
MEETING	AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE
DATE	19 MARCH 2012
PRESENT	COUNCILLORS JEFFRIES (CHAIR), BARNES, BROOKS (VICE-CHAIR), BURTON, CUTHBERTSON, WATSON AND STEWARD

PART B - MATTERS REFERRED TO COUNCIL.

57. CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES.

Members considered a report which followed on from a report brought to the previous meeting of the Audit and Governance Committee. It sought to address some matters discussed in relation to the abolition of Cabinet Member Decision Sessions. The report also referred to proposals for amending the terms of reference for Ward Committees which the Cabinet is recommending to Council. The report also provided an update on the proposed abolition of Cabinet Working Groups.

Cabinet Member Decision Sessions

The Audit and Governance Committee had indicated its support for the general principle of ceasing the current practice of routinely holding formal meetings for individual Cabinet Member decisions at its last meeting. However, it was recognised that some of these meetings such as the City Strategy Decision Session, attract public interest. Members had asked the Assistant Director for Governance and ICT to give consideration to some arrangements which might allow for members of the public to require a public meeting to be held.

Following consultation with the Leader of the Council, the Assistant Director advised that the recommendation remains that the decision about holding public decision sessions should remain with the Cabinet Members and the Leader, as any potential options would do little to reduce the work load involved in organising the meetings.

Members made the following comments:

- It was disappointing that no options for a potential process to enable members of the public to require a decision to be made at a public meeting had been included in the report, as Members of the Committee had specifically asked for this to be presented to them.
- City of York Council had a history of exceeding the minimum requirement for public participation and some Members were disappointed to see the suggested abolition of the Decision Sessions and commented that it was a move towards minimum level public participation.
- Whilst some Members recognised that it was not cost effective to have all decisions made in public, concern was expressed that the decision to have a public meeting or not would be made by the Cabinet Member and the Leader, with the Leader being able to over rule the Cabinet Member.
- Some Members felt that it would be beneficial for the Audit and Governance Committee to have a yearly report back on the cabinet member decisions being taken in private and in public to enable the Committee to monitor the new system.

It was moved and seconded to remove references to Cabinet Member decision sessions from the Constitution. When put to the vote, Councillors Brooks, Cuthbertson and Steward voted against the recommendation.

Abolition of Cabinet Working Groups

At the last Audit and Governance meeting the Committee voted against the cessation of the Mansion House Advisory Group. As reported previously, the use of Working Groups is a matter for the Cabinet and does not require a decision by the Audit and Governance Committee. Further to the last meeting, the Leader has confirmed that he is happy to seek and receive advice informally from former Lord Mayors.

Some Members felt that there was still a need for a formal advisory group comprising of a range of Members and former Lord Mayors but accepted that the update was for noting and that the matter was for the Cabinet.

Ward Committees

Cabinet at its meeting on 6th March 2012 had resolved to recommend to Council changes to the Ward Committee arrangements as set out at Annex A to the report. The Audit and Governance Committee was invited to comment on the proposals and made the following observations:

- References in the document to the Chairs of Ward Committees requires clarification as some Wards have 3 Members from differing political parties who may all want to Chair the meetings.
- How residents are notified of the details of Ward Committee meetings should be specified as it would not be acceptable to use only social media.
- If there is to be only 1 formal meeting per year that can make decisions, it should be made clear.
- Clarification of who can request Council Officers to attend Ward Meetings is required as in the past Officers have not attended when they have been requested to.
- Members queried the clerking arrangements for the informal Ward Committees and how residents would be notified of any response to queries raised at such meetings.

- RECOMMENDED: (i) That Council agree to remove references to Cabinet Member decision sessions from the Constitution
- (ii) That Council note the above comments in respect of the Mansion House and Mayoralty Advisory Group.
- (ii) That Council note the above comments in respect of the proposed Constitutional provisions for Ward Committees.

REASON: To ensure that the Council has effective and efficient Constitutional arrangements in place.

Councillor Jeffries, Chair

[The meeting started at 5.30 pm and finished at 6:45pm]