

Constitution Review Group
23 July 2020

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the CONSTITUTION REVIEW GROUP held on Thursday 23 July 2020 at 6.30 pm virtually via Zoom.

PRESENT: Councillors T.Kingsbury (Chairman)
F.Thomson (Vice-Chairman)

A.Dennis (substituting for M.Cowan), G.Hayes,
F.Marsh, K.Thorpe and S.Wrenn

OFFICIALS PRESENT: Corporate Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance)
(N.Long)
Corporate Director (Resources, Environment and Cultural Services)
(K.Ng)
Head of Law and Administration (M.Martinus)
Governance Services Manager (A.Marston)
Governance Services Officers (H.Johnson)

43. SUBSTITUTIONS OF MEMBERS

The following substitutions were made in accordance with Council Procedure Rules:

Councillor A.Dennis for Councillor M.Cowan.

44. APOLOGY

An apology for absence was received from Councillor M.Cowan.

45. MINUTES

The minutes of the last meeting held on 27 May 2020 were approved as a correct record.

46. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE UPDATE

The Committee considered the draft Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) draft meeting agenda template, scoring matrix (a mechanism to decide whether an issue is of sufficient value to warrant the commissioning of a Scrutiny Task and Finish Panel (T&P), single scrutiny event or report to OSC), scoping document (to define the clear scope of the scrutiny and plan for its delivery) and agenda template for Scrutiny T&Ps.

The following points were raised about the suggested draft documentation:

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- Scoping Document - A list of the corporate priorities could be highlighted.
- Scoring Matrix - The score could be clarified – such as building in greater flexibility into the medium priority score so that it is “considered” and did not just depend on resources being available. Low priority items could go on the work programme or a briefing note sent out to Councillors or added to the Member Information Hub on MS Teams
- Member Information Hub – further engagement was required from Members and Group Leaders would be following this up.

Officers clarified the scoping document and scoring matrix were tools to assist OSC members and that they were working documents and would evolve.

Further potential amendments suggested by OSC on 28 July 2020 meeting would go back to the Group.

AGREED:

That the Constitution Review Group agree the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) meeting agenda template, scrutiny scoring matrix, scrutiny scoping document and agenda template for Scrutiny Task and Finish Panels, subject to the suggested amendments and potentially further amendments by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at their next meeting.

47. REVISION OF COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES

The group considered the consequential amendments to Constitution documents arising from Overview and Scrutiny changes, including Part 1 Summary of the Constitution, Article 13 Decision Making, Protocol on Member Officer Relations and Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules.

Due to track changes on the documentation being sent as a late item, it was agreed Members would email comments to the Monitoring Officer after the meeting.

AGREED:

That the Constitution Review Group agree to feedback any comments on the consequential amendments to Constitution documents arising from Overview and Scrutiny changes (including Part 1 Summary of the Constitution, Article 13 Decision Making, Protocol on Member Officer Relations and Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules) to the Monitoring Officer. Unless any material comments were received, these could be agreed.

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48. BUDGET MONITORING AND SETTING SCRUTINY BY THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (OSC)

The presentation from the Corporate Director (Resources, Environment and Cultural Services) set out the proposed budget monitoring and budget setting scrutiny by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) to enable discussion.

Quarterly budget monitoring reports would be presented to August, November, February and June Cabinet meetings. As soon as Cabinet papers were published the budget monitoring reports would go on the Member Information Hub. Budget monitoring reports had previously gone to the Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee (ROSC).

A reminder had been sent to Group Leaders to follow up with their members to get set up on MS Teams where initially the Member Information Hub would reside.

Member raised the following points:

- What could be done on MS Teams to avoid duplicate questions from Members? Officers confirmed that all Members could see the conservation on MS Teams. Members could still email Officers privately and also ask that the answer be posted on MS Teams. In addition that Groups could email questions or post on MS Teams.
- Would the Information Hub be divided in service areas? Officers confirmed that there would be section on understanding budget and KPIs and also divided by service.
- The new hubs would be trialled by members initially, with any feedback such as improving the structure of the hubs being incorporated before being finalised.

Budget setting

The current Corporate Plan 2018 – 2021 was due for review this year. The budget should follow the corporate priorities. Officers were aiming for a new 2021 – 2024 Corporate Plan and draft budget proposals to be presented to January 2021 Cabinet.

Officers proposed that:

- The new role of OSC could be to create new scrutiny Task and Finish Panels (T&Ps) to look at both Corporate Plan and budget proposals. The T&P could be set up from September 2020, meet monthly and then a report could be brought to OSC in January 2021. Comments and recommendations from OSC could be considered by Special Cabinet in late January 2021.
- The proposals, if agreed by CRG, would be presented to OSC on 28 July 2020.

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- Any Task and Finish Panel set up with regards to the Corporate Plan and budget proposals would meet in private to enable meaningful discussion.
- The Executive Member for Resources could be invited to the T&P to explain the rationale of budget proposals, as set out in the scrutiny protocol.

AGREED (unanimous):

- (1) That the Constitution Review Group agree to the proposed budget monitoring and budget setting scrutiny by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) as set out in the report.
- (2) That the Constitution Review Group agree that the proposals be presented at Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 28 July 2020.

49. REVIEW OF NON-EXECUTIVE COUNCIL FUNCTIONS

The Group considered the review of non-executive council functions, including Article 4 the Council and Responsibility for Functions: Council and Council Committees.

The Group noted the current documents forming the Council's policy framework as set out in Article 4. The Group were asked to give thought to a refined list that should form the core suite of documents that will form policy framework reserved to Council. To assist, Officers had reviewed the list and made suggestions of what a revised suite of documents could be. Those that were highlighted were additional items and those in bold indicated those policies that needed to be reserved for decision by Full Council.

AGREED:

That the Constitution Review Group agree to the amended non-executive council functions, including Article 4 The Council and Responsibility for Functions: Council and Council Committees, subject to adding back in the Health and Safety Service Plan.

50. DATES OF NEXT MEETING

It was agreed that the date of the next meeting of the Constitution Review Group would be Monday 26 October at 6.30pm.

Meeting ended at 7.50pm
HJ