

Constitution Working Group

Held at:	Zoom – remote meeting
Date	Thursday, 22 February 2024
Present	Councillors Mrs Jennifer Hollingsbee, Jim Martin, Tim Prater and Paul Thomas
Apologies for Absence	Councillor Connor McConville
Officers Present:	Ellen Joyce (Democratic Services Trainee), Amandeep Khroud (Assistant Director), Susan Priest (Chief Executive), Jane Walker (Communications & Engagement Manager) and Jemma West (Democratic Services Senior Specialist)
Others Present:	David Kitson, Bevan Brittan

1. **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest at the meeting.

2. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 January 2024 were agreed as a true record of the meeting.

3. **Feedback from public consultation and session held on 5 February**

The Communications and Engagement Manager outlined her presentation which set out the results of the recent consultation exercise. Members commented on various issues and made points including the following:

- Was it possible to work out the geographical area of those who responded to the survey?
- Of the 23 responses, the majority had been in the council chamber and still did not seem to be clear on the system. What could be taken from this feedback?

- The responses indicated that the public were more interested in what the council was doing rather than how it was achieved, and this indicated an endorsement of trust.
- It was clear that it was intimidating for members of the public to ask a question at a meeting. It could be made easier by removing the requirement for individuals to be present in the chamber to ask their question. This could be by allowing people to submit their questions for the Chair to read out, or questions being dealt with outside the meeting, for example, and included within the agenda pack.
- More democratic outreach work, and reducing the barriers to the public should be done, irrespective of the governance arrangements of the council.

The Communications and Engagement Manager responded to some of the comments raised, and made points including the following:

- There were no personal details taken from those submitting responses to the consultation, so no way of telling the geographical location.
- It was clear that the process for engaging with meetings needed to be better explained to the public. This could be done using 'talking heads' videos.

The Chief Executive sought clarity from David Kitson on the legislation requiring the public to attend meetings in person to submit their questions. David confirmed that the law around this did not address this point, only specifying a need for meetings to be accessible to the public. Other authorities did allow participation remotely.

A discussion then took place around the session which had taken place on 5 February. The Chief Executive advised that she was not made aware of any further questions submitted by members after the session, and suggested that the Working Group Members advise if there was anything else that officers could do to support members with the transition to a committee model of governance.

4. **Revised timelines for move to Committee system of Governance**

David Kitson advised that the specifics in terms of the timeline were yet to be worked up, but would include the following:

- The understanding and knowledge of members and officers could be enhanced with an initial programme of training.
- The principles of the committee structure would be finalised after the sessions, allowing for any minor tweaks to be made.
- A constitution would then be worked up in the autumn, and would go through the committee process with a view to being fully approved by the end of the calendar year.
- A further training programme could then be rolled out after based on the principles of the agreed constitution, and could involve mock meetings, giving members an opportunity to consider an item previously agreed at

Constitution Working Group - 22 February 2024

Cabinet, helping to give a practical understanding of how decisions would be made in the committee system.

Members commented on various aspects of David's introduction and made points including the following:

- The mock meetings should be held sooner, to ensure familiarity for members with the new way of working.
- It would be preferred if the new constitution could be in place by June or July 2024, giving members opportunity to understand the workings in sufficient time before it is implemented in May 2025.

David advised that the new constitution would need to be drafted prior to any mock meetings taking place. The Assistant Director of Governance and Law added that she would consider the timelines further to see if the new constitution could be available sooner, and report back to members.

The Chief Executive then thanked Members for their input into the work being carried out by the Independent Remuneration Panel in respect of Member Allowances.