

REVIEW OF CAMBRIDGESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S COMMITTEE SYSTEM

To: Council

Date: 24th March 2015

From: LGSS Director Law, Property and Governance

Purpose: Council is asked to consider recommendations from the Constitution and Ethics Committee to make a number of revisions to the Council's Constitution following a review of the operation of the Council's Committee System and miscellaneous matters.

Recommendation: It is recommended that Full Council agree the following revisions to the Constitution as set out in Appendix 1 (*additions in bold and underlined and deletions in strikethrough*) and detailed below:

- (i) information reports to not be included on committee agendas unless they are updating, at the specific request of the Committee, progress of decisions previously agreed by a committee.**
- (ii) each service committee to consider and approve its own training plan at every meeting. The plan to include figures for attendance for each training session.**
- (iii) full Council to receive a short (two sides of A4) report on each policy and service committee at its annual meeting in May. The report to be prepared by the relevant Service and not open for discussion at the meeting.**
- (iv) to amend the budget setting process to remove the requirement to request the Leader to re-consider.**
- (v) to reduce the number of Member seats on each service committee (excluding General Purposes Committee) to thirteen.**
- (vi) to rename service committees to Policy and Service Committees to better reflect their role.**
- (vii) to hold an annual training day for Chairs, Vice-Chairs and Spokes with a focus on their roles and remits individually and collectively.**

Council is also recommended to agree the following:

- (viii) to hold training at a future Members' Seminar covering the current role of General Purposes Committee and how it relates to service committees.**
- (ix) to ask the Constitution and Ethics Committee to conduct a mini review in a year's time in order to consider whether to recommend any changes to the detailed governance procedures to Council.**
- (x) to authorise the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chairman of the Constitution and Ethics Committee, to make any other minor or consequential amendments to the Constitution necessary for, or incidental to, the implementation of these proposals.**

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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 At its annual meeting in May 2014, following a resolution in 2013, Cambridgeshire County Council resolved to convert from a Leader Cabinet form of governance to a Committee System. The detailed form and procedures of the new system had been developed over the preceding nine months in a process coordinated by the Constitution and Ethics Committee under the auspices of its role in oversight and maintenance of the Council's Constitution.
- 1.2 In recognition of the fact that any newly designed system of governance may experience unforeseen issues in operation and in addition, potential improvements may emerge, the decision to implement included an express requirement to conduct a review of the operation in its first 12 months with a view to the Committee considering whether to recommend any changes to the detailed governance procedures.
- 1.3 A consultation exercise involving elected members and officers was conducted via an electronic questionnaire available from the end of November until 24 December 2014 (some flexibility was allowed for comments after this period given the importance of seeking as many views as possible). The questionnaire consisted of questions relating to specific aspects of the system and a section for general comments. It was seeking to confirm what was working well and to identify areas which would improve the operation of the system.
- 1.4 The Constitution and Ethics Committee held a workshop on 27 January 2015 to consider the responses to the survey. A report detailing the responses and a copy of the presentation to the workshop are available at the following link <http://tinyurl.com/ccc-ce-030315>

2. CONSTITUTION AND ETHICS COMMITTEE WORKSHOP

- 2.1 At its workshop, Members initially focussed on a section of questions on specific issues which had been raised over the recent months and were capable of yes or no answers. They also considered a number of proposals to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the following four topic areas: Topic 1 – Full Council; Topic 2 – The Role of General Purposes Committee; Topic 3 – Administration; and Topic 4 – Services Committees.
- 2.2 Following discussion and in the light of the results of the survey, Members came to the conclusion that the following should not be progressed:
 - a) that parent governors should not be included in the membership of the Children and Young People Committee (CYPC). The current diocesan representatives are statutory appointees with limited voting rights at CYPC. It was felt that Parent Governors were already represented on the Cambridgeshire Schools' Forum, which had responsibility for school finance.
 - b) that Local Members should continue to have five minutes to speak on an item rather than the three minutes given to members of the public. It was felt that the role of a Local Member, in relation to their overall role of representing their Division, was very different to that of a member of the public.

- c) that oral question time should continue at full Council. However, the need for Members to bear in mind that the Committee Chairman/woman was not the Cabinet Portfolio Holder and could therefore not commit the Committee to actions without its agreement was highlighted. It was important that Members used oral question time only after exhausting all avenues first.
- d) that a proposal for individual Members to be allowed to write and present reports to Committee could not be supported as there was no way of preventing bias, ensuring all the facts were presented and that the committees remained strategic. It was felt that Members could request reports on specific issues through the Spokes system.
- e) that there was no need for officer reports to be more succinct and contain executive summaries. It was felt that reports were not too lengthy and Executive Summaries would just deter Members from reading the whole report.

