

Minutes of a Meeting of the Constitution and Governance Committee held in the John Meikle Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton TA1 1HE, on Wednesday, 31 January 2024 at 2.00 pm

**Present:**

Cllr Tim Kerley, Vice Chair in the Chair

Cllr Theo Butt Philip

Cllr Mandy Chilcott

Cllr Dawn Johnson

Cllr Sue Osborne

Cllr Simon Carswell

Cllr Barry Clarke

Cllr Martin Lovell

Cllr Steven Pugsley

**Other Members present remotely:**

Cllr Alan Bradford

Cllr Helen Kay

Cllr Emily Pearlstone

Cllr Ros Wyke

Cllr Peter Clayton

Cllr Christine Lawrence

Cllr Leigh Redman

**15 Apologies for Absence - Agenda Item 1**

Apologies were received from Councillors Ross Henley, Helen Kay, Christine Lawrence, who attended online and was substituted by Sue Osborne, Emily Pearlstone and Richard Wilkins, who was substituted by Theo Butt Philip.

**16 Minutes from the Previous Meeting - Agenda Item 2**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors queried whether the all-member survey had been sent out to gather feedback to include in the review, which had been agreed at the previous meeting.

*The Head of Governance and Democratic Services confirmed that they had used the results from the planning survey to feed into the review, along with input from all the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the Committees and that they would send out an all-member survey with the proposed amendments to the Constitution to gather feedback for the final report.*

**Resolved** that the minutes of the Constitution and Governance Committee held on 18 October 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.

**17 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 3**

Councillors present at the meeting declared the following personal interests in their capacity as a Councillor of a Town or Parish Council or any other Local Authority:-

<b>UNITARY COUNCILLOR</b>	<b>TOWN AND/OR PARISH COUNCIL</b>
Alan Bradford	North Petherton Town Council
Theo Butt Philip	Wells City Council
Simon Carswell	Street Parish Council
Peter Clayton	Burnham Highbridge Town Council
Tim Kerley	Somerton Town Council
Martin Lovell	Shepton Mallet Town Council
Sue Osborne	Ilminster Town Council
Leigh Redman	Bridgwater Town Council
Ros Wyke	Westbury-sub-Mendip Parish Council

**18 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 4**

No submissions were received for Public Question Time.

**19 Constitution - Update on its review - Agenda Item 5**

The Head of Governance and Democratic Services, Scott Wooldridge, introduced the report which provided an update on the work being undertaken to review the new Constitution of Somerset Council.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors suggested holding one joint workshop to discuss the three areas of the review.  
*The Head of Governance and Democratic Services agreed it was an option, but that the date of the workshop would need to be pushed back to March 2024 to allow for further work to be carried out on some of the areas of the review.*
- Councillors suggested that all members should be invited to the joint workshop.
- Concern was raised that only the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the Planning Committees had been involved in the review and that all councillors should be

included.

- Concern was raised that the all-member survey had not been distributed, as agreed at the previous meeting of the Committee.

*The Monitoring Officer advised that if the workshop was pushed back to March, then the all-member survey could be carried out prior to the workshop and the results fed into the proposed changes.*

- Councillors requested for all committee processes to be aligned going forward. They further urged that officers ensured that a consistent approach was used in all committee procedures.

- Councillors queried what would be included in the survey.

*The Head of Governance and Democratic Services advised that the survey would be designed around the Planning Terms of Reference and based on the work carried out by the working group. He advised that the working group had received considerable feedback and that the survey would validate the discussions held in the working group.*

- Councillors queried when the proposed changes would be taken to Full Council for approval.

*The Head of Governance and Democratic Services advised that the report would be taken to the Annual General Meeting of Full Council in May 2024.*

Councillor Dawn Johnson proposed the following recommendation, which was seconded by Councillor Mandy Chilcott:-

Confirmed the holding of a joint workshop in March 2024 to consider the review and recommendations from the three working groups and to receive the all-member survey results on the Planning Committee Terms of Reference.

**Resolved** that the Constitution and Governance Committee:-

- 1) Noted the progress being made with the review of the Constitution by the working groups and the specific areas identified in October 2023; and
- 2) Confirmed the holding of a joint workshop in March 2024 to consider the review and recommendations from the three working groups and to receive the all-member survey results on the Planning Committee Terms of Reference.

## **20 Assurance on preparations for May 2024 Elections - Agenda Item 6**

The Electoral Services Manager, Steven Lake, presented some slides which detailed an update on the preparation works for the upcoming elections due to take place in May 2024.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors queried whether overseas postal votes were sent out early enough

to give the voters time to cast their votes.

*The Electoral Services Manager advised councillors of the process and that plenty of time was allotted for their votes to be cast.*

- Councillors asked for clarification on the new postal vote procedures.
- Concern was raised on the new form to be completed by people who hand delivered any postal votes. Councillors understood that the process was to limit fraud, but further concern was raised on any votes being rejected due to the new procedure.

*The Electoral Services Manager advised that the best advice to give voters, was to place their postal votes in the Royal Mail postal service. He further advised that plenty of posters would be placed by the council office post boxes and in the reception areas advising people not to hand deliver their postal votes.*

- Councillors queried whether the electors who had their postal votes rejected would be re-issued with a new postal vote.

*The Electoral Services Manager advised that the vote would be rejected and no further vote would be issued.*

- Councillors urged the Elections Team to ensure that adequate communications were published to inform postal voters of the new form.
- Councillors queried the count arrangements for if there was a parliamentary election and whether the count for multiple constituencies would be carried out in the four count centres.

*The Electoral Services Manager advised that a concurrent count would take place, which had been done previously when multiple elections had taken place on the same day.*

**Resolved** that the Constitution and Governance Committee noted the Update.

**21 Constitution and Governance Committee Work Programme - Agenda Item 7**

The Monitoring Officer advised the Committee of a future item on the Boundary Review.

**Resolved** that the Constitution and Governance Committee noted the Work Programme.

**(The meeting ended at 3.35 pm)**

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**CHAIR**