

GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 21 September 2021

**Present: Councillor Paul Barrington-King (Chairman)
Councillors Simmons and Wormington**

Officers in Attendance: Jane Clarke (Head of Policy and Governance), Claudette Valmond (Principal Solicitor) and Mark O'Callaghan (Scrutiny and Engagement Officer)

Other Members in Attendance: Councillors Dr Hall and Ellis

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

GP30/21 Apologies were received from Councillors Lewis, Pope, Rands and Scott. Councillor Holden was not present.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

GP31/21 There were no disclosable pecuniary or other significant interests declared at the meeting.

NOTIFICATION OF PERSONS REGISTERED TO SPEAK

GP32/21 Councillor Dr Hall had registered to speak on agenda items 5 and 6.

MINUTES OF THE MEETING DATED 22 JULY 2021

GP33/21 Members reviewed the minutes. No amendments were proposed.

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting dated 22 July 2021 be approved as a correct record.

ELECTORAL REVIEW: COUNCIL SIZE SUBMISSIONS

GP34/21 Jane Clarke, Head of Policy and Governance introduced the report as set out in the agenda.

Registered Speakers: Councillor Dr Hall.

Discussion and questions from Members included the following:

- A proposal was made and agreed to amend the first paragraph of the analysis under the Community Leadership section (Appendix A – page 44 of the report) as follows:
“Generally Councillors fulfil their representational role with elected members by sitting on committees at the council, and taking part in working groups as required, canvassing the opinions of their electors through social media, on the doorstep and meetings with local stakeholders (e.g. community and business leaders) and communicating Council decisions and political discussions that affect them. For many Councillors this makes up the bulk of their work.”
- It appeared from the responses given, the general consensus was either for a small reduction in the number of Councillors or that the current number was about right.
- There was a suggestion for an amendment to better reflect the

different ways Councillors undertook their casework. It was proposed and agreed that the suggested form of words would sit better under the reasoning section of the report rather than within the analysis section of Casework (Appendix A - page 45 of the report). The text to be included as follows:

“Members deal with casework in different ways within the authority, and this is very much dependent on the person. There is no formal requirement for members to handle casework in a particular way. Some Councillors do take a very hands on approach to resolving casework, spending considerable time and effort to go the extra mile for their residents. In the consultation it was clear that many residents wished some Councillors were more active in this task and having a good supply of Councillors will enable us to continue to do this practically.”

- It was suggested that something on accessibility and workload should be included in the reasoning section (Appendix A – Page 36 of the report). It would also be important to encourage a more diverse make-up of the Council.
- It was recognised that it was unlikely that the role would be practical for most of the electorate as a full time occupation. It was also recognised that on occasions the work involved was a full time job. It would be difficult to strike the right balance in order to encourage a wider range of people to become a Councillor.
- The Council welcomed any measures that would encourage greater diversity.
- It was proposed and agreed to include something along the following lines:
“A greater workload for Councillors is likely to make the role less attractive to those in full time employment and those with child care responsibilities. We are concerned that this would have a disproportionate impact on younger people and women who are often those involved in full time work/childcare responsibilities already.”
- The reasoning proposed and agreed at this meeting would go forward to Full Council. It would be possible to include information in this section following Full Council and a meeting to be scheduled with Group Leaders.
- There was clear appetite from those who responded to the consultation to reduce costs by having fewer Councillors. It was suggested that included in the reasoning section it should be stated that the public were clear that costs should be reduced via a reduction in the number of Councillors.
- Whilst the idea of reducing overall costs could be agreed, a trade off in reducing the number of Councillors would reduce effectiveness and therefore should not be supported.
- Councillors basic salary would not result in a significant saving for the Council. Discussions on the merits of reducing the number of Councillors by either 3 or 6 would see a reduction in overall costs to the Council of around £15 to £33k per annum (Councillors receive a basic salary of £5.5k p.a.).
- Councillor salaries/allowances had not risen for a number of years.
- It was agreed that reasoning around costs would not be included.
- It was suggested that there were good reasons to reduce the number of Councillors by small amount. The number proposed was 42 Councillors.
- A recorded vote was requested to determine the number of Councillors to be put forward as a recommendation to Full Council.

A recommendation that 48 Councillors be the number put forward to Full Council:

Agreed – 2
Against – 1
Abstain - 0

The motion was carried.

RESOLVED – That the report be amended to reflect the amendments as detailed. That the number of Councillors to be recommended to Full Council be 48.

WHOLE COUNCIL ELECTIONS

GP35/21 Jane Clarke, Head of Policy and Governance introduced the report as set out in the agenda.

Registered Speakers: Councillor Dr Hall.

Discussion and questions from Members included the following:

- There was concern that a significant amount of education on how all out elections worked would be needed to ensure the electorate both knew and understood the process.
- Many other Councils already used all out elections.
- Candidates moved/resigned etc. but the process of replacing them would be the same. It was therefore unclear as to why all out elections were deemed to be more complicated than elections by thirds.
- It was suggested that understanding multi-candidate voting was more complicated for some people.
- It was confirmed that only two authorities in Kent still did elections by thirds, TWBC and Maidstone.

RESOLVED – That results of the consultation be noted and that the matter be referred to a specially convened meeting of Full Council on 6 October 2021.

URGENT BUSINESS

GP36/21 There was no urgent business.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

GP37/21 The date of the next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday 19 October 2021 at 6:30pm.

NOTE: The meeting concluded at 7.40 pm.