

STANDARDS AND CONSTITUTIONAL OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 25 February 2020

Present:

Councillor T Cox (Chair)

Councillors P Hackett
C Cooke
P Gilchrist

P Stuart
G Wood

23 **ONE MINUTE'S SILENCE**

The Standards and Constitutional Oversight Committee stood in silence for one minute as a mark of respect for Councillor Chris Blakeley who had sadly passed away on 15 January 2020.

24 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Moira McLaughlin.

25 **MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were received.

26 **MINUTES**

Resolved – That the minutes of the Standards and Constitutional Oversight Committee meeting held on 26 November 2019 and the minutes of the Standards Panel meeting held on 4 December 2019 be confirmed as a correct record.

27 **DRAFT REVISED COUNCIL CONSTITUTION**

Philip McCourt, Director of Governance and Assurance introduced his report that set out information on how the Council was to adopt a committee system of governance from the beginning of the 2020/21 municipal year. The report informed of the forthcoming change to the Council's governance arrangements necessitating a revised Constitution to be in place for the Annual Meeting in May 2020.

The report further informed that a Governance Member Working Group, appointed by the Standards and Constitutional Oversight Committee, had been meeting regularly and had overseen the process of drafting the revised

Constitution. Full Council had requested that this be ready for adoption at its next meeting of 16 March 2020, following consideration of the draft by this meeting.

The Director of Governance and Assurance advised Members that the Governance Member Working Group felt it advisable to delay adoption to allow for a further period of consultation and for training, which would require an additional extraordinary meeting of the Committee and Council to adopt the later draft – a special meeting of the Committee had been diarised to take place on 31 March 2020 an extraordinary meeting of Council had been scheduled for 15 April 2020 to this effect.

The Director of Governance and Assurance apprised the Standards and Constitutional Oversight Committee that the Governance Review and changes to the working arrangements i.e. the move from a Cabinet / Scrutiny decision making structure allowed a 'factory reset' of the Council's Constitution and drew Members attention to key revised sections of the draft Constitution appended to his report.

The Chair informed the Committee that there had been some significant savings against the initial cost estimates with regard to this project as a result of much of the work having been undertaken in-house.

A Member further pointed out that although there had been a number of sticking points during the review, he was satisfied that the draft Constitution, in its current form, was workable and further review would continue over the coming 12 months.

The Director of Governance and Assurance advised Members that it would be appropriate for this committee to request a formal review of the Constitution at 6 months, and that the Working Group continue with its work programme, that should also include a review of the LGA Member Code of Conduct later in the year.

The Chair informed that the best elements of the Councils' existing Constitution were being retained in the new version.

Members sought clarification on a number of matters regarding the planned working methodology for the new committees, in particular that relating to the responsibility area relating to the Council's priority regarding Climate Emergency. Following a short debate:

Councillor Chris Cooke moved, seconded by Councillor Pat Hackett:

"To revise the name of the committee currently referred to in the draft constitution as the *Environment, Highways and Infrastructure Committee* to **Environment, Climate Emergency and Infrastructure Committee".**

It was clarified by the Director of Governance and Assurance that the function in respect of Climate Emergency also be transferred as part of the Terms of Reference for the committee. This was confirmed by Councillor Cooke.

The motion was put to the vote (for 4, against 3, no abstentions) and carried.

Resolved: That

1. the draft revisions to the Constitution of the Council for consideration attached as Appendix A, be received.
2. (a) the draft revised Constitution be referred to an extraordinary meeting of this Committee to be held on or about the 31st March 2020, for recommendation to Council for adoption at an extraordinary meeting to be held on or about the 15th April 2020.

(b) it be noted that:
 - (i) a workshop and a workshop and training session be held for Members, on 26th February and 11th March, the second presented by the Centre for Public Scrutiny on behalf of the Local Government Association, and
 - (ii) the publication of the draft revised Constitution will allow for further consultation and meetings of the Governance Member Working Group prior to final recommendation of the revised Constitution; and
3. the name of the committee currently referred to in the draft Constitution as the 'Environment, Highways and Infrastructure Committee' be revised to 'Environment, Climate Emergency and Infrastructure Committee'.

28 **UPDATE ON PROGRESS MADE IN RESPECT TO THE CHANGE IN GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS**

Philip McCourt, Director of Governance and Assurance introduced his report that provided the Standards and Constitutional Oversight Committee with an update on Progress Made in Respect to the Change in Governance Arrangements.

The report informed that the ongoing review of the Council's governance arrangements would result in the introduction of a different set of roles and

responsibilities for Members. The report provided an update on work undertaken to support the change in governance arrangements in relation to:

- The Independent Remuneration Panel
- Training for Councillors and Officers
- A re-design of Democratic and Member Services
- The Committee Cycle 2020/2021

Steve Fox, Head of Democratic and Member Services provide an update to the Standards and Constitutional Oversight Committee on each of the above points and apprised Members of details in respect of the associated actions contained within each work programme. He further informed Members on the key dates and how Officers from Democratic and Member Services were working with other Officers across the Council to deliver information and training in relation to the service, together with the indicative calendar of meetings and supporting programme / work cycle for each committee.

Following a short debate, it was agreed that Members would take information on this, and the previous item of business, to their party groups for wider review.

The Chair confirmed that any final decisions on these matters would be taken at the special meeting of the Standards and Constitutional Oversight Committee to be held on 31 March 2020.

Resolved – That the report be noted.