

Minutes of the Meeting of the General Services Committee held on 24 August 2017 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillors Robert Gledhill, Oliver Gerrish, Gerard Rice, Graham Snell, Roy Jones, Brian Little (Substitute) (substitute for Shane Hebb) and James Halden (Substitute) (substitute for Mark Coxshall)

Apologies: Councillors Shane Hebb and Mark Coxshall

In attendance: Lyn Carpenter, Chief Executive
Steve Cox, Corporate Director of Environment and Place
David Lawson, Deputy Head of Legal & Monitoring Officer
Matthew Boulter, Democratic Services Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer
Wendy Le, Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting may be filmed and was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

1. Minutes

The meeting of the General Services Committee held on 3 May 2017 was approved as a correct record.

2. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

3. Declarations of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Amendment to Polling Place: Polling District F - Belhus Ward

The Monitoring Officer informed the Committee that due to the closure of the Culver Centre, a new polling station was required for District F of the Belhus ward. The Chair felt that the reference to police stations not being open to the public, which was mentioned in the report, was not accurate and that these premises could and should be considered in any future reviews.

RESOLVED:

That the location of Holy Cross Catholic Primary School, Daiglen Drive, South Ockendon be approved as the polling place for Polling District F (Belhus Ward, Culverhouse)

5. Council Questions Procedures

The Committee recognised that in relation to recommendation 1.1 the Mayor had always had the power to allow a public question at his or her discretion. Officers stated that the recommendation would help clarify the Mayor's powers in relation to this issue.

Councillor Gerrish, as Chair of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, stated he was happy to undertake a review into public participation procedures of the council as outlined in the recommendations. Councillor Halden added that he felt the recommendations should not prescribe the areas of review for the overview and scrutiny committee and to allow the committee freedom to look at all aspects of public participation at committees.

There was a brief discussion on the Council's use of forward plans and whether these were understood by general members of the public. Councillor Gerrish stated that the scrutiny review could include this aspect as well.

The Committee continued to debate the recommendations and the Chair stated that the Mayor's powers as outlined in 1.1 should not be seen as party political and therefore, he was of a mind to remove it. He agreed with Councillor Halden that recommendation 1.2 did not need to be prescriptive for the overview and scrutiny committee. The Chair also felt that the second half of recommendation 1.3 (relating to the repetition rule for council questions) could be added to recommendation 1.2. The remaining wording of 1.3 could be amended to include reference to those decisions that were not part of the forward plans as allowed by the constitution. The Committee agreed these suggested changes.

RESOLVED: That:

- 1. The committee, within its remit of considering changes to the constitution, request Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee to review public participation options in the constitution and to report back to general services committee for them to consider the need to make recommendations to full council on possible changes to the constitution. Any further options such as allowing receipt of public questions after publication of the agenda or moving the publication to an earlier date and whether the repetition rule, upon which a public or member question cannot be substantially the same as one previously asked in the preceding 12 months is reduced to 3 or 6 months, will also be considered by the overview and scrutiny committee.**
- 2. To note that the council already publishes forward plans for both cabinet and full council giving 1 months public notice of forthcoming decisions and agenda items (excluding non-key decisions and any urgent decisions, as prescribed by the constitution, that arise) for those meetings.**

6. Establishment of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee or Working Group/Task Force in relation to the Lower Thames Crossing

Councillor Snell supported the Task Force for the main reason that it could be established with immediate effect and be responsive to the issues relating to the Lower Thames Crossing as they arose. Councillor Little agreed with this and added that the Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee could still engage with the Lower Thames Crossing (LTC) issue and request any information or report it wished.

Councillor Gerrish felt that an overview and scrutiny committee would be better defined and supported to carry out the work.

The Chair recognised both proposals as being able to respond to the LTC issues. However, he felt the Task Force allowed co-opted Members to vote and he thought this would be seen as fair and democratic in the eyes of the public. He also felt that the draft terms of reference should be amended to reflect the following co-opted Members:

- One representative from the Lower Thames Action Group. They must be a resident of Thurrock.
- One representative from Thurrock business.
- One representative from the wider Thurrock community who may be either for or against the LTC proposal.

The committee noted that either option would be fully resourced and supported by the officer body.

Councillor Little raised a query of whether MPs could or should be invited to sit on the group. Members felt generally that the group should be representative of Thurrock Council's view of the LTC and not include MPs but officers agreed to check the legal rules around this issue.

The Committee voted on the recommendations with the creation of a Task Force being passed 5 votes to 2.

RESOLVED: That:

- 1. A Lower Thames Crossing Task Force is established.**
- 2. The terms of reference are agreed as amended to reflect the new composition of co-opted members.**

The meeting finished at 6.45 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

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Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**