

Minutes of the Democracy and Standards Committee held at 7.00 pm on Monday 7th November, 2022 at the Council Chamber, Swanspool House, Wellingborough, Northants, NN8 1BP.

Present:-

Members:

Councillor Lora Lawman (Chair)

Councillor Jean Addison

Councillor Lyn Buckingham

Councillor Robin Carter

Councillor Emily Fedorowycz

Councillor Kirk Harrison

Councillor Paul Marks

Councillor Andy Mercer

Councillor Dorothy Maxwell

Councillor Gill Mercer

Councillor Michael Tye

Councillor Kevin Watt

Officers:

Adele Wylie, Director of Governance/HR & MO,

Paul Goult, Interim Democratic Services Manager,

Carol Mundy, Senior Democratic Services Officer (Committees/Members)

41 Apologies for absence

Resolved to note that an apology for absence was received from Councillor Nichol.

42 Members' Declarations of Interest

The chair invited those Members who wished to do so to make a declaration.

Resolved to note that no declarations were made.

43 Minutes of the meeting held on 12 September 2022 and reconvened on 10 October 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 September 2022 and reconvened on 10 October 2022 were received.

Resolved that the minutes be approved and signed as an accurate record of the meeting.

44 Meeting Procedure Rules

The annexed circulated report of the Director of Governance/HR and MO was received for members to consider revisions to the current meeting procedure rules in relation to the formal meetings of Council and committees.

The revised draft procedure rules were appended to the report.

Mr Goult, Interim Democratic Services Manager, presented the report and explained that the Constitutional Working Group had been reviewing the procedure rules with reference being made at 5.2 of the report to the highlighted areas detailed in the appendix.

The chair informed the committee that she had been handed three further pages of amendments prior to the commencement of the meeting. These would have to form

part of a future report to the working group and committee and discussion would only be in relation to the published report before the committee.

Members sought clarity over the submission of questions and the definition of six clear working days (17.2). Officers clarified that this point related only to questions at full Council meetings. Details of dates and times, in relation to the Executive or Committee meetings, for submission of requests to address a meeting would be found on each individual agenda. For example a meeting to be held on a Thursday would mean that a request to speak would need to be made by the deadline of 5pm on the Monday.

Resolved that the Constitutional Working Group consider the additional amendments at its next meeting, due to be held in December, and submit the revised Meeting Procedure Rules to the next meeting of the committee.

45 Proposals for a Scrutiny Review

The annexed circulated report of the Director of Governance/HR and MO was received for the committee to consider initiating a consultation into the current scrutiny arrangements following a review by the monitoring officer.

Adele Wylie, Monitoring Officer, presented the report and explained that she had a requirement to review governance arrangements to ensure compliance with legislation to ensure its decision-making structures were efficient and effective.

The role of scrutiny ensures that the Executive is held to account and that key decisions are made in an appropriate manner. Scrutiny influences policies and decisions of the Executive but also other organisations delivering services to the public. It investigates import service delivery through task and finish groups, and the call-in procedure.

The council currently has two scrutiny committees, the Scrutiny Commission which can establish topic-specific task and finish groups undertaking the work on the Scrutiny workplan and Finance and Resources Scrutiny Committee, which scrutinises and monitors the finances of the council, with attention on in-year monitoring of spend and input into consultation on the draft budget for future years as part of the budget setting process.

It is recognised that the quantity of work exceeds existing capacity and requires enhancement.

The Constitutional Working Group had received a presentation, with a copy of the slides appended to the report. Also appended to the report at Appendix B was the proposed scrutiny structure.

The committee was asked to give approval to a consultation taking place on the proposed structure which included establishing the following:

- Scrutiny management Board;
- Corporate Scrutiny Committee;
- Place and Environment Scrutiny Committee;
- Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee

Committee was also asked to consider the timeline for consultation at Appendix C.

The committee generally discussed the proposed changes to the scrutiny function recognising that currently there was some cross-committee work that was a duplication. They also considered that there was confusion over the call-in process and that those sitting on scrutiny needed specific skills to challenge. The committee considered that the scrutiny of external partners would be very welcome

Some of the committee considered that the Executive Advisory Panels (EAPs) had not worked as had been expected. Many meetings had been cancelled, others had acted as briefing sessions and it was not clear whether any decisions on policy or recommendations were escalated to the Executive. It was felt that they needed to be more creative, to enable ideas to be discussed in an open and informal way with workplans in place so that progress could be evidenced. More clarity was sought on their purpose.

Some members were unaware of when reports on particular subjects were being taken back to an EAP.

Mrs Wylie clarified that reports were published on the council website and that if members wished they could always contact the portfolio holder directly to ask when an item would be returning to an EAP.

Mrs Wylie also clarified that the EAPs were 'a gift of the leader' and as such the operation of them would need to be discussed with him directly and he would need to make any decision in relation to them.

Members commented on the two timeline options and considered that Option 2 was the most appropriate.

Resolved that:

- (i) Approval be given for a wider consultation on the future structure of scrutiny within the council in line with the principles contained in the monitoring officer's report;
- (ii) Approval be given to indicative timeline, as detailed at option 2, for consultation and determination of the proposals.

46 Close of meeting

Resolved to note that the meeting concluded at 8.05pm

Chairman.....