

CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Constitution Committee held on Monday 18 January 2021 virtually.

PRESENT:

Cllr Richard Boyles	Cllr John Payne
Cllr Mark Hawthorne MBE (Chair)	Cllr Lynden Stowe
Cllr Colin Hay	Cllr Lesley Williams MBE
Cllr Nigel Moor	Cllr Will Windsor-Clive

Officers in attendance: Rob Ayliffe and Gillian Parkinson

Apologies: Cllr Nigel Robbins OBE

2. MINUTES

Members approved the minutes of the previous meeting.

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions were received.

4. MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

No members' questions were received.

5. WRITTEN ANSWERS TO SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

5.1 The Committee noted that this request had been raised by Cllrs Iain Dobie and Kate Haigh at the previous full Council meeting. Cllr Haigh reminded the Committee that when cabinet members were unable to provide a full verbal response to supplementary questions at Council, a written response was provided as soon as possible after the meeting.

5.2 Whilst the answer to the initial question and verbal answers to supplementary questions were in the public domain, written responses were not. It was felt for transparency and clarity these responses should form part of the public record of the meeting as well. The member was keen for the same procedure to apply to public supplementary questions as well as members' questions.

5.3 Members discussed the draft wording that had been provided on the agenda front sheet under this item. It was clarified that there were two separate issues in this amendment. The first issue was providing a response to the supplementary questions to the questioner, and this was suggested should be within a reasonable timeframe. The second issue was when any such written answers would be gathered together and published with the original

meeting papers, which was suggested to be no later than 4 weeks after the meeting.

- 5.4 Members challenged the wording of 'within a reasonable time' and two suggestions were put forward of within 7 or within 14 days. It was also suggested that if the answer was not going to be provided within the set timeframe, the questioner should be written to and explain when they should expect an answer.
- 5.5 Officers advised that the 4 week period had been provided as an absolute limit, and not as a target. It would always be expected that officers would work as quickly as possible to provide written answers and publish the information; the 4 weeks simply allowed time after the questioners had received their answer to collate everything ready for publication.
- 5.6 It was added that this circumstance was not the norm, where cabinet need to provide written response instead, it tended to occur on matters of complexity that portfolio holders needed to consult officers on or to gather extensive data that could not be provided instantly.
- 5.7 Listening to the discussion, the Chair put forward the following suggestion:
- Supplementary written answers will be provided within a reasonable time 14 days and then published as a supplementary document with the original meeting papers no later than 4 weeks after the meeting.*
- 5.8 The assumption being that the publication of the document would be as quickly as possible after the 14 days. 7 members voted for the amendment and 1 member voted against.
- 5.9 The Committee confirmed they would like a similar approach to be taken for public questions as well. The questioner would be advised at the meeting when to expect their response if it cannot be provided on the day.

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND TO THE COUNCIL that the proposed amendment outlined above be made to the Constitution at standing orders 9.5.3, 9.8.3 and 8.8.3.

6. MONITORING OFFICER CHANGES

Members noted the suggested changes to the Constitution.

CHAIR

Meeting concluded at 14:24.