



# STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

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## COUNCIL

Thursday, 14 December 2023

7.00 - 11.01 pm

Council Chamber

### Minutes

#### Membership

##### **Councillor Doina Cornell (Chair)**

Councillor Beki Aldam

Councillor Paula Baker

Councillor Martin Baxendale

Councillor Natalie Bennett

Councillor Catherine Braun

\* Councillor Chris Brine

Councillor Martin Brown

Councillor Gordon Craig

Councillor Kate Crews

\* Councillor Laurie Davies

Councillor Stephen Davies

Councillor Katrina Davis

Councillor Jonathan Edmunds

Councillor Christopher Evans

Councillor Helen Fenton

\* Councillor Colin Fryer

\* Councillor Victoria Gray

Councillor Lindsey Green

\* Councillor Trevor Hall

Councillor Jessie Hoskin

\* Councillor Nicholas Housden

Councillor Nick Hurst

Councillor Steve Hynd

Councillor George James

Councillor Julie Job

\*Absent

##### **\* Councillor Norman Kay (Vice-Chair)**

Councillor Christopher Jockel

Councillor John Jones

Councillor Haydn Jones

Councillor Robin Layfield

Councillor Gary Luff

\* Councillor Jenny Miles

\* Councillor Dave Mossman

Councillor Gill Oxley

Councillor Loraine Patrick

Councillor Martin Percy

Councillor Keith Pearson

Councillor Nigel Prenter

Councillor Steve Robinson

Councillor Mattie Ross

Councillor Mark Ryder

Councillor Lucas Schoemaker

Councillor Ashley Smith

Councillor Nigel Studdert-Kennedy

Councillor Haydn Sutton

Councillor Brian Tipper

Councillor Ken Tucker

Councillor Chloe Turner

Councillor Tricia Watson

\* Councillor Rich Wilsher

#### Officers in Attendance

Chief Executive

Corporate Director (Monitoring Officer)

Democratic Services & Elections Manager

Head of Housing Solutions

Strategic Director of Resources

#### CL.042

#### Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Brine, Davies, Fryer, Gray, Hall, Housden, Miles, Mossman and Wilsher.

**CL.043**      **Declaration of Interests**

There were none.

**CL.044**      **Minutes**

Councillor Turner proposed an amendment to section CL.035 of the minutes. She requested for the second to last bullet point of her amendment to state a 'six-monthly basis' as opposed to the monthly basis.

Councillor Braun seconded the amendment.

On being put to a vote, the Motion was carried unanimously.

**RESOLVED To make the above amendment to the Minutes and bring back to the following meeting for approval.**

**CL.045**      **Announcements**

The Chair held a minutes silence in tribute to the former Chief Executive, Richard Ollin, the former Monitoring Officer, Patrick Arran and Councillor Norman Kay who had sadly passed away and offered her heartfelt condolences to their families. Councillors and the Chief Executive were invited to say a few words in remembrance.

The Leader, Councillor Braun provided an update regarding the Local Plan and advised that it was still going through the Examination in Public. She confirmed that the Council had been working with the Inspectors to address concerns which focused on specific strategic road network issues with Junction 12 and 14 of the M5. She confirmed that in October the Inspectors had written to Stroud District Council (SDC), National Highways, South Gloucestershire Council and Gloucestershire County Council asking all parties to work together to agree a joint action plan. She confirmed that they had responded to all the points raised by the Inspectors and all parties had worked together to submit the joint action plan. The response was sent by the deadline of the 30 November 2023 and the inspectors had given permission last week to publish the correspondence. She reminded Members that currently the Inspectors controlled the timetable, the publishing of documents, any modifications or changes to the draft plan and any future consultations. All these elements were outside of the Council's current control.

She confirmed that they were now waiting for the Inspectors to consider the joint action plan and determine whether they would grant a six month pause in the examination.

**CL.046**      **Public Question Time**

Public questions were submitted and supplementary questions were also asked by Mr Steve Willetts. (Please refer to the Council's [recording](#) and [Agenda Item 5](#)).

**CL.047**      **Member Questions**

There were none.

Councillor Green advised that 2 questions were submitted but they were rejected by the Chief Executive. The Chair was provided with a signed request for an Extraordinary Meeting of Full Council by Councillor Green and agreed to consider the request.

