

## CONSTITUTIONAL REVIEW WORKING PARTY

Minutes of the meeting held on 5 November 2020 at 5.00 pm by Video Conference.

**Present:** Mr Tucker (Independent Chairman), Mr Wellbrook (Independent Member), Councillors Hopkinson, Revd Piper, Tomlinson and Hart.

**In Attendance:** Cllrs Bailey, Garner and Whitehead.

### 122. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

### 123. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

### 124. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

*At this point Mr Wellbrook acted as chairman due to Mr Tucker experiencing technical difficulties.*

Concerns were raised that the minutes did not accurately reflect the meeting that took place in November 2019. Notably the issue of filtering complaints against statutory officers and the associated recommendation.

Cllr Revd. Piper was keen to make it clear for the public that the point in question had been raised at the Constitutional Review Working Party initially, before going to Council.

Cllr Piper proposed, in agreement with Mr Howes (Director of Corporate Governance and Monitoring Officer), that the minutes should more accurately reflect the views of this committee, regarding the filtering process in connection with statutory officers.

Cllr Tomlinson seconded the proposal.

With this amendment, the minutes of the previous meeting held on 21 November 2019 were agreed.

### 125. REVIEW OF PETITION SCHEME

Cllr Garner and Cllr Whitehead spoke under rule 20.1 on this item.

Nicholas Hughes, Committee Services Manager, outlined the proposed changes to the Council's petition scheme:

- To accept e-petitions from Change.org and 38Degrees.
- To completely remove the Council's e-petition facility.
- Retain ability to submit paper petitions.
- If under 50 signatories, to treat as correspondence.
- 50-1500 signatories, to deal with it as a petition by an officer in consultation with the Cabinet Member, then reported for information to Cabinet or Council, depending on subject matter.
- Council would debate petitions with over 1500 signatories.
- Members of the public can only speak to petitions to the Full Council with over 1500 signatories.
- The main rejection categories were mainly unchanged.

- The appeals process was unchanged.
- The scheme retained the ability to simultaneously do e-petition and paper petitions, but reported as separate numbers.

*At this point Mr Tucker resumed position as Chairman.*

The key issues raised during discussion were:

- Members were happy with accepting petitions from 38Degrees and Change.org instead of using the council petitions site in future.
- The importance of keeping petitions accessible to those without internet access by combining paper and electronic petitions, and the associated possibility of repeat signatures. It was felt that the necessity for inclusivity outweighed the accuracy of numbers.
- The view that decision making appeared to be controlled by Senior Officers rather than Members. This was discussed at length, covering the outcomes for each size of petition and it was felt that smaller petitions also needed assurance of the inclusion of a councillor.
- The reasoning for increasing the threshold of signatories for petitions to be debated at council. It was explained that this was in order to speed up the process, so that actions could be taken in a timely manner. Members were keen to ensure the public received a message of willingness from the council and felt that as there were not many petitions of that size it would be reasonable to keep the number at 1000.

It was proposed, seconded and agreed that the Committee would recommend to the Standards Committee the proposals for petitions set out in the in the report subject to the following changes:

1. That the number of signatories required to debate at council should be reduced from the proposed 1500 to 1000.
2. That the number of signatories signing paper and e-petition should be added together when calculating the threshold reached, rather than them being reported separately.
3. That the appropriate Cabinet member is copied into the response to the petitioner when a petition doesn't reach the minimum threshold (under 50 signatories) and is treated as correspondence.

#### **126. REVIEW OF QUESTIONS WORD LIMIT**

Cllr Whitehead and Cllr Bailey spoke under rule 20.1 on this item.

Nicholas Hughes, Committee Services Manager, presented the report.

It was proposed, seconded and agreed that the Committee would recommend to the Standards Committee the following:

To increase the word limit for Full Council questions from Members of the Public and Councillors from 50 words to 150 words.

#### **127. USE OF NON-GENDER SPECIFIC PRONOUNS IN THE CONSTITUTION**

Tim Howes, Corporate Director of Governance and Monitoring Officer presented the report.

The CRWP considered the request to use non-gender specific pronouns and a subsequent change to the constitution.

A member raised the point that the report was referring to removing non gender specific titles, rather than pronouns.

It was proposed, seconded and agreed:

1. That the Committee would recommend the report to the Standards Committee
2. To change the title of this report to 'Removing from the constitution gender-specific titles.

Meeting concluded : 6.50 pm