

CONSTITUTION WORKING PARTY

Minutes of a remote meeting of the Constitution Working Party held on Monday 18 May at 2.00 pm

Committee Ms V Gay Mr T FitzPatrick
Members Present: Mr N Housden Mrs P Grove-Jones

Officers in Attendance: Head of Legal & Monitoring Officer and Democratic Services Manager

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllr T Adams.

2 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 September 2019 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the following amendment;

RESOLUTION

- 1) A general point is included in the introduction that District Councillors are referred to as '~~Members~~' or 'Elected Members'

Cllr Gay requested that the summary of the skills audit of Members was shared with all Members. This was supported by the Working Party.

3 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None.

4 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None received.

5 THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND POLICE AND CRIME PANELS (CORONAVIRUS) (FLEXIBILITY OF LOCAL AUTHORITY POLICE AND CRIME PANEL MEETINGS) (ENGLAND AND WALES) REGULATIONS 2020 NO.392

The Monitoring Officer introduced this item. She outlined recent changes to legislation to allow the holding of remote meetings and she explained that the report before Members provided details of the changes that needed to be made to the Constitution to reflect this. She said that the changes were minimal but that it was a step change in how meetings were held and conducted.

The Monitoring Officer went on to say that there were several different platforms available for the hosting of remote meetings. The Council had opted for Zoom as

many Members were already familiar with it. There were two issues that officers wanted Members' feedback on – was Zoom the right platform? And what should be included in a protocol for remote meetings? She explained that remote meetings could be challenging and it was important that various options were considered including changes to the format of reports and additional officer presentations. Officers and Members had received support and training in how to conduct remote meetings.

Cllr T FitzPatrick (County Council Portfolio Holder for Innovation, Transformation & Performance) explained that Norfolk County Council had opted for Microsoft Teams as they felt it provided more functionality and was more secure. The meetings held so far had gone very well. It was important for democratic accountability that the public could access the decision-making process easily.

Mr N Housden asked whether remote meetings would be recorded and if so, how long any copies would be retained for. The Democratic Services Manager replied that recordings were taken to support the minute-taking as it could be challenging to run a remote meeting and provide the clerking support at the same time. Public committee meetings were also live-streamed to ensure public access and this provided an additional record of the meeting. The Chairman said that she found the live-streams of the meetings useful as you could see everyone's faces. In the Council Chamber, members of the public sat behind the Committee.

The Chairman referred to page 9, section 3.4, which covered voting by a show of hands. She asked whether a roll call would be used for remote meetings instead. The Monitoring Officer replied that this was a decision for Members. Cllr P Grove-Jones said that a roll call worked well for Development Committee. It could be confusing if people used a mix of icons and the physical raising of hands. The Democratic Services Manager said that there was a polling function in Zoom which could be used for voting but more work was needed to see if it would be effective. She acknowledged that there had been security concerns regarding Zoom but that the Council was complying with the National Cyber Security Centre's guidance on protecting remote meetings. Cllr FitzPatrick added that the challenges around security often arose when meetings were taking place across two platforms.

The Monitoring Officer thanked Members for their comments. She said that the draft protocol would be shared with all members for their feedback and any amendments would be made before it was published.

RESOLVED to recommend to Council

1. That the Constitution is amended to reflect the changes required by the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulation 2020 No.392
2. That the draft Remote Meetings Protocol is adopted

6 EMPLOYEE CODE OF CONDUCT - REVISED

At the previous meeting of the Constitution Working Party on 17 September 2019, a revision to paragraph 21 of the Employee Code of Conduct was proposed. This had been accepted by a subsequent meeting of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee (JSCC) and was now coming back to the Committee for approval.

Cllr P Grove-Jones referred to section 19 'Hospitality' and sought clarification on the Heads of Service roles. The Monitoring Officer replied that they formed the Senior Leadership Team. She added that there were very few occasions at the Council where senior officers received gifts or hospitality.

Cllr N Housden queried whether there should be an additional section within the Employee Code of Conduct to cover expected behaviour during a pandemic. The Monitoring Officer replied that the Council already had a 'Pandemic Flu' policy and this was used during the current pandemic. She said that the Employee Code of Conduct focussed on the ethical conduct of officers.

Cllr Grove-Jones queried how shielded and vulnerable staff managed during the current pandemic. The Monitoring Officer replied that they worked from home, as did the majority of the Council's staff, adding that there were considerable benefits to working from home. Cllr Grove-Jones said that concerns around a lack of social inclusivity should be acknowledged, particularly if someone had to work from home for a lengthy period of time.

It was proposed by Cllr V Gay, seconded by Cllr T FitzPatrick and

RESOLVED to recommend to Council

That the revised Employee Code of Conduct is approved and included in the Constitution.

9 UPDATES TO THE CONSTITUTION

None.

Before closing the meeting, the Chairman asked about the Constitution and whether it could be in a more prominent place on the Council's website. The Democratic Services Manager replied that this was the intention. It was currently being 'tidied up' before being re-published.

The meeting ended at 2.45 pm.

Chairman