**CL.048**      **Motion on Council Support for the Extension of the Franchise - Proposed by Councillor Steve Hynd and Seconded by Councillor George James**

Councillor Hynd introduced the Motion which asked for the support of those who called the Stroud District their home by allowing them to exercise their right to vote in local elections. He stated that Councillors power as local councillors was derived directly from those who elected them and that as long as they were denied the right to vote their standing as elected representatives would be diminished. He provided a brief outline of the key changes to the franchise as a result of the Elections Act being introduced. He confirmed that from May 2024 any EU citizen who entered the UK after 31 December 2020 would only have the right to vote in England if there was a reciprocal voting arrangement, these were currently only in place for; Poland, Luxembourg, Portugal, and Spain. He stated that these changes were fundamentally unfair and that the added complexity would only compound the existing problems as under the current rules just 66% of commonwealth and EU citizens were registered to vote compared to 87% of UK citizens. He also advised that there were a host of other reasons for people needing to be on the electoral register, for example, it could improve their credit score and therefore residents would be disadvantaged.

Councillor Green asked for clarification as to how the Motion was about a matter which the Council had responsibility and drew Members attention to the Officer implications which included details of work that was underway. Councillor Hynd confirmed that it was a way of showing support for Officers work and to go a step further by writing to the Secretary of State.

In response to a question from Councillor Studdert-Kennedy, Councillor Hynd advised that everyone did not have equal voting rights across the world and that the Motion was asking for voting rights to be based on residency rather than Nationality so that everyone who was legally living in the UK would have the right to vote.

Councillor Hynd confirmed, in response to Councillor Watson, that they were requesting the same rights for residents of England as were available in devolved authorities.

Councillor S Davies asked if the franchise was extended as requested in the Motion whether an American citizen would have the right to vote in presidential elections and local elections in the UK. Councillor Hynd confirmed that was the case.

Councillor Hynd provided clarification, in response to a query raised by the Chair, that the Motion was only about local elections and not national elections.

Councillor Schoemaker asked whether if England adopted the extended franchise whether other Countries would also implement similar franchises. Councillor Hynd advised that extending the franchise might encourage good will to British Citizens living elsewhere.

Proposed by Councillor Hynd and Seconded by Councillor James.

Councillor Smith advised that he was pleased to see the Motion brought forward and stated that he had spoken at length to the Migrant Democracy Project regarding their campaign. He stated that the power and responsibilities as councillors came from those who elected them and if there was a proportion of residents who were not able to vote then that would be unfortunate and an affront to democracy.

Councillor S Davies raised concerns that the Member questions submitted for the Council Meeting had been refused and stated that he wished that they were talking about the Local Plan instead.

Councillor Brown stated that there were many permanent legal residents of the UK, who paid taxes, whose children went to school, who used the services of the Council and therefore had an interest in the decisions of this Council and other Councils. He believed that it was a basic matter of fairness that those people should be able to have a say.

Councillor Patrick stated that people who wanted to vote in the UK should become a citizen.

Councillor Prenter stated that people could vote in British elections even if they had lived abroad for 15 years or more and that this was unfair for people who were living in Stroud, had a vested interest in local services and had been paying Council Tax who were unable to vote.

Councillor Layfield offered support for the Motion and stated that if residents paid tax they should be entitled to have a choice in where that tax was spent.

Councillor Braun highlighted the huge inequality within the UK, with different franchise rules for Scotland and Wales. She also raised concerns with the elections coming up in May 2024 and the changes in legislation as people may be confused about whether they were able to vote or not.

Councillor James stated that he was seconding the motion because he wanted to give a voice to those who didn't have one so that they could have a say in their communities. He stated that he was an advocate for the fundamental principal of democracy and the right to participate in the political process. He advised that those individuals who contributed to their communities in countless ways deserved to have a say. He stated that the right to vote was not a privilege that should be granted based on nationality but a fundamental right that should be extended to all that contribute to society.

Councillor Hynd highlighted reasons as to why the franchise should not be linked to citizenship including that some countries did not allow dual nationality and that the application of citizenship was expensive, bureaucratic and out of reach for some people. He stated that a number of local authorities had backed the Motion already, including the London Assembly.

On being put to the Vote, the Motion was carried with 25 votes in favour, 6 against and 10 abstentions.

**RESOLVED The Council commits to:**

- Ask the Chief Executive of the Council to write to the Secretary of State at the Department for Levelling Up**

**Housing and Communities requesting that the franchise for local elections be extended in England and Northern Ireland to all qualifying foreign nationals in line with eligibility criteria in Scotland and Wales. This would ensure a UK-wide and fair approach so that all our residents who are also our council tax payers are enfranchised. The letter should emphasise the Stroud District Council's support for such measures.**

- **Continue collaborative work with voluntary sector organisations in our local authority area to reach residents about current voter eligibility rules and how to vote.**
- **Follow the legislative process to implement the Elections Act and develop a process to ensure that the implementation of the Elections Act, including the removal of some EU citizens from the register, does not wrongfully remove eligible voters from the register.**
- **Continue promoting voter registration and photo ID requirements to residents at citizenship ceremonies events, and other communication channels.**

#### **CL.049 Recommendation from Strategy and Resources Committee**

The Chair of Strategy and Resources Committee, Councillor Braun, introduced the report which included a proposal to establish community funding. She advised that the decision Council was being asked to consider was adding the £35K per annum running costs to the annual budget. She gave a brief introduction to the crowdfunding/community funding practice and advised that it was a common way of raising funds for good causes. She highlighted the ties community funding had with wider Council aspirations including helping to empower communities and creating an environment where innovation and collaboration were encouraged.

