

CONSTITUTION WORKING PARTY

Meeting: 16 February 2023

At: 5.30 pm

PRESENT

Councillor Malcolm Allan (Chair) in the chair; Councillors Anna Charles-Jones, Colin Foster, Jilly Julian, Mike Hurleston, Tom McGee and Mark Roberts.

1. MINUTES

The minutes (copies of which had been circulated) of the meeting held on 3 November 2022 were approved as a correct record.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors and officers were invited to declare any interests they had in any of the items on the agenda for the meeting.

No declarations of interest were made.

3. AREA COMMITTEE BOUNDARIES

The Assistant Director for Legal and Democratic Governance submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) detailing the proposals for revised boundaries for area committees in light of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's review of the council's electoral arrangements and recommended new warding patterns.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:

- It was suggested that the current area committee arrangements worked well and the 'minimal change' approach identified at section 3.5 of the report seemed a sensible approach.
- There would be an opportunity for area committees to comment on their view of the existing arrangements within their area.
- The current number of area committees was appropriate.
- It was commented that the current area committee boundaries were an administrative arrangement that in some cases did not represent a defined community of interest. In this context, it would be appropriate to consider alternative clusters of wards that might more adequately serve this purpose than the aim of imperfectly aiming to align with communities.
- There was potential for greater alignment with other locality boundaries including the NHS and police.
- Any proposals for significant realignment would need to recognise any resource implications through, for example, an increase in the number of area committees.
- It was noted that there was a disparity in the size of area committees, ranging from 2 to 4 wards per area committee. It was suggested that there may be an opportunity to reduce this disparity through either merging some areas, such as the Marple and

Werneth area or alternatively dividing the borough evenly into seven 3-ward area committees.

- Members representing the Cheadle Area Committee stated that they felt that it represented a cohesive and interrelated area, notwithstanding its size. There was the potential to give consideration to radically redesigning area committee boundaries and what area committees were designed to do.
- Area committees perform an important function and took decisions that affected the lives of residents.
- Consideration needed to be given to the need to retain certain wards as clusters within area committees because of the cross-boundary nature of the communities within them.

RESOLVED - That the Council Meeting be recommended to give approval to the adoption of the arrangement for area committees, as identified in Section 3.5 of the report, subject to an item being included within the Working Party's work programme for 2023/ 2024 to give further consideration to this matter, including scope for a possible radical realignment of area committee boundaries.

4. COUNCIL MEETING PROCEDURE RULES - AMENDMENTS TO MOTIONS

(NOTE: The Chair was of the opinion that this item, although not included on the agenda, should be considered as a matter of urgency in accordance with Section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972 in order that consideration was given to this item of business by the Working Party. Due to the timescales involved, consideration of the item could not reasonably be deferred).

The Assistant Director for Legal and Democratic Governance submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) detailing practice in other local authorities within Greater Manchester in relation to the deadline for submission of amendments to motions at Council Meetings.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:

- It was felt that the current arrangements did not allow sufficient time to adequately consider amendments before a decision needed to be made. This was particularly disadvantageous to smaller political groups that did not have the support of a political assistant and/ or those members who were neurodivergent.
- Conversely, it was suggested that it was the role of elected members to be agile in their thinking, and no evidence had been presented to the Working Party that the current practice had led to bad decision-making.
- It was commented that those authorities that operated advance notice requirements for amendments did not suffer from lack of debate at their council meetings.
- It was suggested that any proposal to make changes to the constitution should be delayed until the new council had been elected in May 2023 to allow those members to determine the procedures that would be followed at future council meetings. In response, it was noted that any decision on the proposed change would need to be considered by the Council Meeting in July 2023 in any event, which placed the matter in the hands of the new council.

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- It was also felt that the current arrangements encouraged behaviour that aimed to 'catch-out' the group proposing the original motion which could lead to poorer quality debate and decision-making.
- It was noted that the majority of authorities in Greater Manchester operated the same arrangements as Stockport did, and the drive for change in the light of that was queried. In response, it was stated that the purpose of the report was to identify what alternative arrangements were being operated elsewhere to ascertain whether there was a better way of considering amendments than was currently the case.
- It was stated that the Working Party was not making a decision on this matter, but rather its role was to advise and guide the Cabinet and the Council Meeting on potential changes to the constitution. It would therefore be appropriate for the Working Party to make a suggestion for change that could then be properly debated by all 63 members at the Council Meeting.
- It was suggested that the Council Meeting consider amending the Council Meeting Procedure Rules in relation to the deadline to submit amendments to motions, to be brought in line with the deadline to submit public questions. It was proposed that the rule be disapplied in the case of committee meetings (and a consequential amendment be made to Council Meeting Procedure Rule 26 to include Rule 14.6(b) within the schedule of exemptions).

RESOLVED – (6 for, 1 against) That the Council Meeting be recommended to give consideration to the amendment of Council Meeting Procedure Rule 14.6(b) as follows:

14.6 Amendments to motions

- (b) All amendments must be submitted in writing and a copy provided to the Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer **by no later than three hours prior to the commencement of the meeting** ~~before they are moved or discussed.~~ **Amendments will be circulated to all members as soon as practicable following this deadline.**

The meeting closed at 6.47 pm