

CONSTITUTION WORKING PARTY

13 MARCH 2013

Present: Councillor I Sharpe (Chair)
Councillor J Aron (Vice-Chair)

Councillors M Mills, S Johnson, K Hastrick, S Rackett and
T Williams

Officers: Head of Legal and Property Services
Democratic Services Manager

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

2 DISCLOSURE OF INTEREST (IF ANY)

There were no disclosures of interest.

3 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 February 2012 were submitted and signed.

4 SUGGESTED AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION

The Working Party received a report of the Head of Legal & Property.

The Group Leaders and the two independent councillors had been asked whether they wished to bring forward any particular concerns or items for review at this meeting. Requests had been made for the Working Party to look at the operation of the budget debate and time for questions on the Mayors Report at Council meetings.

In addition officers were asking the Working Party to consider some changes to the content of the agenda for Annual Council and Budget Setting Council.

Budget Debate

The Chair referred to the new timing system installed in the Chamber which indicated when councillors had run out of speaking time. This had resulted in speaking times being more strictly adhered to than in the past and as a result the

Mayor had run out of time when presenting her speech to Budget Council. He considered that it was appropriate for the whole of the Mayor's Budget speech to be heard and that as the convention was for Groups Leaders to be allowed double the standard time to respond (i.e. ten minutes) it would seem fair to increase the Mayor's speaking time from ten to twenty minutes.

Other Members of the Working Party endorsed this view and it was therefore AGREED that the length of the Mayor's speech at Budget Council be increased to twenty minutes and that the convention to allow Group Leaders to speak in response for up to ten minutes at this meeting be formally adopted as a Procedure Rule in the Constitution.

Amendments

There was a convention at Budget Council that any amendments were debated together and voted for *en bloc* at the end of the debate. The Working Party was asked to consider whether this practice should be more generally adopted for any motion where there were multiple amendments.

Councillor Rackett commented that Members should be encouraged to put down amendments at the earliest opportunity and include them all as part of the debate.

Other Working Party Members endorsed this view and it was therefore AGREED that the practice of debating all amendments together and voted for *en bloc* at the end of the debate be included in the Constitution

Budget Report higher up the agenda

A request had also been received to put the Budget report higher up the agenda to reduce the risk of running out of time and the need to suspend Procedures Rules to continue after 10.30pm.

Councillor Rackett advised that in some authorities the budget was dealt with at a dedicated meeting and maybe this was a possibility for Watford. The Head of Legal & Property explained that the budget at Watford had to be set by 8th February because of the elected mayoral arrangements. The budget Council meeting was therefore held at the end of January; the next Ordinary meeting took place in March.

Councillor Sharpe suggested that a time limit be put on Mayor's Questions at Budget Council. The Head of Legal & Property Services reminded the Working Party of the previous arrangement for Mayor's Questions which had limited the number of councillors given the opportunity to ask a question. The process had therefore been changed to allow everyone an equal opportunity to ask a question.

Councillor Aron asked whether there could be a time limit on the Members' Remuneration debate as it was noted that more time had been spent on this item than on the actual budget report. Councillor Sharpe responded that he was keen

not to stifle debate but suggested that maybe the Chairman could have a word with Group Leaders beforehand to encourage brevity. Councillor Hastrick commented that it was likely that one councillor could represent the views of the whole Group. It was agreed that the Chairman should bear in mind the need to keep the meeting moving along.

It was noted that the report on members' remuneration had to be taken before the budget item as it could have a financial impact. The Working Party therefore AGREED the following order of business for Budget Council meetings:-

- Apologies
- Disclosures
- Minutes
- Members' Remuneration
- Budget Report
- Mayors' Report
- Motions
- All other business

Time for individual questions on Mayor's Report

An Independent Councillor had asked the Working Party to consider adding an extra 30 seconds to the time allowed to ask a question of the Mayor. Councillor Rackett commented that one minute was long enough to ask a question especially as there should be no statements or supplementaries.

The Working Party endorsed this view and AGREED that the time for asking a question of the Mayor remained at one minute.

Council Agenda Items

The Working Party was asked to review the items excluded from specific Council agenda as specified in paragraph 2.1 (a) – (o) of the Constitution.

The Working Party AGREED to make no change to the current arrangements.

The Head of Legal & Property advised that a review of Contract Procedure Rules would be submitted to the Annual Council in May.

RESOLVED

that the revisions agreed by the Working Party be recommended to Annual Council for approval.

Chair

The Meeting started at 6.30 pm
and finished at 7.00 pm