The Chair of Strategy and Resources Committee confirmed that many councils were already successfully operating community funding campaigns. They would be working with a specialised funding vendor called Spacehive who would provide expert support in terms of how to publicise, establish and operate the campaigns. Typically, Spacehive delivered an 85% success rate.

She advised that Strategy and Resources Committee had discussed at length the next steps and Officers were working on detailed processes and policies, including the role of Members and how the fund would operate. This would be presented for discussion to the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting in March 2024.

In response to Councillor Watson the Strategic Director of Resources confirmed that Council were not being asked to agree to the match funding pot as this would come from an allocation of funding already within the Councils reserves which the Strategy and Resources Committee had the power to allocate.

Councillor S Davies asked for clarification as to whether the £35k would be spent prior to the agreement of procedures and processes at the next Strategy and Resources Committee. The Strategic Director of Resources confirmed that Strategy and Resources Committee had already made the decision to procure and that this process had begun but was not expected to be finalised by March.

In response to Councillor Studdert-Kennedy the Strategic Director of Resources advised that the £35k annual sum would be included, if Council agreed, when they presented the MTFP for 2024/25 as they were looking at a 3 year term. He confirmed that other financial elements had already been agreed by Strategy & Resources Committee and it was only the annual running cost which Council was being asked to consider.

The Chair of Strategy and Resources Committee, in response to Councillor Studdert-Kennedy confirmed that in the event that a project was successful, funding that had been committed would go to the project but if it wasn't successful it would be returned back to the person who made the pledge.

Councillor Green asked for clarification on who paid the 5% fee. Councillor Braun highlighted paragraph 6.1 on page 26 which referenced the need to decide how to budget for the 5% success fee for each project and advised that this could either be through an additional allocation to the revenue budget or from the match funding pot. Final proposals would be included in the follow up report covering the scheme detail in March 2024.

The Chair of Strategy and Resources Committee, in response to Councillor Ryder stated that the budget for the 3 year term had not been included as part of the decision as it was a new project councillors may wish to reevaluate the scheme when setting the budget for the following year. She stated that if the scheme was successful, she would expect that Members would wish for it to continue given the huge range of community benefits that it could deliver to the District. She also confirmed that they would be able to cancel the contract after the first year if appropriate.

Councillor Tipper asked for clarification where the match funding would come from. The Chair of Strategy and Resources Committee drew Members attention to paragraph 6.1 on page 26, which confirmed that match funding would be found from Council reserves with £80k funded from the business rates pilot reserve and £20k would be allocated from the Lucky Severn Community Fund.

Councillor Prenter asked whether there was any information on other councils that used community funding and whether it was successful. The Chair of Strategy and Resources Committee confirmed that Cotswold District Council had successfully implemented the same scheme, with the same provider, and a lot of other councils across the country were increasingly looking to implement the model.

In response to a question about timescales from Councillor Watson, the Chair of Strategy and Resources Committee advised that the intention was that the scheme would go live in the next financial year.

Proposed by Councillor Braun and seconded by Councillor Bennett.

Councillor Bennett believed that Community Funding would empower communities and give support to community groups who didn't necessarily have the ability or knowledge on how to publicise a project.

Councillor Turner highlighted the work of Cotswold District Council and advised that around £300k of investment had leveraged £800k.

Councillor Aldam advised that she had recently met with the arts organisations as part of developing the cultural strategy and that it was strongly felt that they were competing with each other for ever decreasing smaller pots of money. She stated that it was a fantastic

way of lowering the fierce competition of the begging bowl culture so would be supporting it.

Councillor Studdert-Kennedy raised concerns about the lack of detail and stated that he would have liked to see the detail of this scheme before they were asked to make decisions. He requested that the next report containing the details be issued to Council in full well before the next Strategy and Resources Committee meeting.

Councillor Hurst echoed concerns raised by Councillor Studdert-Kennedy. He believed that the decision was being made by Council too early and that Strategy and Resources Committee needed to look at it in more detail before the Council should make a decision.

Councillor Watson spoke in very strong support of the initiative and highlighted a number of projects in her ward that could benefit from the scheme.

