

Meeting of the Constitution Committee

Monday, 19 July 2021, 10.30 am
Council Chamber – South
Kesteven House,
St Peter's Hill, Grantham. NG31
6PZ



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

Committee Members present

Councillor Mark Whittington (Chairman)
Councillor Ashley Baxter
Councillor David Bellamy
Councillor Breda-Rae Griffin
Councillor Susan Sandall

Officers present

Alan Robinson (Deputy Chief Executive)
Graham Watts (Head of Democratic
Services)
Shelley Thirkell (Acting Principal
Democratic Officer)
Alice Atkins (Local Government
Association Graduate)

8. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Mike Exton and Councillor Paul Fellows.

9. Disclosure of interests

No disclosure of interests were made.

10. Minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2020

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

11. Review of the Council's Constitution

The Head of Democratic Services presented to the Committee a report which summarised the purpose of an ongoing review of the Council's Constitution.

The Constitution had been amended over the past few years, meaning it had evolved to the point where some parts contradicted others and where some of the information included was now outdated. This had meant that the document required a comprehensive review to make it easily understandable to Members, officers and members of the public. The main aspect that required refining was the Scheme of Delegation. It was noted that clarity would need to be made regarding decision-making with lines of authority also needing to be made clearer. The purpose of the review would be to make the document as open and transparent as possible, and that Member engagement would be a key part of this process.

During discussion, Members made the following points:

- One Member queried as to why the minutes from a previous workshop of the Committee had not been circulated.

It was noted that discussions made in the context of informal working groups were not usually made available in the public domain and so would not be published as a set of minutes. It was agreed that going forward, notes would be kept on what had been discussed during Working Party meetings.

- Members agreed that due to the length of the document, the best way to conduct the full review would be to separate it into sections.
- It was agreed the Committee begin the review by reviewing the Responsibility for Functions section first.
- It was suggested that a road map of the review be developed to measure progress.
- It was suggested that a glossary of terms be appended to the document.
- It was agreed that the Constitution be reordered into an accessible, user-friendly format, as set out in the report and that this be proposed to a meeting of Full Council in the Autumn for an 'in principle' decision. It was suggested that an additional meeting of the Committee take place prior to a meeting of Full Council.

It was emphasised that the purpose of the review would not be to change decision-making powers, but to make it clearer how decisions were currently made and by whom. It was acknowledged, however, that some changes may be required as part of the review or by other reviews such as the planning review, peer review and scrutiny review. Recommendations arising from these reviews would be reported and proposed to the Committee separately.

It was proposed, seconded and AGREED:

- (1) That an additional meeting of the Constitution Committee be held in early September to consider a draft report to the Council on the Constitution review.**
- (2) That the report to Council includes a recommendation to adopt a revised format of the constitution, set out in paragraph 1.4 of the report.**
- (3) That the proposed process to be followed for undertaking and implementing a comprehensive review of the Council's Constitution, commencing with a review of the Scheme of Delegation, decision-making and responsibility for functions, be supported.**
- (4) That the proposed engagement with senior officers and elected members as part of the review be supported.**

12. Any other business which the Chairman, by reasons of special circumstances, decides is urgent

The Chairman referred to the Planning Review Report which was due to be discussed at the upcoming Governance and Audit Committee meeting. It was noted that the Planning Review Report would have a potential impact on the review of the Council's Constitution. The Chairman requested that an update on the potential ramifications of the Planning Review Report be provided to the Committee during the Autumn meeting.

The Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that a Scrutiny Review would not take place until mid-September, and that an update would be provided to the Committee following this.

The Chairman closed the meeting at 11:53.