

# Regulatory & Appeals Committee Minutes

Date: 21 July 2014

Time: 7.00 pm

**PRESENT:** Councillor J A Savage (in the Chair)

Councillors : M C Appleyard, A D Collingwood, R Farmer, R Gaffney, Mrs G A Jones, B E Pearce and D A C Shakespeare OBE, T Snaith.

In attendance: Councillor Mrs L M Clarke OBE

## 7 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Ms P L Lee

## 8 MINUTES

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 9 June 2014 be approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

## 9 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

## 10 PROPOSED CONSTITUTION AMENDMENTS - STANDING ORDERS- QUESTIONS AT FULL COUNCIL

A report was submitted which requested that the wording relating to public and Member questions within the Councils Standing Orders be amended. It was proposed that the length of time permitted to ask a question at Full Council meetings, including supplementary questions be reduced to a maximum of 1 minute.

The report stated that under the current provision whereby 3 minutes per question were allowed, Members were more able to make long statements as part of a preamble prior to reaching the relevant part of the question. Accordingly it was proposed that by reducing the time limit allowed for questions from 3 to 1 minute, there would be more limited opportunity for statements to be made. In addition it would help to negate the opportunity for the questioner to introduce new subject

matter during a supplementary question, thereby helping to ensure compliance with Standing Orders.

With regards to answering of questions, it was proposed to maintain the 3 minute time limit for the initial answer, but with a reduction in the length of time for answers to supplementary questions from 3 to 2 minutes.

A number of views were expressed regarding the matter. Whilst the majority of Members agreed with the proposed recommendations, some expressed the view that it would be more appropriate to postpone the decision until the life of the new Council next year.

Others expressed the view that by implementing the reduction in time limits for questions, particularly in relation to public questions, the Council could give the impression of not listening to relevant concerns, thereby contradicting its image of being a "Caring Council". As such it was suggested that the allocation of time for public questions should remain whilst possibly reducing the time for Members' Questions.

An additional suggestion made was that any remaining unused time allocated to Public questions should be added on to the period allowed for Members' questions, reducing the need for later written answers to unanswered questions which there had been insufficient time to deal with at the meeting. This was suggested as being particularly relevant in the light of the development of the newly formed political group of the Council.

Following detailed debate it was

**RECOMMENDED:** That

(i) S.O. 10 Sect. 5 (Public Questions) be amended to read as follows:

"The questioner shall have a maximum of 1 minute to ask a question, and the answer shall not exceed 3 minutes. A questioner shall then have a maximum of 1 minute to ask a supplementary question, and the answer shall not exceed 2 minutes. Question time shall not exceed 30 minutes in total."

(ii) S. O. 11 Sect 3(a) (Member Questions) be amended to read as follows:

"A Member shall have a maximum of 1 minute to ask a question and the Member responding shall have a maximum of 3 minutes to do so"

(iii) S.O.11 Sect 3(d) (Supplementary Questions) be amended to read as follows:

"A Member shall be allowed up to a maximum of 1 minute to put a supplementary question, and the member responding shall have up to a maximum of 2 minutes to do so"

## 11 MEMBERSHIP OF STANDARDS COMMITTEE - STANDING DEPUTIES

A report was submitted which invited a recommendation to Council as to whether or not standing deputies should be designated to serve on the Standards Committee. It further requested a recommendation as to whether the number of Members appointed to serve on hearings Panel should be reduced in number from a maximum of 5.

Members were informed that membership of the Hearings Panels was drawn from the Standards Committee, which currently allowed for up to 5 Members to sit at any one time. Its role was to hear complaints made against the behaviour of a member of Wycombe District Council or a Town or Parish Council within the district. It was emphasised that that this could lawfully be reduced to 3 if it was Members' preference. If the Committee was minded to allow standing deputies to come into existence, attendance at a suitable training session prior to sitting on the Committee or Panel would be obligatory.

The report stated that in accordance with Standing Order 22.2 appointment of standing deputies of any Standing Committee with less than 16 members should be on a formula of 3.1.1. This would therefore comprise 3 Conservative Members, 1 Labour, and 1 Liberal Democrat Member.

The report summarised the options available to the Committee for recommendation to Full Council for ratification.

In considering the facts before them, Members were in overall agreement with regard to allowing for the existence of standing deputy members on the Standards Committee. Views were varied as to the most appropriate number for members of Hearings Panels. Some felt that due to the irregularity of the meetings, the number should be reduced to 3.

A further view was expressed that the primary consideration should be the ability to be fair and equitable, and to appear to be so. The maximum number of 5 was therefore considered be the most preferable number for the panel hearings, with a qualified pool of people available to step in if and when required.

Following the debate it was:

### **RECOMMENDED:** That

- (i) Subject to the appropriate training being completed standing deputies be permitted to serve on the Standards Committee, and that all relevant consequential changes be made to the Constitution.
- (ii) The number of Members required to serve at meetings of the Hearings Panels remain unchanged, at a maximum of 5.

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Chairman

**The following officers were in attendance at the meeting:**

- Iram Malik - Senior Democratic Services Officer
- Julie Openshaw - District Solicitor