

Constitution Working Group

Held at: Hybrid – Teams and Boulogne Room - Civic Centre Folkestone

Date Thursday, 31 August 2023

Present Councillors Mrs Jennifer Hollingsbee, Jim Martin, Connor McConville, Tim Prater and Paul Thomas

Apologies for Absence None.

Officers Present: Ellen Joyce (Democratic Services Trainee), Amandeep Khroud (Assistant Director), Susan Priest (Chief Executive), Kirsty Roberts and Jemma West (Democratic Services Senior Specialist)

Others Present: Phillip McCourt (Bevan Brittan).

1. **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest at the meeting.

2. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 July 2023 were agreed as a true record.

3. **Meeting arrangements (public access)**

A discussion took place around the arrangements for the Constitution Working Group meetings, and whether they should be open to members of the public.

Proposed by Councillor Prater,
Seconded by Councillor J Martin; and

RESOLVED:

That meetings of the Working Group be held online/as hybrid meetings, and broadcast on the Internet for the public to view, but the public would not be able to attend meetings in person. This would take effect from the next meeting of the Working Group.

(Voting figures: 3 for, 2 against, 0 abstentions).

4. **Responses to the design questions**

Phillip McCourt opened the discussion and outlined the main themes of the responses received from Members in respect of the design questions which had been circulated.

He advised on the three options in terms of a committee structure, which were:

- (a) Two service Committees – one main Policy and Resources, dealing with major policy and financial decisions, and one Committee with less delegations, dealing with community issues.
- (b) One Service Committee and an Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- (c) Two service Committees with a split down the middle in terms of delegations.

Members expressed a preference for Option (a) shown above, with the Committees being given the working titles of Policy and Resources (dealing with major policy and financial decisions), and Communities and Environment (dealing with community engagement, performance, policy development, and task and finish work).

Members commented on various issues and there was discussion on the following points:

- It would be useful to have spokespersons acting as a focal point for certain council areas. These would usually be the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Committees and would not have any individual decision-making powers. A role description could be included in the constitution, and the Committees could appoint Members to the roles and decide on their remits. It was proposed that the number of these roles would be capped at 9, potentially mirroring the current number of Cabinet Portfolio holders.
- A forward plan showing key decisions would be a good way to show members what matters were coming forward for consideration at Committees.
- Officers would have greater delegations to ensure that matters can be dealt with in a timely manner. Key decisions would continue to be shown on the forward plan. Members could then have an option to 'call-in' any key-decision matters which they feel should be considered.
- There was no similar position to the current Leader of the Council in a committee model, but in other models the Chair of the Policy and Resources Committee would act as the leader.
- There would be the ability for Members to call-in decisions via a rescission process built into the constitution.

It was noted that at the next meeting, Philip McCourt would provide the following information:

- Two policy committee structure and working title of P&R and Communities. Along with the draft terms of reference and a diagram showing the decision-making route.

Constitution Working Group - 31 August 2023

- Draft Key Decisions and call-in process for members, allowing more comfort as a trade-off from an enhanced scheme of delegation by exception for committees and especially for officers.
- Draft role descriptions for Council spokespersons.
- Examples of a process for a rescission procedure on policy committee decisions (as opposed to old O&S Call-in procedure).