

## **CONSTITUTION WORKING PARTY**

Meeting: 6 December 2023  
At: 6.00 pm

### PRESENT

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

### **1. MINUTES**

The minutes (copies of which had been circulated) of the meeting held on 27 September 2023 were approved as a correct record.

### **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

No declarations were made.

### **3. REMIT OF AREA COMMITTEES**

The Assistant Director for Legal and Democratic Governance submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) asking the Working Party to consider the current range of delegations to area committees and other associated matters.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- The detail contained within the report was welcomed.
- It was noted that the principle of the area committee model was that decisions were taken as close as possible to the communities that they represented.
- The range of delegations afforded to Stockport's area committees was relatively wide compared to other local authorities with similar such arrangements.
- The length of some debates in relation to development applications, in particular, was on occasion disproportionate.
- While it was important that local councillors were able to have an input into the planning process, it was suggested that area committees were not always serving their purpose in that regard.
- It was noted that it was sometimes difficult to express balanced comments and remarks when public sentiment in the room was of the contrary view.
- It was commented that the evidence suggested that particularly lengthy area committee meetings were the exception, rather than the rule.
- There was the potential to better manage agendas such that high volumes of significant developments didn't all coincide at the same meeting.
- It was important that the views of area committee members remained a part of the planning process.

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- Making difficult decisions was part of what councillors were elected to do, and this included ensuring that planning applications were given a fair hearing whatever the venue they were considered at.
- The Planning & Highways Regulation Committee served as a useful release valve at times to allow contentious applications to move forward to a further committee that was one step removed from the area committee meeting.
- It was important that development applications were determined on the merits of the development itself and according to planning law.
- Members suggested it would be helpful to have further data on the number of applications that were referred to the Planning & Highways Regulation Committee by area committees where they had the delegated authority to take the decision themselves.
- Consideration needed to be given to how area committees can continue to have a role in development control while also ensuring that the council was able to comply with increasingly tight deadlines for the determination of applications.
- It was suggested that further work could be done on the delegation of funding to area committees to allow more longer-term work to be programmed, rather than reactive maintenance.
- Central Stockport Area Committee had elected to delegate decisions in relation to ward flexibility funding grants to officers, whereas other area committees had retained decision-making powers over this function.
- The size of area committees needed to be reconsidered with a view to bringing them into alignment at a set number of wards.
- It was suggested that the input of all area committee members on the report would be valuable.
- It was noted that there was previously a Town Centre Committee that took decisions in relation to developments in the town centre that may serve to alleviate some of the pressures currently being experienced in that area.

RESOLVED – (1) That the Deputy Chief Executive be requested to undertake a review of the planning scheme of delegation in the light of forthcoming changes to the timescales for the determination of planning applications.

(2) That the Assistant Director for Legal and Democratic Governance be requested to submit a copy of this report to the next suitable cycle of area committee with a view to consulting members on the current operation of area committees.

The meeting closed at 7.06 pm.