

## CONSTITUTION FOCUS GROUP

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**MINUTES OF THE CONSTITUTION FOCUS GROUP MEETING HELD ON 8 JANUARY 2015 AT THE LEADER'S OFFICE, COUNTY HALL, TROWBRIDGE, BA14 8JN.**

**Present:**

Cllr Stuart Wheeler (Chairman), Cllr Ernie Clark, Cllr Jon Hubbard, Cllr Julian Johnson, Cllr Helen Osborn and Cllr Jeff Osborn

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1 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Mr Paul Neale and Miss Pam Turner.

2 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 December 2014 were presented for consideration, and it was,

**Resolved:**

**That subject to amending “The Democratic Services Representative may” for “The Democratic Services Representative shall” under paragraph 4.9.4 and 4.9.5 of Appendix 1, to APPROVE as a true and correct record and sign the minutes.**

3 **Review of Protocol 7: Media Relations**

The Monitoring Officer presented amendments to Protocol 7 as requested by the Focus Group at its last meeting, clarifying wording on when a Chairman could suspend the recording of a meeting, and other minor changes.

It was requested that it be specified that a designated representative of the Monitoring Officer could be consulted by a Chairman on whether to suspend recording of a meeting. It was also stated that if anyone recording a meeting was responsible for any claims resulting from their recording and would be required to indemnify the council in relation to such claims, this would need to be drawn to their attention with a notification or announcement.

In debating the proposed social media guidance for councillors, the Focus Group determined this should be included within the Protocol as an appendix. The views of the Corporate Leadership Team were to be sought on the contents before a draft was to be considered by the Focus Group for approval.

The Focus Group also considered whether generic advice on Pre-Election Periods should be included within the Protocol, but considered that as a reminder of legal obligations tied to specific legislative deadlines depending on which election was taking place, this should continue to be issued by the Monitoring Officer as and when necessary.

**Resolved:**

**That subject to the later approval by the Focus Group of Social Media Guidance for Councillors, to recommend to the Standards Committee to request Council adopt the proposed revisions to Protocol 7.**

**4 Review of Protocol 1: Briefing and Information for Local Councillors**

The Monitoring Officer presented a revised Protocol 1, which contained a condensed version of the same information as contained in the existing Protocol.

The Focus Group advised on the roles of councillors that should be specifically mentioned within the Protocol, and discussed the level of information regarding their divisions that councillors currently received from council officers, what they felt councillors should be able to receive or be notified of, and how best to facilitate that level of notification. It was noted that currently councillors were not consistently informed of important business within their Divisions.

The Focus Group felt that with the adoption of paperless working and advances in electronic communication and monitoring of issues raised with the council, the Protocol should be redrafted following an investigation into the most appropriate method of notifying councillors of important business within their Divisions.

**Resolved:**

**For a redrafted Protocol 1 to be considered at a future meeting of the Focus Group.**

**5 Review of Protocol 9: Monitoring Officer**

The Monitoring Officer presented revisions to Protocol 9 of the constitution, which were stated to be mostly cosmetic changes, as well as the inclusion of the responsibility to maintain a Register of Interests for members and co-opted members of the council, as well as the town and parish councils of Wiltshire.

**Resolved:**

**To recommend to the Standard Committee that Council adopt the changes to Protocol 9.**

## 6 **Review of Protocol 11: Governance Reporting Arrangements**

The Monitoring Officer presented proposed revisions to Protocol 11 of the constitution, updating the governance reporting arrangements of the council.

The Focus Group debated the proposed changes, requesting external and internal audit list the same 'interested committees', and for updates to include Looked After Children and Safeguarding issues, and references where appropriate to newer bodies such as the Police and Crime Panel and Health and Wellbeing Board. It was also confirmed that amending the constitution remained the responsibility of Council, and this should be made clearer in the document.

### **Resolved:**

**For the Focus Group to consider further revisions at its next meeting.**

## 7 **Review of Protocol 10: Code of Corporate Governance**

The Monitoring Officer stated that Protocol 10 was being revised through the Governance Steering Group, a body of senior officers including the Monitoring Officer and the Associate Director of Finance, as well as the Vice-Chairman of the Audit Committee.

### **Resolved:**

**For the Focus Group to consider any proposed revisions at its next meeting.**

## 8 **Forward Plan and Date of Next Meeting**

It was requested the date of the next meeting be moved from 11 March 2015, with details to be circulated when arranged.

The Forward Plan was noted, with the intention to approve those items deferred for further consideration from the current meeting, along with if possible the Contract and Procurement rules, for final approval at the Council meeting on 12 May 2015.

## 9 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

(Duration of meeting: 1.10 - 2.20 pm)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Kieran Elliott of Democratic Services, direct line 01225 718504, e-mail [kieran.elliott@wiltshire.gov.uk](mailto:kieran.elliott@wiltshire.gov.uk)

Press enquiries to Communications, direct line (01225) 713114/713115

