

GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

THURSDAY, 30TH AUGUST, 2012

PRESENT: Councillor K Wakefield in the Chair

Councillors A Blackburn, M Dobson,
S Golton, P Gruen, G Latty, T Leadley,
J Lewis, A Lowe, E Nash, J Procter and
M Rafique

Apologies Councillor J Blake and R Finnigan

12 Appeals against refusal of inspection of documents

There were no appeals against the refusal of inspection of documents.

13 Exempt Information - possible exclusion of the press and public

There were no resolutions to exclude the public.

14 Late items

There were no late items submitted to the agenda.

15 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests although Councillor Latty declared an interest in respect to Item 12, minute 23 refers.

16 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Blake and Councillor Finnigan.

17 Minutes of the previous meeting

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the General Purposes Committee meeting held on 25th June 2012 be approved as a correct record.

18 Deputation to full Council - Falun Gong

The Head of Governance Services presented a report of the Director of Resources which considered the deputation received by full Council on 11th July 2012 from Ms Man regarding practitioners of Falun Gong and the Council's response to it.

RESOLVED - Members of the General Purposes Committee resolved to:

(a) note the issues raised by Ms Man;

(b) request that the Chief Executive:-

write to Ms Man on the Council's behalf thanking her for her presentation;

bring the issues raised by Ms Man to the attention of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office; and

(c) reaffirm unequivocal support for the right of freedom of expression and views with concern any actions that may deny this basic human right.

19 Proposed amendments to the Members' Code of Conduct arising from DCLG Guidance

The Head of Governance Services presented a report of the City Solicitor introducing Members to recent guidance issued by the Department of communities and Local Government concerning Members' personal interests.

Specific attention was drawn to aspects of the guidance that prevent any form of participation by a Member at a meeting where the business relates to a matter in which they have a disclosable pecuniary interest; this being a departure from previous arrangements whereby a Member was permitted to make representations and answer questions provided the public also had those rights.

Members acknowledged that the Leeds Members' Code of Conduct was now out of line with the recently published government guidance.

Members also considered a proposal for future amendments to the Members' code of Conduct to be recommended by the Standards and Conduct Committee directly to full Council, rather than such recommendations being made by General Purposes Committee.

RESOLVED – Members of the General Purposes Committee resolved:

(a) To recommend to full Council that the proposed amendments to the Members' Code of Conduct as set out at Appendix 2 to the report be approved;

(b) To not support proposals to alter the process by which recommendations to amend the Members' Code of Conduct are made to full Council; and

- (c) That concerns expressed by Members regarding the restrictions now placed on Members be brought to the attention of DCLG.

20 New Regulations regarding meetings of the executive and access to information

The Head of Governance Services presented a report of the City Solicitor. The report outlined the new provisions introduced by the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012, to seek Members' views on proposed amendments to current practice, and to highlight any areas of risk to the authority.

RESOLVED - Members of the General Purposes Committee resolved to

- (a) note the implications of the new Regulations and officers' suggestions that clarification should be sought as to the scope and definition of 'executive decisions' from DCLG;
- (b) agree that the Council continue to produce a Forward Plan albeit within the revised 28 day notice period for Key Decisions prescribed by the Regulations;
- (c) recommend that full Council approve the proposed amendments to Article 12 in relation to the functions of the Head of Paid Service as set out at Appendix 2 to the report, and the amended terms of reference for the Standards and Conduct Committee as set out at Appendix 3 to the report; and
- (d) note the City Solicitor's intention, in consultation with Members, to amend the Constitution to give effect to the new Regulations and the amendments to current practice.

21 Review of Council Meetings

Councillor J Lewis presented a report of the Chief Executive seeking approval of recommendations to be put to full Council to introduce consideration a third White Paper to Ordinary meetings of Council.

Members agreed that it was important to keep 'back bench' Members engaged with Council meetings and that these proposals were a positive move towards that. It was confirmed that further consideration would be given to the success of the arrangements following the September full Council meeting.

Further to content of the report presented, the Head of Leeds Initiative and International Partnerships presented proposed arrangements for Leeds City Council State of the City Meetings 2012/13.

Members stressed the importance of partners getting a feel for Members' views on the various partnerships the Council has as well as Members understanding the views of external partners. Members also discussed the timings of the meetings.

RESOLVED - Members of the General Purposes Committee resolved to:

- (a) note the proposals contained in the report and recommend to Full Council the adoption of the new arrangements as set out at Appendix 1, (the new arrangements to be reviewed, following the Council meeting on 12 September 2012); and
- (b) agree that the revised arrangements be reviewed by the Committee during the course of the Municipal Year; and
- (c) that the second State of the City Meeting take place on 27th February 2013, at the conclusion of business necessary to agree the council's budget for 2013/14.

