant Director: Law, Democracy & Public Protection agreed to discuss this matter with the Corporate Communications team.

Members supported this recommendation.

e) Use of Social Media (Twitter, Blogs) by members of the public during meetings of the Council

The use of social media was in many ways linked to the filming and recording of meetings. Should the principle of filming/recording be permitted then it would be difficult to justify not allowing the use of Twitter by members of the public. In many cases this was almost certainly happening already at some meetings.

No protocol was required for this option but the Chairman would have absolute discretion to terminate or suspend any of these activities if, in their opinion, continuing to do so would prejudice proceedings.

Members supported this recommendation.

f) Reducing the level for Publication of expenditure by the Council to £100

The Council currently published expenditure over £500. In order to provide greater transparency the Council would voluntarily publish expenditure for everything over £100. This would bring in a significant number of additional transactions but would provide greater public access to the Council's expenditure and would be in line with the ethos of openness and accountability. Publication of over £100 expenditure would commence from October 2013 and that the information be collected as part of the annual related party transactions data collection exercise.

Members supported this recommendation.

RESOLVED: That the following proposals, shown at 3.3 – 3.5 of the report, for increasing transparency and improving public accountability be recommended to Full Council.

- a) Publication on the Council's website of information on Councillors who trade with the Council, information to be collected as part of the annual related party transactions data collection exercise
- b) Publication on the Council's Website of Councillor attendance figures for appointed meetings of the Council and a list of councillors appointed to serve on Outside Bodies.
- c) Introduction of a 15 minute Public Question session at Full Council Meetings
- d) Permitting Filming and/or Recording of Cabinet and Full Council meetings
- e) Permitting use of Social Media by members of the public during meetings
- f) Voluntary publication of Council expenditure over £100 (reduced from the current level of £500)

CCC-5 NEW CONSTITUTION

The Assistant Director: Law, Democracy & Public Protection had provided a set of printed slides updating the Committee on progress made on the new electronic constitution.

Work had been ongoing to streamline and simplify the document in order to make it more accessible. Views and comments were welcomed on the style and content of the document.

The introduction to the constitution was divided in to the following clear sections:

- How the Council Works
- Decision Making
- Governance – Scrutiny, Oversight and Transparency

Reference was made to the current, very detailed scheme of delegation. The Assistant Director: Law, Democracy & Public Protection told the meeting that he would like to receive views from members on a proposal for a scheme of delegation 'by exception' replace the current scheme. Such a scheme would highlight what was not delegated to officers and at what financial level this applied. This would be a simpler and more manageable document. Members agreed to further consider this option and bring back responses to a future meeting. Members were referred to the very early draft scheme of delegation included in their papers.

RESOLVED- That work on the new Constitution be noted and that work continue and that a draft scheme of delegation by exception be considered at a future meeting of the Committee

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The meeting ended at 7.09 p.m.

Chairman:

Date: