

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Democracy Committee

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 16 NOVEMBER 2016

Present: Councillor Boughton (Chairman), and
Councillors Fissenden, Mrs Hinder, Joy, Lewins,
Newton, Revell, Mrs Ring and Vizzard

Also Present: Councillors Cuming, Prendergast and
Willis

31. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

32. **NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

There were no Substitute Members.

33. **NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS**

It was noted that the following Visiting Members were in attendance with regard to the items specified:

- Councillor Cuming reserved his right to speak on items 11 and 12.
- Councillor Prendergast reserved her right to speak on items 11 and 12.
- Councillor Willis reserved his right to speak on item 12.

34. **DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS**

Councillor Boughton disclosed an interest with regard to item 8 – Polling Station Review, as he had responded to the consultation and given his firm view. In light of this Councillor Boughton felt he could not consider the issue with an open mind. It was noted that Councillor Boughton would leave the room and the Vice-Chairman would take the chair for item 8.

35. **DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING**

Councillor Boughton indicated that he had been lobbied with regard to item 10 – Courier Review.

36. **TO CONSIDER WHETHER ANY ITEMS SHOULD BE TAKEN IN PRIVATE
BECAUSE OF THE POSSIBLE DISCLOSURE OF EXEMPT INFORMATION.**

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

37. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 8 SEPTEMBER 2016

It was proposed that item 29, paragraph 3 of the minutes should be amended to state: 'Councillor Vizzard requested that the Overview and Scrutiny Report on the Council changing to four yearly elections dated 2010 be circulated to all Committee Members.'

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 8 September 2016 be approved as a correct record and signed subject to the amendment of item 29, para 3 to read: 'Councillor Vizzard requested that the Overview and Scrutiny Report on the Council changing to four yearly elections dated 2010 be circulated to all Committee Members.'

38. CHANGE TO THE ORDER OF BUSINESS

RESOLVED: That item 11 – Four Yearly Elections Interim Report be taken before item 8 – Polling Station Review, as a technician was in attendance for item 11.

39. REPORT OF THE HEAD OF POLICY AND COMMUNICATIONS - FOUR YEARLY ELECTIONS INTERIM REPORT

The GIS/LLPG Technician was invited to address the committee regarding the change in electoral boundaries that would be possible following a decision of the Council to change to a four yearly election timetable.

Councillor Prendergast addressed the committee as a Visiting Member.

During discussion the following points were made:

- The issue of four yearly whole council elections was considered as part of a report in 2008-09 under the Cabinet governance system. The matter was not progressed at that time and should be closed.
- A review of four yearly whole council elections was welcomed if this would simplify the system and encourage more people to vote.

It was moved and seconded:

That the progress of the Committee's review of four yearly elections be noted.

For – 4 Against – 5 Abstain – 0

The motion was lost.

RESOLVED: That no further action be taken with regard to the review of four yearly elections.

For – 5 Against – 4 Abstain – 0

40. REPORT OF THE HEAD OF POLICY AND COMMUNICATIONS - POLLING STATION REVIEW

The Chairman Councillor Boughton disclosed an interest in the item and left the room at 7.08 p.m. Vice-Chairman Councillor Fissenden took the chair.

The Head of Policy and Communications presented the report proposing a change of venue of the Fant Ward (East) Polling Station from St Michael's School to the Grange Moor Hotel.

It was explained that the change of venue would be cost neutral. At a Member's request it was confirmed that the costs of using the Grange Moor Hotel would be circulated to committee Members outside of the meeting.

RESOLVED: That it be recommended to Council that the polling station in Fant Ward be changed from St Michael's School to the Grange Moor Hotel.

41. REPORT OF THE HEAD OF POLICY AND COMMUNICATIONS - WEBCASTING SERVICE

Councillor Boughton re-joined the meeting and took the chair at 7.12 p.m.