22 Community Governance Review recommendations on whether to increase the number of parish councillors for Scarcroft parish council

Councillor J Lewis presented the report of the Head of Licensing and registration which considered the Electoral working Group's (EWG) recommendations regarding the request from Scarcroft Council to increase the size of the Parish Council from 7 to 9 Councillors and the subsequent Community Governance Review to establish whether such an increase should be approved.

RESOLVED – Members of the General Purposes Committee resolved to recommend to full Council that:

- (a) the size of Scarcroft Parish Council be increased from 7 to 9 Councillors;
- (b) the electoral arrangements as set out in Appendix A to the report be applied; and
- (c) in the interim the existing Parish Councillors cover the duties of the two new Parish Councillors until those vacancies tot the parish council are filled.

23 Community Governance Review recommendations on whether to create a new parish of Rawdon

Councillor J Lewis presented the report of the Head of Licensing and Registration. The report considered EWG's recommendations regarding the petition from electors in polling districts from the Horsforth, Guiseley & Rawdon and Otley and Yeadon wards and the subsequent Community Governance Review to establish whether a new parish for Rawdon should be created.

Councillor Latty made known to the committee that as a resident of Rawdon he would be impacted by the proposals and any precept payable.

RESOLVED – Members of the General Purposes Committee resolved to recommend to full Council that:

- (a) a new parish and Parish Council for Rawdon be constituted, excluding the polling district OYG (from the original proposal contained in the petition received on 18 May 2012);
- (b) the precept for the new parish council be set at £40,000;
- (c) the electoral arrangements be as those set out in Appendix A to the report; and
- (d) the interim arrangements for the new parish are that the existing Local Government Ward Councillors act as parish councillors until vacancies to the new parish council are filled.

24 Webcasting Council Chamber Meetings

The Head of Governance Services presented a report of the Chief Officer Democratic & Central Services and the Chief Officer ICT Services. The report considered the introduction of webcasting for Council meetings and the likely costs and benefits to the introduction of webcasting were described.

Members considered the report and discussed the cost implications of the options presented to them. They also viewed this as a change to engage with the public and hoped that it could bring about greater understanding of what happens in full Council meetings.

Members also considered that a protocol on the recording of meetings should be established before webcasting takes place.

RESOLVED – Members of the General Purposes Committee resolved to:

- (a) agree to a trial webcasting of the November State of the City Council meeting as a one off event, subject to appropriate protocols concerning the application and use of the Webcasting system being drawn up in advance of the trial and agreed with Members;
- (b) That any decision to extend the trial to the 2013/14 Municipal Year being subject to General Purposes Committee's consideration of the outcome of the trial Webcast;

25 Review of Plans Panels

Councillor Gruen presented a report of the Director of City Development which proposed the establishment of a strategic plans panel with responsibility for making decisions on strategically significant planning applications for the district and for those city centre planning applications which are considered by Members. It also provided proposals for changes to the geographical areas covered by the other two panels, which takes account of recent application workloads, the need to achieve timely and predictable outcomes for major developments, the need to improve performance in the determination of major applications and the importance of securing involvement and participation in planning decision making by Members, local residents and other interest groups.

The Chief Planning Officer and the Head of Planning Services were in attendance to answer Member questions.

Members discussed the report in detail. Specifically Members raised questions about the meaning of 'Job Growth' in terms of defining a strategic planning application and that 'Significant Job Growth' would be a better term.

Members also had considerable debate over the need for a protocol to be in place prior to the establishment of a 'Strategic Panel'.

Consideration was also given to the name 'Strategic Panel' this name was rejected by Members who preferred the name of 'City Plans Panel'.

Members highlighted the importance of them being notified and involved in strategic planning applications that effect their wards during pre-application discussions.

The Head of Governance Services advised the Committee that the starting date for the new arrangements should take into account the scheduled meeting of the Plans Panel (West) on 13 September 2012.

RESOLVED – Members of the General Purposes Committee resolved to:

- (a) note the outcome of the review of the composition of the plans panels;

- (b) note and support the Executive Member's commitment to produce, at the earliest opportunity, and in consultation with Members from all political groups:
- a revised protocol for pre-application involvement, including Heads of Terms where there are legal agreements;
 - an action plan to take forward the suggestions made from the working party, as set out in paragraph 3.1.15 to the report
- (c) pending the revised protocol, instruct the Chief Planning Officer to urgently, (in the period leading up to the September Council meeting), seek cross-party consensus on an interim set of principles to govern how the panels will operate;
- (d) recommend full Council approve revised arrangements as set out in the report including:
- the Terms of Reference for a strategic plans panel (to be named the City Plans Panel) as set out at Appendix 1 to the report;
 - the Terms of Reference for Area Plans Panels as set out at Appendix 2 to the report – these being the North and East Plans Panel, and the South and West Plans Panel, the boundaries for which are shown on the attached appendix 2a to the report; and
 - an amendment to Article 8 of the Constitution to dis-apply the restriction on membership numbers to the proposed Strategic Plans Panel as set out at Appendix 3 to the report; and
- (e) review the operation of the revised plans panels arrangements 6 months after commencement.