

# Minutes



## Democratic Services Committee

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Date: 6 June 2024

Time: 10.00 am

Present: Councillors W Routley (Chair), T Watkins, S Cocks, P Hourahine, T Harvey and A Sterry

In Attendance: Katharine Majer (Deputy Democratic and Electoral Services Manager), Mike Wallbank (Interim Head of Law and Standards), Simon Richards (Governance Officer), Emily Mayger (Governance Officer) and Joseph Walliker (Electoral Services Administrator)

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### 1 Apologies

Councillors J Mudd, J Hughes and K Thomas.

### 2 Declarations of Interest

None

### 3 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Committee queried whether the minutes for Item 6 – Review of Standing Order, Leader's Questions accurately reflect the discussion that took place and asked for the recording to be checked to verify the discussion and its outcome.

The minutes of the previous meeting held on **18th March 2024** were **accepted as a true and accurate record**.

### 4 Model Constitution Update

The Interim Head of Law and Standards gave an update to the Committee.

The following was discussed:

- The Committee reiterated that the implementation of the Model Constitution does not need to be rushed and look forward to the next update in September.
- The Committee stated that the Constitution does not make specific reference to conduct in committees, as a guide for chairs. The Interim Head of Law and Standards informed the Committee that there is a line within the Constitution that states procedural rules that govern Council also apply to Cabinet and other committees. These state if a Chair or Deputy Chair are absent then members of the Committee would need to elect a Chair at the meeting.

- The Committee enquired whether there is a specific date by which that the Model Constitution must be implemented. The Interim Head of Law and Standards informed the Committee that there is no statutory deadline for the implementation.

## 5 Register of Interests

The Interim Head of Law and Standards gave an overview to the Committee.

The following was discussed:

- The Committee enquired whether if a Member was appointed to a new Committee, would the Declaration of Interest be automatically updated by the Democratic Services team. The Interim Head of Law and Standards informed the Committee that it is a Member's responsibility to ensure their Declaration of Interest forms are up to date. They explained that once the form had been returned to the Monitoring Officer, it was passed to the Democratic Services team to be updated on the website. The Committee enquired whether it would be possible for the officer to contact the Member to inform them that the information had been updated. The Deputy Democratic and Electoral Services Manager advised the Committee that the Democratic Services team would reissue the form to Members on an annual basis. The Interim Head of Law and Standards reiterated to the Committee that in the matter of the law and the Constitution, the responsibility lies with the Member to make sure their interests were updated.
- The Committee stated that the Code of Conduct did not include all protected characteristics. The Interim Head of Law and Standards informed the Committee that this will be updated as part of the Model Constitution update.

## 6 Member Survey Results

The Deputy Democratic and Electoral Services Manager gave an update to the Committee.

The following was discussed:

- The Committee stated that there needs to be a collective understanding between officers and Members attending ward meetings and suggested that going forward whether it would be possible to plan these meetings 12 months in advance as that would provide a better understanding of topics and would be easier to manage.
- The Committee stated that the budget consultation ward meetings were generally poorly attended by the public and felt that more consultation with Members was required to see whether the meeting needed to go ahead, as certain wards held public meetings regularly. The Committee enquired whether a record of attendance was kept for ward meetings and expressed concern at the use of officers' time for low reward.
- The Committee stated that there was short notice for the budget consultation meetings, but this could only be improved upon and hopefully will see greater attendance by the public in future.
- The Interim Head of Law and Standards stated that the Committee's contributions were insightful and raised a concern about the perception of the Council if ward meetings are not held or offered to all wards. They stated that discussions would take place with Members to get their feedback as it could be disheartening for both officers and Members if these meetings are poorly attended.
- The Committee stated that social media was a good tool for advertising ward meetings. The Deputy Democratic and Electoral Services Manager informed the Committee that the Budget Consultation was a very tight timeframe, so it posed challenges for planning and advertising meetings in advance but assured the

Committee that all their feedback has been the same as the feedback from the Member Survey and had been taken onboard.

- The Committee noted that they are supportive of the direction of progress and the commitment of officers to work with individual wards and Members. The Committee looked forward to future updates to see how this had progressed and improved.

## **7 Forward Work Programme 2024/2025**

The Governance Officer informed the Committee that the Meeting Record item has been removed from the Forward Work Programme as it is included within the Model Constitution update. They informed the Committee that the date recorded as March 2024 needs to be amended to March 2025.

- The Committee enquired whether the Head of Democratic Services report would take account of the running of the General Election on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July 2024. The Interim Head of Law and Standards confirmed that the report can note this.

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