

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEE MINUTES

Committee: Constitution Working Group **Date:** Thursday, 16 March 2023

Place: Virtual Meeting on Microsoft Teams **Time:** 7.30 - 8.45 pm

Members Present (Virtually): Councillors P Bhanot (Chairman), R Bassett (Vice-Chairman), S Heap, S Kane, J McIvor, C C Pond, R Pugsley, M Sartin and J H Whitehouse

Other Councillors (Virtual): Councillors R Brookes and S Murray

Apologies: H Kauffman and J Philip

Officers Present (Virtually): P Maginnis (Service Director (Corporate Services)), V Messenger (Democratic Services Officer) and G Woodhall (Team Manager - Democratic & Electoral Services)

13. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was noted that there were no substitute members for this meeting.

14. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the notes of the working Group held on 1 November 2022 be agreed as a correct record.

15. TERMS OF REFERENCE & WORK PROGRAMME

(a) Terms of Reference

The Working Group noted the Terms of Reference.

(b) Work Programme

Action:

- (1) Item (3) Programme 2025 Workstream (5) – What should the Constitution look like? It was agreed the Monitoring Officer would amend the progress description for 2023/24, as the entire Constitution was to be reviewed with the Scheme of Delegations initially identified.

16. CONSTITUTION - REVISIONS & AMENDMENTS

The report detailing the Constitution Update of 26 January 2023 was noted.

17. PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

The Council had faced a very challenging budgetary situation for 2023/24, which had required several difficult decisions to be taken. Within the Democratic Services

Team, this had necessitated a reduction of 1.5fte to 2.73 fte officers, which was to be achieved through voluntary redundancies. As the team would not have the resources to support the Council in the way it had done previously, senior officers progressed the changes that had been agreed as part of the budget setting process in February 2023. It was felt the Constitution Working Group should be convened to consider and recommend to Council its preferred option for the structure of the Council's scrutiny committees for 2023/24

After discussions the Working Group agreed this report should also be considered by the Stronger Communities Select Committee on 21 March 2023 and therefore, a supplementary agenda would be published. The Democratic and Electoral Services Team Manager would provide a verbal update at this meeting on the Working Group's recommendations, which was for option 1 below, and these would be included in the Annual Calendar of Meetings report due for consideration by Council on 4 April 2023. There should also be appropriate training provided for scrutiny chairmen and all scrutiny members.

Resolved:

- (1) That the preferred option for the structure of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny committees for 2023/24 was that option 1 be recommended to Council for approval;
- (2) That Overview and Scrutiny Committee be retained on the Council's committee list;
- (3) That the Stronger Council Select Committee be removed from the Council's committee list and its work programme be absorbed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
- (4) That the Stronger Communities and Stronger Place Select Committees be retained on the Council's committee list and their work programmes continued to be aligned with the corresponding key themes within the Council's Corporate Plan;
- (5) That the two select committees be renamed as Communities Scrutiny Committee and Place Scrutiny Committee;
- (6) That nominations for all three scrutiny committees be undertaken by the Appointments Panel and recommended to the Annual Council meeting for approval each year – therefore, the first meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June would not be required;
- (7) That the position of Chairmen for all Overview and Scrutiny Committees should be filled by a member outside of the majority group but experienced in scrutiny matters;
- (8) That the position of Vice-Chairmen for all Overview and Scrutiny Committees need not all be filled outside of the majority group; and
- (9) That the Monitoring Officer be delegated authority to make the necessary revisions within the Constitution to implement the changes above.

18. SUPPLEMENTARY AGENDA DEADLINE

Councillor J Whitehouse was concerned this had arisen as a result of a very late supplementary agenda item on devolution that had been published on 20 December 2022 after 17.00 for the Full Council meeting at 19.00, in addition to a devolution briefing at 18.00. Consequently, not many members had had adequate time to read or even knew about the supplementary agenda. Councillor J Whitehouse was of the opinion that sufficient time should be allowed for a supplementary agenda to be properly considered and proposed a deadline of 17.00 the day before a meeting was scheduled to be held – not on the day. The Working Group agreed that this would allow for exceptional circumstances, and it would be helpful if the number of supplementary agendas being published was also monitored.

Resolved:

That the Working Group recommended officers should be given guidance by the Strategic Team that supplementary agendas were published no later than 17.00 the day before a meeting was scheduled to be held.

19. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the dates of the Working Group meetings for 2023/24 would be circulated in due course, subject to the agreement by Council of the Annual Calendar of Meetings.