The Head of Policy and Communications presented the report updating Members on the installation of the new webcasting service provided by Public-i.

The committee was advised that:

- A key feature requiring consideration was the ability to vote electronically at meetings using the conferencing functionality of the new microphone units.
- The Maidstone Borough Council constitution stated that 'Unless a recorded vote is demanded under Rule 21.4, the mayor will take the vote by a show of hands, or if there is no dissent, by the affirmation of the meeting' (Part 3.1, 21.4) As such the constitution would need to be amended to include electronic voting. This would require the committee to refer the matter to Council.

Members raised the following points during discussion:

- An all-Member demonstration of how electronic voting would work in practice was required to take place before the issue was considered at Council.
- Social media was currently used as a tool for public engagement. The use of social within the procedures of the Council's committees – such as to allow members of the public to use Twitter as a facility for asking questions of Councillors during a live meeting – would require amendments to be made to the constitution.

RESOLVED:

1. That the update on the installation of the webcasting service be noted.
2. That it be recommended to Council that the use of the webcasting voting system to ensure transparency and accuracy at meetings be approved, and that the constitution be amended to reflect this decision.
3. That a demonstration of the webcasting voting system for all Members be held prior to Council's consideration of the voting system recommendation.

For – 9

Against – 0

Abstain – 0

42. **REPORT OF THE HEAD OF POLICY AND COMMUNICATIONS - COURIER REVIEW**

The Head of Policy and Communications presented the findings of a review into the courier run as commissioned by the committee as part of its work programme.

The following issues were raised during discussion:

- The Civic Officers owned a van which was used to deliver the internal courier run on Wednesdays and Councillor courier run on Fridays. MBC debt recovery was in need of a van, and so officers were requested to ascertain whether MBC debt recovery could have use of the van on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays.
- The courier run utilised .22 FTE (full time equivalent) of officer time, equating to approximately £3000 annually. The exact cost figure would be circulated to Members outside of the meeting. The staffing implication was that an officer role could be reduced by .22 FTE, or the officer assigned to other duties during those hours.
- A Member put forward Thurrock Council as a positive example of an authority at which Councillors collected their papers from a named pigeon hole at the Council offices. It was suggested that this method would only be effective if papers were ready promptly for collection.
- It was felt that Councillors views were missing from the review. It was requested that an all-Member survey on the findings of the courier run review and available options be undertaken with the results to return to the January meeting with a clear officer recommendation. It was requested that the survey also invite Members to put forward their own suggestions.

RESOLVED: That an all-Member survey on the findings of the courier run review and available options be undertaken, with the findings to be

presented to the 11 January 2016 meeting of the committee with a clear officer recommendation.

For – 9 Against – 0 Abstain – 0

43. REPORT OF THE HEAD OF POLICY AND COMMUNICATIONS - OUTSIDE BODIES FOLLOW UP REPORT

The Head of Policy and Communications introduced the report explaining that additional omitted information had come to light following the decision made regarding Outside Bodies on 8 September 2016. The committee was therefore asked to review its decision.

Councillor Willis addressed the committee as a Visiting Member.

Members stated the following during discussion:

- Members had previously requested clarification from legal as to which Outside Bodies the Council had a legal obligation towards, but this was not brought out in the reports to Committee.
- It had been put forward that Outside Bodies could be aligned to Service Committees. The allocation of Bodies to specific Committees required further work.
- A working group supported by a legal advisor would allow all issues to be identified and addressed, and would be able to harness Member's knowledge of the historical links between the Council and Outside Bodies.

RESOLVED:

1. That, in light of the information in the report, the decision made with regard to Outside Bodies on 8 September 2016 be revisited.
2. That a working group be created to review the appointments to Outside Bodies in detail, giving consideration to the Overview and Scrutiny review in 2008-09 as part of that review.

For – 9 Against – 0 Abstain – 0

44. DURATION OF MEETING

6.33 p.m. to 8.11 p.m.