

CIVIC AFFAIRS

18 March 2015

6.00 - 7.10 pm

Present: Councillors McPherson (Chair), Benstead (Vice-Chair), Cantrill, Pitt, Hart and Robertson

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL**15/13/CIV Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were submitted from Sean Brady (Independent Person).

15/14/CIV Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 January 2015 were signed as a correct record.

15/15/CIV Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

15/16/CIV Public Questions

There were no questions.

15/17/CIV Internal Audit Plan / Strategy 2015 / 2016

The Committee received a report from the Head of Internal Audit. In introducing the report, the Committee was advised that an appointment had recently been made and the internal audit team would be back to full complement from May.

In answer to questions from the committee the Head of Internal Audit advised:

- i) The fact that the team had been carrying a vacancy accounted for the level of carry forward work into 2015/16.

- ii) The current Audit Plan includes a review of governance arrangements in place for various shared services and would include the internal audit service.
- iii) Arrangements for post-audit questionnaires were being reviewed and would be prioritised. A council wide customer survey was also being considered.
- iv) The External Auditor was satisfied with the proposed approach to core system assurance work (pages 45-46).
- v) No more outstanding actions pre 2012/13 (page 51) would be reported next year. These were to be resolved during the coming audit year.

Members of the committee recorded their thanks for the good work of the internal audit team.

Resolved

- i. To approve the Internal Audit Plan for 2015/16
- ii. To note the internal documents on Internal Audit provision – the Audit Charter- as identified in accordance with PSIAS.
- iii. To note progress with the implementation of Internal Audit agreed actions as recorded in the Risk Register.

15/18/CIV Procedure for Submitting Substantive Amendments to Full Council Meetings

The Head of Legal Services introduced the report.

Councillor Pitt was concerned that the proposal removed the facility for consensus Motions and that the proposed changes to Rule 23 would give too much power to the ruling group on the Council. Councillor Cantrill said that the proposal would not enable Motions to reflect the debate at Council and the pursuit of consensual Motions eg. the Motion on the Living Wage in 2014. Regarding new rule 23.4, there could also be disagreement over what was a 'substantive' amendment and that this could put undue pressure on the Mayor.

Councillor Benstead stated the proposal formalised the current non-binding convention albeit bringing the deadline forward by a day, giving officers sufficient time to consider properly the implications of amendments to Motions and to advise councillors accordingly.

The Committee noted that if approved, the proposal would be recommended to the next but one meeting of Council ie. to the Annual Meeting of the Council on 28 May as described in paragraph 3.5 of the report.

Resolved to recommend (by 4 votes to 2) that the Council adopts the changes to its Constitution proposed in appendix 1 of the Head of Legal Services' report.

15/19/CIV Duration of Full Council Meetings

Councillors Holland and Hipkin attended for this item and addressed the committee.

The following points were made:

- i. Council (and Area Committees) should not be open ended in duration.
- ii. Councillors should consider the equalities implications of late into the night meetings (eg childcare arrangements). Late meetings were not good for decision making. The Council should look to the changes made by Parliament to help those with caring responsibilities and good governance.
- iii. There was a general deterioration in behaviour and quality of debate as members became tired.
- iv. By 10.30pm, four and a half hours of debate had been had – that was not enough time to do business if members focussed their contributions. Council should consider a guillotine.
- v. There was a cost to the Council of late meetings (officer time, heating/lighting, childcare allowance).

Councillors Holland and Hipkin proposed options for change:

- i. Groups could agree which councillors would speak on items, giving a concise representation of the various political views.
- ii. A timed agenda agreed by the Groups before publication, so that the Mayor has at least a guide to work to in managing the length of meeting.

Councillor Benstead stated that the councillors made some valid points although there must be time for the Council to conduct its business, so restricting the time may be difficult. However, he agreed that the way members conducted themselves at Council and how the business was managed should be looked at. Councillor Cantrill proposed that a small working group be established to consider the issues raised. The Chair proposed a membership of the Chair and opposition spokes of the committee, the group leaders and the Mayor. The committee noted that it was likely that such a meeting would take place after the elections.

Resolved-

To establish a working group to discuss the issues raised in detail with the membership of Chair, spokes of the committee, Group Leaders and the Mayor.

15/20/CIV Members Allowances Scheme

The Democratic Services Manager introduced the report.

Councillor Hart asked for clarification of when the area committee allowance was introduced and if it was related to the determination of planning applications. The Democratic Services Manager undertook to provide the information to the committee.

The Committee considered that it was appropriate to review the allowances scheme in 2015/16, bearing in mind it had not changed since 2008/09 and noted that a review itself did not commit the Council to make any change to the scheme.

Resolved

- i. To recommend Council that the existing Allowances scheme be continued for 2015/2016 municipal year.
- ii. To review the allowances scheme in 2015/16, noting that a report will be submitted to the June committee seeking approval for how this will be achieved.

The meeting ended at 7.10 pm

CHAIR