

Members Advisory Panel-New Constitution

A meeting of Members Advisory Panel-New Constitution was held on Tuesday, 6th October, 2009.

Present: Cllr Ken Lupton (Chairman), Cllr Jim Beall, Cllr David Coleman, Cllr Ken Dixon, Cllr Mrs Suzanne Fletcher, Cllr Robert Gibson, Cllr Steve Walmsley and Cllr Bill Woodhead (vice Councillor Beaumont)

Officers: D. Bond, M. Waggott and M. Henderson (LD)

Also in attendance:

Apologies: Cllr Mrs Apedaile, Cllr Mrs Beaumont, Cllr Mrs Cains, Cllr Laing and Cllr Noble

MAP 12/09 Chairman

In the absence of Councillor Laing it was agreed that Councillor Lupton take the Chair

MAP 13/09 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

MAP 14/09 Minutes of the meeting held on 14th September 2009 - to follow

The Minutes of the meeting held on 14th September 2009 were agreed as a correct record subject to the following change:-

in relation to the item entitled Constitutional Arrangements and the protocol for electing the Mayor/Deputy Mayor the minute should clearly indicate that longest cumulative service would apply to service with Stockton on Tees Borough Council only.

MAP 15/09 Members' Questions at Council

Members were reminded that, at its last meeting, the Panel had discussed issues surrounding Members' Questions at Council. There was some concern that Members' Question Time was becoming unnecessarily lengthy and some questions could have been dealt with by contacting officers outside of the Council meeting. In order to allow members time to discuss this issue with their groups it had been agreed that a further meeting of the Panel be held. The Leader had undertaken to circulate a discussion note to all group leaders, which he had duly done.

The Panel was provided with that discussion note which proposed a protocol which would require questions to be initially submitted to the relevant Director and provided a mechanism that would see questions escalated to the relevant Cabinet member, and then Council, if not answered to the member's satisfaction. The Panel also received a schedule detailing other authorities' rules relating to members' questions.

Members discussed the matter at length and there were a number of views put forward.

At the conclusion of discussion the Panel agreed that the following proposal be put to the next Council meeting:-

- Members' Questions Time to be the penultimate item on relevant Council Meeting agendas
- a time limit of 2 minutes to be placed on the putting of a valid members question at Council (as the question will have been circulated/tabled, ahead of the meeting, the member may put the question purely by reference to the 'question as tabled')
- the respondent to be limited to 2 minutes in giving his/her answer
- the supplementary question to be limited to 2 mins as would the response to that supplementary question.

The Panel also agreed that, to avoid questions being unnecessarily asked at Council meetings, members should be encouraged to initially seek satisfactory answers to questions from relevant directors/members.

The Panel was aware that Council Procedure rules indicated that Members' Question Time should not exceed 30 minutes and there was no proposal to change that rule.

AGREED that a proposal in line with the above be presented at the Council's next meeting.