

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRACY AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 21 NOVEMBER 2022

Attendees:

Committee Members:	Councillors Cooper (Chairman), Joy, Mrs Blackmore, Cooke, Rose, Garten and S Webb
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39. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bartlett and Perry.

40. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was noted that Councillor Garten was present as a Substitute for Councillor Bartlett, and Councillor S Webb was present as a Substitute for Councillor Perry.

41. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

42. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no Visiting Members.

43. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

The Director of Strategy, Insight and Governance, and the Democratic and Electoral Services Manager, as named officers in the report on Item 14 – Appointment of Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer, declared an interest and intended to leave the room when the item was discussed.

44. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

Councillor Cooper stated that he had been lobbied on Item 15 – Amendments to Part B5 of the Council’s Constitution – Responsibilities of Senior Officers.

45. EXEMPT ITEMS

RESOLVED: That all items be taken in public as proposed.

46. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 21 SEPTEMBER 2022

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed.

47. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

48. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FOR LOCAL RESIDENTS

There were no questions from local residents.

49. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were no questions from Members to the Chairman.

50. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager updated the Committee on the Local Government Boundary Review, with the final proposals due to be published by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England on 29 November 2022. The Community Governance Review first stage consultation was underway with fourteen responses received so far, it would run until 29 January 2023.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager confirmed that the report on honouring sports people was still under discussion with Councillors and Groups and would come forward at an appropriate point.

RESOLVED: That the Committee Work Programme be noted.

51. REVIEW OF THE CONSTITUTION

The Director of Strategy, Insight and Governance introduced the report on the planned six-month review of the Council's Constitution, in response to the change of Governance model from May 2022. The recommended option in the report was to conduct the review via a working group with representation of all groups that would report back to the Committee before recommendations were made to full Council. The report recommended that the scope of the review would cover Part C of the Constitution as the area with the most issues identified, though there would be consequential amendments to the other parts of the Constitution.

The Committee supported the review, and the use of the working group with political representation across all groups but felt that the working group should determine the scope of the review. This would include issues identified by officers, including the absence of rules and information, for example on how to conduct call-ins, as well as issues identified by Councillors.

It was noted that the Committee would retain overall responsibility for the review as the working group would report back to them. It was clarified that the membership of the working group did not need to come from the Committee and that Group Leaders would be asked to nominate members for the group with three Conservatives, and one from each other group.

RESOLVED:

1. That option 1 in section 3 of the report be approved with a working group appointed to carry out a review of the constitution, reporting to this committee with their findings in March 2023 to ensure any changes can be recommended to council for adoption for the next municipal year; and
2. That the working group determine the scope of the review.

52. APPOINTMENT OF RETURNING OFFICER AND ELECTORAL REGISTRATION OFFICER

The Interim Monitoring Officer introduced the report and outlined the recommended appointment of the Director of Strategy, Insight and Governance as the Council's Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer, with the Democratic and Electoral Services Manager as the Council's Deputy Electoral Registration Officer.

The Committee reiterated the considerable experience of both officers in facilitating and supporting elections, with support expressed for the proposed appointments. The breadth of the Director of Strategy, Insight and Governance's responsibility was noted.

In response to questions, the Interim Monitoring Officer confirmed that the relevant officers including the Council's Corporate Leadership Team had been consulted on and supported the proposed appointments.

RESOLVED: That the Council be recommended to

1. Appoint Angela Woodhouse (Director of Strategy, Insight & Governance) as the Council's Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer for Maidstone Borough Council with immediate effect;
2. Appoint Ryan O'Connell (Democratic and Electoral Services Manager) as the Council's Deputy Electoral Registration Officer; and
3. Authorise the Monitoring Officer to amend the Constitution to reflect these changes.

53. AMENDMENTS TO PART B5 OF THE COUNCIL'S CONSTITUTION - RESPONSIBILITIES OF SENIOR OFFICERS

The Director of Strategy, Insight and Governance introduced the report and clarified to the Committee that the recommendation should not have been to make a recommendation to Council as the report was for noting. The changes outlined in the report were to be made under the delegations to the Chief Executive and the Monitoring Officer.

The Committee thanked the Director for the clarification.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

54. MEMBER SAFETY GUIDANCE

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the report setting out optional Member Safety Guidance to help support Members. The guidance included an incident reporting form to help Members and Democratic Services in dealing with any incidents raised.

The Committee welcomed the guidance and it was confirmed that it would be sent to all Members, be included in the new Member induction and be made available on the Members area in MS Teams that was under development.

The Committee also congratulated the Democratic Services Officer, Oliviya Parfitt, for her Learner of the Year award given at the national Association of Democratic Services Officers Conference 2022.

RESOLVED: That the Member Safety Guidance, attached at Appendix 1 to the report, be approved.

55. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 7.10 p.m.