

## PROCEDURES COMMITTEE

18 November 2024

Present:-

Councillors F Biederman, J Hart (Chair), J Hodgson, C Leaver, C Whitton,  
Y Atkinson and J McInnes.

Councillors S Hughes and F Letch (remote attendance)

\* **75**      **Announcements**

The Chair welcomed Mrs Saltmarsh who was attending the meeting in her capacity as a co-opted member of the Standards Committee to monitor compliance with the Council's ethical frameworks.

\* **76**      **Declarations of Interest**

The Chair reminded Members they should declare any interests they may have in any item to be considered, prior to any discussion taking place on that item. The details of District and or Town and Parish Twin Hatters was on the attached list - [County councillors who are also district, borough, city, parish or town councillors](#).

\* **77**      **Minutes**

It was **MOVED** by Councillor McInnes, **SECONDED** by Councillor Biederman, and;

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 19 September 2024 be signed as a correct record.

\* **78**      **Items requiring urgent attention**

There was no item raised as a matter of urgency.

\* **79**      **Land and Property Committee Protocol**

The Committee considered the draft Land and Property Committee Protocol.

It noted there may be times when the Land and Property Committee or supporting Officers would like to visit sites ahead of an Officer recommendation (or potential recommendation) coming to the Committee for a site to be acquired or disposed of. The Protocol set out clear terms of reference for how these visits should be conducted, attendance, dealing with lobbying, avoidance of predetermination and maintaining impartiality.

Members noted the Land and Property Committee had endorsed the Protocol, following minor amendments suggested at the Committee.

It was **MOVED** by Councillor McInnes, **SECONDED** by Councillor Biederman, and;

**RESOLVED** that the Protocol be endorsed, and its adoption recommended to the Council.

\* 80 **Enabling Remote Attendance and Proxy Voting at Local Authority Meetings**

The Committee noted that the Government had launched a consultation on enabling remote attendance and proxy voting at local authority meetings.

The consultation sought views on the detail and practical implications of allowing remote and hybrid attendance. It also tested views on the possible introduction of proxy voting for those occasions when an elected member, due to personal circumstances, may be unable to attend even remotely. For example, during maternity, paternity or adoption leave.

The Committee noted that a discussion had been held at the Governance Working Group on the 11 November 2024 and the follow comments were made and shared with the Procedures Committee.

Remote Meetings

- That remote attendance at meetings was generally welcomed across the group;
- Councillors did not wish to see a return to fully remote meetings across the Board, particularly for decision making bodies and Scrutiny;
- The importance of feeling / tone / body language which could be challenging in a remote setting;
- The role of Chair should be in person;
- The potential savings that could be achieved and the positive impact on carbon footprints;
- Further discussions would be required on how the Council might implement the changes;
- Remote meetings would be helpful for shorter meetings, with very few items on the agenda;
- Important to have understanding of when remote attendance should be permitted;
- On occasions where a person was unwell, should they be attending meetings at all, even remotely;
- Remote meetings would be helpful in cases of inclement weather (flooding, snow etc) and would allow the meeting to still take place and that attendance and voting would be recognised.

Proxy Voting

- The GWG expressed concerns over this particular proposal, with the governance of the proposal being of significant concern;

- Proxy voting had to be another Member of the Authority;
- How proxy voting might work with independent Members;
- That proxy voting could potentially benefit smaller parties;
- That proxy voting was permissible in general and local elections;
- That remote attendance should help and potentially negate the need for proxy voting;
- A lack of clarity of how proxy voting would work when amendments were moved at a meeting, for example;
- Whether the use of proxy voting could be seen as predetermination with licensing and planning matters;
- In a highly politicised Council, bullying or blackmailing of elected members was a consideration;
- If proxy voting was introduced, the need for exceptionally strong governance and guidance on where it might be appropriate.

A copy of the consultation questions had been circulated with the agenda and the Committee made the following comments and asked these views were fed into the consultation response. The Committee also made specific comments on each of the Consultation questions, which were noted.

In general terms, the Committee agreed with the deliberations of the Governance Working Group. The move to allow remote meetings was supported, but with additional protocols and working practices for the Council to adopt in terms of how it might be implemented and used. Further concerns were raised about a move to proxy voting, but some Members could see a place in exceptionally rare circumstances, but it would require strong caveats and governance to support such a move.

Other matters debated by the Committee included the availability of broadband in the region, potentially impacting on remote attendance at meetings, the general support for more modernised ways of working and the potential use of substitutes as a mechanism moving forwards which was currently not permitted under the Council's Constitution.

**RESOLVED** that a response to the Consultation be drafted, based on the comments above, noting that the Council would prepare further protocols and working practices on remote attendance and proxy voting, should either of these elements become permissible in law. A final copy of the Consultation response would be shared with Members.

**NOTES:**

1. *Minutes should always be read in association with any Reports for a complete record.*
2. *If the meeting has been webcast, it will be available to view on the [webcasting site](#) for up to 12 months from the date of the meeting*

\* **DENOTES DELEGATED MATTER WITH POWER TO ACT**

The Meeting started at 10.30 am and finished at 11.32 am