



Agenda

Meeting: **Constitution Working Group**
Date: **22 February 2024**
Time: **10.00 am**
Place: **Zoom – Remote meeting**

**PLEASE NOTE, THIS MEETING IS NOT OPEN TO THE PUBLIC
BUT WILL BE STREAMED LIVE TO
<https://bit.ly/YouTubeMeetings>**

To: Councillors Mrs Jennifer Hollingsbee, Jim Martin, Connor McConville,
Tim Prater and Paul Thomas

1. **Apologies for absence**
2. **Declarations of interest**
3. **Minutes**

To agree as a true record the minutes of the meeting held on 25 January 2025.

4. **Feedback from public consultation and session held on 5 February (Pages 7 - 12)**
5. **Revised timelines for move to Committee system of Governance**

To receive an update from David Kitson, Bevan Brittan.

Queries about the agenda? Need a different format?

Contact Jemma West– Tel: 01303 853369
Email: committee@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk
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Minutes

Constitution Working Group

Held at:	Remote meeting - Zoom
Date	Thursday, 25 January 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 Senior Specialist) 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 4 January 2024 were agreed as a true record of the meeting.

3. **Motion implications**

Following the motion to defer the move to a committee system to May 2025, which had been agreed at Council the previous evening, David Kitson sought suggestions from the Group as to what activities should be incorporated into the timetable to enable Members to gain better knowledge on how the new arrangements would operate.

Working Group Members made points including the following:

- It was important not to lose momentum on the change to a committee system.

- It would be useful to have a draft constitution in place for the summer, to enable members to get familiar with the new structure.
- More all-members sessions should be scheduled through the year to allow deeper understanding about the new system, with sessions focused on the principles, process and mechanisms.
- A dual/shadow system, which had been suggested at Full Council the previous evening would be too resource intensive, and not practical.
- Members needed to understand how the system would function without an Overview and Scrutiny Committee as the Committee was fundamental in the current arrangements.
- Further clarity was needed over the spokesperson role of Committee Chairs.
- It would be worth looking at the Tewkesbury model, who presently operated with named lead portfolio holders.

David responded to some of the issues raised and made points including the following:

- It would be preferable to run some sessions for members to gain input prior to drafting the constitution.
- The timetable would be revised and brought back to the Working Group for consideration.

The Chief Executive advised that an implication of the move to a Committee structure being delayed was the need to create a Scrutiny work plan for 2023/24. The Democratic Services Senior Specialist gave an update on the proposed timelines, with public input being sought from the 29 January until 23 February. Once the topics had been scored by Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the final programme would be reported to the meeting of OSC on 23 April, and then the Annual meeting of the Council.

Members noted the update.

4. Update on the changes to Governance arrangements

The Communications and Engagement Senior Specialist then gave an update on the consultation, which was open until 31 January 2024. She stated there had been 15 responses, which indicated that the public were keen to get involved. Accessibility was a theme, with a desire to be able to submit questions to committee meetings without the need to attend the meeting in person.

The Working Group Members indicated that although it was important to offer a variety of options for members of the public to engage, it should not compromise the operation of committee meetings.

David Kitson stated that the public consultation event, due to take place on 5 February would include a presentation setting out an overview of the new structure, and time frames involved. This would be limited to one hour, and Members had been invited.

A Member briefing had been tentatively scheduled for 19 February, but this would likely be postponed. A revised timetable would be provided in due course.

The Chief Executive advised that in terms of the schedule of formal meetings, a new schedule for 24/25 would be provided to members in due course, taking into account the issues which had been encountered with meeting dates in 23/24. The rhythm of committee meetings in a new structure had been considered, and would likely include 8 or 9 meetings of the Resources Committee, and 4 meetings of the Community and Environment Committee. There would also be 4 meetings of both the Housing Sub-Committee and Shareholders Sub-Committee. A full schedule would be put before members in due course.

A discussion took place around whether the Sub-Committees could be created prior to the committee system being implemented, to enable members to get used to the new way of working, and gain knowledge of the various topics involved. The Chief Executive advised that this matter would be given consideration.

A further discussion took place around training for members prior to the new structure taking effect, and how this would assist with the transition. It was noted that a training programme would be incorporated in the revised timetable for the change.

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Public Consultation

Online survey

- Launched 10 January, with 31 January deadline
- Publicised across all council communication channels
- 23 completed responses

Survey results summary

- 22 of those responding were fully or partly aware of the council's system of decision-making
- 12 had attended a council meeting or joined a live webcast
- 3 of those responding had previously asked a question at a full council meeting.
- Those who had not asked a question offered reasons why including feeling intimidated by not understanding procedures, meetings inaccessible, too long to wait until meeting
- 19 wanted to ask a question under the new system of governance

Survey results summary (cont)

- 19 agreed they would be more involved if there was an alternative way of raising issues with the council and not just at meetings
- 16 responses were received in the free text box requesting views on the change of decision-making structure
- Comments about the structure included – “clear and inclusive and welcomes input from the public”, “retrograde step that will at best delay timely decision making”, “please make public how residents etc can easily contact councillors”.

Public meeting 5 February 2024

- Announced 10 January (x2 news releases)
- Publicised across all council communication channels (3 times on social media in week prior to meeting)
- Kent Online report (30 January) of full council meeting inc. reference to in person meeting
- 3 members of the public attended. All spoke at the meeting.

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