

CONSTITUTION WORKING PARTY

Meeting: 27 September 2023

At: 5.30 pm

PRESENT

Councillor Mark Roberts (Chair) in the chair; Councillors Christine Carrigan, Anna Charles-Jones, Gary Lawson, Jilly Julian, David Meller, Becky Senior and Matt Wynne.

1. MINUTES

The minutes (copies of which had been circulated) of the meeting held on 16 February 2023 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) noting that the Working Party had previously considered proposals for the realignment of area committee boundaries for the 2023/24 municipal year, and asking whether the Working Party would wish to give further consideration to the matter.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- Consideration needed to be given as to whether it remained appropriate to have area committees of different sizes, constituting as they did between two and four wards, and whether work should take place to try and harmonise this. It was suggested that area committees comprising three wards each should be considered.
- Chairs of area committees received the same level of remuneration regardless of their size.
- It was suggested that the Working Party should also examine the remit of area committees, with particular regard to planning powers. It was stated that should the Working Party be minded to consider the remit of area committees, then it would be appropriate to defer consideration of geographical boundaries until this work had been completed.
- It was commented that it may be difficult to apply a 'one-size-fits-all' model to area governance, as other considerations such as aligning to communities and access to democracy may be factors that need to be considered.
- Area Committees were not just an administrative tool, but acted as a 'front door' to democracy in Stockport.

- The report identified stark contrasts in the population represented by each area committee, and it was noted that some area committee agendas were becoming increasingly lengthy and unmanageable.
- The Working Party would benefit from considering other models of area governance implemented elsewhere including the extent of powers and functions that had been delegated.
- It was suggested that an analysis of agenda length and meeting length be undertaken to allow members to better understand the distribution of workload across the seven area committees.
- It was noted that for a number of years there was a Town Centre Committee that took on responsibility for development control within the town centre which alleviated some of that burden.
- It was queried whether it was possible to codify the convention that chairs of area committees should rotate between the wards.
- It was noted that some area committees met at the Town Hall, whereas others met within the locality and it was queried whether this had an impact on the transaction of business at those meetings or how the meetings ran and whether there was a significant cost burden to the council for meeting outside the civic complex.

RESOLVED – That the Assistant Director for Legal & Democratic Governance be requested to submit a report to the next meeting of the Working Party in relation to the remit of area committees.

4. WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24 AND DATES FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

The Assistant Director for Legal and Democratic Governance submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) outlining a draft work programme and schedule of meetings for the Working Party for the 2023/24 municipal year and requesting that members give consideration to any further items that they would like to have included on the work programme.

The report also detailed amendments that the Monitoring Officer proposed to make under delegated authority.

A discussion took place in relation to the forthcoming changes to public transport in Greater Manchester with specific regard to bus franchising. It was noted that as public transport was undergoing a significant transition, with increased powers over bus operations being transferred to the GMCA, there remained limited representation by councillors, particularly those from minority groups, on those GM bodies that now had responsibility for these functions. Members discussed the benefit of establishing a local body at a local authority level that could influence and feed into the work being undertaken by the GM Bee Network Committee.

It was further queried whether consideration could be given to the process through which committee chairs were appointed and whether these could be made by the relevant committee rather than by the Annual Council Meeting. In response, it was stated that these positions were currently appointed to following negotiations between the political groups at the start of the municipal year.

RESOLVED - (1) That the proposed amendment to the constitution in relation to the removal of reference to the Funding Committee to be exercised under delegation by the Monitoring Officer be noted.

(2) That approval be given to the draft Work Programme detailed in Section 3 of the report.

(3) That approval to the schedule of meetings for 2023/24 detailed in Section 4 of the report.

5. MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES SCHEME

The Chair reported that this item had been placed on the agenda at the request of Councillor Matt Wynne.

Councillor Wynne stated that it had been a number of years since the Members' Allowances Scheme had last been subject to a formal review. It was further stated that it was important that the council was representative of the wider demographics of the borough and that an appropriate level of remuneration for the role was a factor in encouraging underrepresented groups to seek election to the council.

Councillor Wynne then requested that the Working Party give consideration to requesting that the Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources invites the Independent Remuneration Panel to commence a full review of the Members' Allowances Scheme.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- A review of the scheme was a complex and lengthy piece of work, and consideration needed to be given to planning for appropriate capacity within the relevant teams.
- It was commented that previous such reviews had taken place within a 'fallow year' such that the review did not compete with work taking place on planning for a local election.
- It was important to ensure that becoming a councillor remained accessible to all communities within Stockport, and that remuneration was not a barrier to public service.
- It would be beneficial to consider the appropriate level of remuneration for an area committee chair once the work on the remit and boundaries of area committees had been concluded.

RESOLVED – That this Working Party recommends that a review of the Members' Allowances Scheme be undertaken during the 2024/25 municipal year.

The meeting closed at 6.31 pm