3. CONSTITUTION AND ETHICS COMMITTEE MEETING

- 3.1 The Committee met on 3rd March 2015 to consider in more detail changes proposed at its workshop on 27th January 2015 in relation to the four topic areas.
- 3.2 Given the comments made in the survey about there being too many items going to committee thereby limiting proper discussion, it was felt that information reports should not be included on committee agendas unless they were updating, at the specific request of the Committee, progress of decisions previously agreed at the Committee.
- 3.3 The need for more accessible training and briefings for members in relation to services within their committee remits and decisions being made was discussed. It was suggested that if a committee was responsible for its own Committee Training Plan, it could arrange training at the convenience of its own committee members, monitor attendance, and ensure that each member received copies of PowerPoint presentations.
- 3.4 Members discussed the need for the work of the service committees to be reported to full Council. However, they acknowledged the importance of avoiding the same debate being repeated in a different setting. It was therefore suggested that full Council should receive a short (two sides of A4) report at its annual meeting in May. The report should be prepared by the relevant Service and should not be open for discussion at the meeting.
- 3.5 The Committee acknowledged that the requirement in the budget setting process to request the Leader to re-consider no longer applied in a committee system and should be removed.
- 3.6 57% of respondents had agreed that the number of seats on committees should be reviewed. The current number of seats (17) had been agreed on the basis of each political group on the Council having an automatic right to a place on each service committee, and to ensure that every member of the Council had a place on a service committee. The Independent Group Leader had proposed, with the support of his Group, that he would be content for his Group to not have a place on every service committee.

- 3.7 Members' attention had been drawn to feedback from the survey that committees encourage a silo mentality. The Committee felt that this argument was unfounded. It was of the view that it was up to Members to engage with other committees and that committees were not just looking after their own interests. It highlighted the fact that General Purposes Committee had an important cross-cutting role detailed in the Constitution.
- 3.8 The Committee was therefore of the view that the number of seats on General Purposes Committee should remain unchanged but the number of seats on each service committee should be reduced to thirteen.
- 3.9 Members considered the role of the service committees and suggested that they should be renamed to Policy and Service Committees to better reflect their role.
- 3.10 The Committee considered concerns identified in the survey regarding the lack of engagement of all committee members by Chairs/Vice-Chairs and Spokes. It was felt that some Spokes did not fully understand the need to feedback to their groups. It was therefore proposed to hold an annual training day for Chairs/Vice-Chairs and Spokes with a focus on their roles and remits individually and collectively.
- 3.11 Members considered a request from a member of the public for recorded votes at all committee meetings. It was felt that the provision in the Constitution for Members to request a recorded vote was sufficient.
- 3.12 The Committee considered a number of proposals to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of General Purposes Committee (GPC). It did not really come to a view as to how it could give the role of GPC greater clarity, which had been an issue raised in the survey. Some Members were still concerned that GPC should not be given any more decision making powers over and above the few it had. It was not really established how the relationship between GPC and the service committees could be clarified. It was acknowledged that there is confusion surrounding the current role of GPC. It was therefore proposed that training on the current role of GPC and how it relates to service committees should be held at a Members' Seminar.
- 3.13 Members considered the need to clarify the timetable for committees. It was noted that most committees were aiming to meet bi-monthly, but having to meet monthly; this was partly due to the Business Planning process but also because of workload and urgent items. Members discussed the possibility of creating a third committee covering the Economy, Transport and Environment Service area to help relieve the workload pressure on Economy and Environment and Highways and Community Infrastructure Committees. It was felt that a proposal regarding the delegation of Traffic Regulation Orders would avoid the need at this point in time to create a third committee. However, it was suggested that it should be kept under review.

4. CONTINUAL REVIEW

- 4.1 There is a need to review any newly designed system of governance on a regular basis in order to implement any potential improvements which may emerge. It is therefore proposed that the Constitution and Ethics Committee should conduct a mini review in a year's time in order to consider whether to recommend any changes to the detailed governance procedures to Council.

Source Documents	Location
Reports and minutes of County Council	http://www2.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/CommitteeMinutes/Committees/Committee.aspx?committeeID=12
Reports and minutes of Constitution and Ethics Committee	http://www2.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/CommitteeMinutes/Committees/Committee.aspx?committeeID=59