

CONSTITUTION WORKING PARTY

Meeting: 5 March 2009

At: 2.00pm

PRESENT

Councillor Sue Derbyshire (Chair) in the Chair; Councillors Shan Alexander, Chris Baker, Peter Burns, Bryan Leck, John Pantall, Peter Scott and David White.

Also in attendance

Craig Ainsworth - Head of Area Governance & Partnerships, Chief Executive's Directorate
Barry Khan - Service Director (Legal & Property), Business Services Directorate
Mike Iveson - Head of Committee Services, Chief Executive's Directorate
Louise Richardson - Head of Policy & Scrutiny, Chief Executive's Directorate
Chris Braithwaite - Democratic Services Officer, Chief Executive's Directorate

1. MINUTES

The minutes (copies of which had been circulated) of the meeting held on 2 October 2008 were approved as a correct record.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

3. MATTERS ARISING

RESOLVED – That consideration of the matters arising from the meeting of the Working Party on 2 October 2008 be deferred until the next meeting of the Working Party.

4. POLICY FRAMEWORK

RESOLVED – That consideration of this item be deferred until the next meeting of the Working Party.

5. AREA COMMITTEE CONFIGURATION

The Executive Councillor (Communities) submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing the Working Party with proposals to strengthen the role of Area Committees, building on good practice established through the Area Committee Pilots undertaken in the last eighteen months. The report included the observations which arose from the meeting of the Area Committee Chairs and Vice-Chairs on 9 February. In addition, the report included options for the reconfiguration of Area Committees, with a proposed reduction from eight Area Committees to seven Area Committees and the establishment of a politically balanced Town Centre Committee, based on the existing Town Centre/M60 Gateway Task Force area to consider strategic issues relating to the Town Centre.

The Working Party discussed their experiences of the Pilots and welcomed the opportunity for Area Committees to be able to take advantage of the different schemes pilot as required by the specific needs of each Area Committee.

6. ADJOURNMENT

At 2.11pm it was

RESOLVED – That the meeting be adjourned.

At 2.57pm the meeting reconvened.

7. AREA COMMITTEE CONFIGURATION (Continued)

The Working Party discussed a proposal to Pilot Local Communities' Activity Budgets, which would create a budget (in addition to existing delegated budgets) to fund specific local projects, managed by Area Committees to support Councillors' role as community leaders. It was noted that further delegated power to Area Committees had the potential to create a disparity between decisions made in different areas of the Borough.

The Working Party then considered the options for a future reconfiguration of Area Committees. Concerns were expressed regarding the size of the proposed Area Committee encompassing Heatons North, Heatons South, Reddish North and Reddish South, and the number of issues common to these areas was queried. Concern was also expressed concerning the potential imbalance with regard to public engagement between those Area Committees which would be made up of four wards in the new configuration and those Area Committees which would continue to be made up of two wards. Councillors also raised queries regarding the powers of the proposed Town Centre Committee, particularly regarding whether this would include all of the powers of an Area Committee, or restricted to the regulatory and strategic functions. It was stated that it was currently intended for the Town Centre Committee to have full powers for determining strategic planning applications, rather than the Committee making a recommendation to the Planning & Highways Regulation Committee. The costs associated with the change in the configuration in Area Committees were requested.

RESOLVED – (1) That the report be noted.

(2) That the elements of the Area Committee Pilots set out in paragraph 2.2 of the report be made available to all Area Committees (where Area Committees wish to take these up) and that a further report be submitted to a subsequent meeting of the Working Party on the consequential changes required to the Constitution.

(3) That the proposal to make training on planning mandatory for members of Area Committees before they can be involved in taking planning decisions be supported;

(4) That the proposals in relation to establishing a Local Communities Activity Budget be further developed.

(5) That the Assistant Chief Executive (Strategy, Performance & Governance) and the Service Director (Legal & Property) be requested to submit a further report to the next

meeting of the Working Party with regard to the future configuration of Area Committees including the creation of a Town Centre Committee.

(6) That the need to resource the development of Area Committees as set out in paragraph 5.1 be noted.

8. CONSULTATION ON CHANGING COUNCIL GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

A representative of the Assistant Chief Executive (Strategy, Performance & Governance) submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) seeking a response from the Constitution Working Party to a consultation on changing Council Governance arrangements undertaken by the Department of Communities and Local Government.

RESOLVED – That a draft response to the consultation be submitted to the next meeting of the Working Party.

9. GENERAL AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION

(i) Changes to Portfolio Responsibilities

A representative of the Assistant Chief Executive (Strategy, Performance & Governance) attended the meeting to consult the Working Party on a potential amendment to the Constitution to allow clarification or minor changes in responsibilities of Executive Councillor portfolio to be addressed.

RESOLVED – That the Service Director (Legal & Property) be recommended to investigate a mechanism for securing between Annual Meetings of the Council, minor changes to portfolios.

(ii) Responsibilities for setting Council Tax Bases

A representative of the Assistant Chief Executive (Strategy, Performance & Governance) attended the meeting and reported that the Corporate Director, Business Services no longer wished to exercise his delegated power to set Council Tax Bases,.

RESOLVED – That the Service Director (Legal & Property) be recommended to revise the Constitution by deleting paragraph 15 on page 90 delegating power for setting Council Tax Bases to the Corporate Director, Business Services, and to submit these changes to the Council Meeting.

(iii) Duration of Council Meetings

A representative of the Assistant Chief Executive (Strategy, Performance & Governance) attended the meeting to consult the Working Party on general amendments to Council Meeting Procedure Rule 9 of the Constitution relating to the duration of Council Meetings had been invoked.

A Councillor proposed an amendment to Council Meeting Procedure Rule 14.11 to require the Mayor to take a formal vote on a procedural motion to rather than by acclamation.

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RESOLVED – That the Service Director (Legal & Property) be requested to submit a further report to the next meeting of the Working Party with regard to potential changes to the Council Meeting Procedure Rules.

The meeting closed at 3.59pm.

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