

Report to: **Special Council**

Date: **5 November 2019**

Title: **Outcomes of a Political Structures Working Group Meeting**

Portfolio Area: **Council – Cllr Samuel**

Wards Affected: **all**

Urgent Decision: **N** Approval and clearance obtained: **Y**

Date next steps can be taken: **Immediately after Council**

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Recommendations: That Council be **RECOMMENDED:**

1. To instruct the Head of Communications to progress a three-month trial period (from January to March 2020) of webcasting Council and formal Committee meetings to an internal audience in the first instance, and to report back to the Political Structures Working Group with the findings of this trial before making a recommendation on a final decision to the Council;
2. that, where deemed appropriate by the relevant lead officer, Members be given the option of remotely attending briefings by Skype; and
3. To amend the Constitution so that the method of taking recorded votes is changed as follows:
 - Step 1 – a ‘Recorded Vote’ is called for;
 - Step 2 – all Members receive a named Voting Paper;
 - Step 3 – all Members complete their Voting Paper;
 - Step 4 – all Voting Papers are collected;
 - Step 5 – all Votes are read to the meeting and collated; and
 - Step 6 – result of vote declared.

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 The Political Structures Working Group (PSWG) met on 8 October 2019, and considered a range of issues.
- 1.2 The PSWG cannot make decisions, but can make recommendations to full Council based on the issues considered and resulting discussions.
- 1.3 The recommendations within this report are intended to support the decision making process by offering options for Members in attending Briefings, and support transparency by undertaking a webcasting trial.
- 1.4 The PSWG will report at a later date on the outcome of the survey undertaken to canvas opinion on start times of meetings and, if approved by the Council, the outcome of the webcasting trial

2. Background

- 2.1 The Council appointed the following Members to the PSWG at the annual meeting on 21 May 2019:

Cllrs K Ball; M Davies; C R Musgrave; L Samuel; J Spettigue and L Wood.

- 2.2 At the first meeting of the PSWG, Cllr Samuel was elected as Chairman of the Group. At the first meeting, the Group also approved its primary purpose as follows:

The Political Structures Working Group is tasked with making recommendations to full Council on the Council's 'governance arrangements and decision making processes and structures.'

- 2.3 At its first meeting, in addition to there being some issues that had been rolled over from the previous Council administration, all Members were invited to put forward matters for consideration. Therefore, the Group discussed a number of issues at this meeting as set out below and reached the following conclusions:
 - 2.3.1 **Review of Hub Committee.** It was agreed that the Group would defer any review of the Hub Committee until May 2020 at the earliest. This would enable newly elected Members the opportunity to fully assess how the Hub Committee and its lead Members worked.
 - 2.3.2 **Webcasting.** Members of the Group were in favour of progressing a trial of webcasting meetings. The Group was of the view that the trial should be for a three month period that would commence from January until March 2020. After this trial has concluded, Members asked that a PSWG meeting be arranged to consider the outcome before a final recommendation is made to the Council.
 - 2.3.3 **Meeting start times.** The Group had a lengthy discussion on meeting start times and, such was the range of opinions given, it was agreed that a survey be conducted to canvas the views of all Members on this subject. It was also

agreed that the results of the survey would be considered at the next meeting of the Group before a recommendation is then made to the Council.

2.3.4 Remote attendance at meetings and briefings.

The Group supported the introduction of attendance at briefings by Skype. It was accepted that voting by Skype was not permitted, and some training had to be conducted 'in the room' (e.g. planning training and interactive case studies). However, the Group recommendation was to offer attendance by Skype when deemed appropriate by the lead officer.

2.3.5 Recorded votes. The Group discussed how the current practice was for every recorded vote to be taken in an alphabetical manner. Some Members at the PSWG meeting felt that this could disadvantage Members at the top of the alphabet who were called earlier in the vote process.

Alternatives were discussed and it was recommended that the method for taking recorded votes be changed as follows:

- Step 1 – a 'Recorded Vote' is called for;
- Step 2 – all Members receive a named Voting Paper;
- Step 3 – all Members complete their Voting Paper;
- Step 4 – all Voting Papers are collected;
- Step 5 – all Votes are read to the meeting and collated; and
- Step 6 – result of vote declared.

2.3.6 Wider use of public consultations. The Group discussed this but felt that the proposal conflicted the Member role and recommended no further action.

2.3.7 Unstarred Minutes. The Group discussed how the terminology caused confusion and it was agreed that in future the terminology would be changed to 'Recommendations'.

3. Outcomes/outputs

- 3.1 Of the matters discussed, the recommendations set out throughout this report reflect the outcomes and recommendations of the Group.

4. Options available and consideration of risk

- 4.1 There were no specific risks identified by the PSWG, and the recommendations reflect the Group desire to make decision making transparent and to encourage as many Members as possible to be able to attend meetings, if not in person then by Skype.

5. Proposed Way Forward

- 5.1 The proposed way forward is to accept the recommendations of the PSWG as set out in this report.
- 5.2 Future meetings of the PSWG will consider the outcomes of the Member survey on meeting start times and the webcasting trial.

At a later date, the PSWG will convene to consider a review of the Hub Committee.

6. Implications

Implications	Relevant to proposals Y/N	Details and proposed measures to address
Legal/Governance		<p>Section 90 of the Local Government Act 2000 provides that a local authority may not—</p> <p>(a) cease to operate a form of governance, or</p> <p>(b) vary executive arrangements, other than in accordance with the Act and in making a change in governance arrangements, the local authority must comply with any directions given by the Secretary of State.</p> <p>The Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) Regulations 2001 require votes to be recorded in respect of budget decisions. Under the Council Procedure Rules adopted by the Council a recorded vote may be held if the quorum of the meeting request it; or on the advice of the Head of Paid Service or Monitoring Officer that there are legal implications.</p> <p>The Political Structures Working Group can make recommendations to full Council.</p> <p>The Council has the ability to amend and/or update its Constitution throughout the year.</p>
Financial implications to include reference to value for money		None arising directly from this report, with the exception of webcasting meetings which, if progressed, may include additional costs
Risk		There are no specific risks attached to this report The recommendations will encourage transparency and seek to support attendance at Briefings by a greater number of Members
Supporting Corporate Strategy		Efficient and Effective Council
Climate Change - Carbon / Biodiversity Impact		No direct carbon/biodiversity impact arising from the recommendations. The recommendation to allow Skype attendance to Briefings where appropriate may reduce travel and therefore carbon footprint.
Comprehensive Impact Assessment Implications		

Equality and Diversity		None arising as a direct result of this report
Safeguarding		None arising as a direct result of this report
Community Safety, Crime and Disorder		None arising as a direct result of this report
Health, Safety and Wellbeing		None arising as a direct result of this report
Other implications		None arising as a direct result of this report

Supporting Information

Appendices:

None

Background Papers:

Notes of Political Structures Working Group held 8 October 2019

Approval and clearance of report

Process checklist	Completed
Portfolio Holder briefed/sign off	Yes/
SLT Rep briefed/sign off	Yes/
Relevant Heads of Practice sign off (draft)	Yes/
Data protection issues considered	Yes/
Accessibility checked	Yes/