

Report of the General Purposes Committee held on 22 February 2023

Present: Councillor David Boothroyd (Chair), Aicha Less and Paul Swaddle

Constitutional Changes

- (a) The Committee considered a paper providing an outline of the various sections of the Constitution which Officers had been reviewing and subsequent recommendations for change. These include changes to Full Council Standing Orders to introduce public participation in Full Council meetings, and what format this should take, and amendments to the list of Outside Bodies.
- (b) The Majority and Opposition Groups had been consulted and invited to review and provide comments on the proposals. It was noted that the proposals and options on how the new scheme could be shaped were based on best practice reviews from other councils as well as an informal, cross-party meeting of the General Purposes Committee in December 2022. The proposals were also informed by findings from a small (non-representative) survey of Westminster residents.
- (c) We discussed in detail the various options available and were of the opinion that the proposals set out in Table 4 of the report would best support and facilitate the initiative on introducing resident participation in Full Council. This option would result in a reduction in Councillor Issues and a reduction in time for party business but would allow 30 minutes for resident participation. We also discussed and agreed to recommend a change in how Councillor Issues are selected, dispensing with the current randomly generated system and instead inviting Group nominations for which councillor leads this each meeting. It will be for Groups to determine how councillors are chosen.
- (d) We also agreed that the removal of the Future Policy Plan as a device for party business was appropriate and instead allow Groups to select any policy or operational matter for debate provided it is relevant to the Council or city.
- (e) In terms of Outside Bodies, we considered that a new approach was required as the current list was significantly out of date. This was to reduce the list of officially recognised Outside Bodies to which the Council made a corporate nomination to a much smaller, core group of bodies, and to tighten the criteria and process for accepting bodies on to this list in the future.

Recommendation:

That the Committee recommends to Council for approval of:

- 1) the introduction of a 30-minute public participation item at Full Council meetings in line with the headline proposals set out in section 4 of the report.

- 2) the amendment of the petitions scheme to support public participation at meetings of Full Council as set out in section 4 of the report.
- 3) table 4 as set out in section 4 of the report detailing changes to meeting timings in the Full Council standing orders be adopted.
- 4) the selection of Councillor Issues to be in proportion to the sizes of Groups on the council and to remove the random selection of councillors for this item with this process replaced by nominations made by Groups.
- 5) the removal of the future policy plan as a device for selecting debates (and the accompanying requirement for a briefing note to be produced) and its replacement with a requirement for the Group proposing a subject for debate to give a short descriptive paragraph to frame the debate.
- 6) the delegation of authority to the Monitoring Officer to adopt such changes agreed by Full Council into the Constitution and to update and maintain supporting documents such as the Full Council Public Participation Protocol, including to make changes to public participation rules in consultation with Group Whips and Chair of the General Purposes Committee.
- 7) a review of the Public Participation Protocol be undertaken in Spring 2024.
- 8) the amendments to the scheme of Outside Bodies as set out at section 5 of the report, subject to Imperial College Court being retained on the list of recognised outside bodies.
- 9) the Director of Law to investigate further any issues around the indemnity of members serving on an outside body.

David Boothroyd, Chair

Background Papers

Appendix 1 - Report to General Purposes Committee (22.02.23).