Councillor Jockel stated that it was a very well-established form of social investment and advised that community organisations, by virtue of them being embedded in the community, were often best placed to deal with community issues and therefore investment in them and support to them was critical.

Councillor S Davies thought that it was a brilliant scheme but raised concerns about the lack of details provided.

Councillor Layfield spoke in support of the report and highlighted his personal experience of the challenges of trying to raise grant funding for projects.

Councillor Craig stated that he was excited by the initiative but raised concerns regarding the lack of detail provided.

Councillor Braun stated that it was right to take a decision in principal to set up a community funding scheme and then start to think about the detail and policy around that scheme. She confirmed that it was a decision for members about what kind of policy they wanted to have, what kind of projects they wanted to support and the sums of money that could potentially be allocated per project. She welcomed all members views on the detailed proposals that would come forward on 7 March 2024 at the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting.

On being put to the vote, the Motion was carried with 38 votes in favour and 3 abstentions.

**RESOLVED**            **To agree to include the contract sum of £35k in the Medium Term Financial Plan for 2024/25 as recommended by Strategy and Resources Committee.**

b)     Extension of Berkeley Car Park

The Chair of Strategy and Resources Committee introduced the report which contained a proposal to extend the District Councils car park at Marybrook Street in Berkeley. The extension would provide approximately 23 additional spaces close to the town centre. The work would involve demolishing a garage site owned by the Housing Revenue Account and expanding the existing District Council car park onto the site. The full market value of the garages would transfer into the Housing Revenue Account. Works would require planning permission and subject to Council approval officers would begin the process of developing and submitting a planning application. Any detailed proposals for the site would

include consideration of the number of disabled spaces available. The project was being developed in partnership with Berkeley Town Council.

Councillor Luff asked what safeguards could be imposed on the development to support active travel. The Chair of Strategy and Resources Committee advised that if the concept was approved the planning application would need to be considered by Development Control Committee and cycle parking facilities could also be considered.

In response to Councillor Watson, the Chair of Strategy and Resources Committee advised that she was unable to confirm what the exact investment return would be but it would allow the Council to support market town vitality and would help to support local businesses and local shops.

Councillor Green provided clarification to questions from Councillor Luff and Watson to confirm that bicycle storage was available in the town centre and that the car park would help to support tourism which was a key part of the Council Plan.

In response to Councillor Turner, the Chair of Strategy and Resources Committee advised that work hadn't started on the detailed planning application.

Councillor Brown asked for clarification as to whether the garage sites were currently in use. The Chair of Strategy and Resources Committee advised that the next step would be to make sure the site was vacant and to give notice on anyone who was still renting before the site was sold. She highlighted paragraph 2.3 which stated that 8 garages were vacant and 5 were rented on a monthly basis.

Councillor Layfield asked for assurance that enough disabled parking would be provided to ensure a decent provision and not just a token gesture. Councillor Bennett advised that she had spoken to a resident from Berkeley previously about the lack of disabled car parking spaces and had spoken to the Strategic Director of Resources to confirm that it was a priority. The Strategic Director of Resources confirmed that it was covered in the equalities analysis and that it was seen as an important issue. He advised that when drawing up the plans it would include consideration of the appropriate number of disabled places.

Proposed by Councillor Braun and Seconded by Councillor Bennett.

Councillor Pearson stated that he would be supporting the extension of the car park as it was a way to help market towns.

Councillor Green was also fully in support of the extension of the Car Park and the great work that Berkeley Town Councillors had done. She stated that they local places included the Jenner Museum, Cattle Country and Berkeley Castle but the issues with parking in Berkeley meant that people who visited these places did not then stop in Berkeley Town Centre.

Councillor Watson raised concerns that they were allocating a relatively large amount of money for relatively few spaces and was therefore uncertain whether she was able to support the initiative.

Councillor Robinson stated that SDC had been criticised previously for not working closely with towns and they were seeing great improvements with SDC listening to parish and



town councils. He highlighted a similar change in Nailsworth town which had led to increased footfall.

Councillor Craig advised that the Town improvement plan had been put together for at least 10 years and that one of the big stumbling blocks had been parking. He stated that Berkeley was the local hub for a wide rural area and that people wanted to visit but the only way they could get into Berkeley was by car and this would therefore be beneficial for the town.

Councillor Jockel advised that he was broadly in favour of this if the ecological and environmental concerns including landscaping were addressed as part of the detail.

Councillor Jones confirmed that he was in support of the extension of the car park and advised that it would help tourism which was a massive element of how they were going to remain financially sustainable.

Councillor Tipper stated that Berkeley was a very rural area and it served the area as its nucleus. He reminded Members of the location of the car park which was opposite the library and near to a school and doctors surgery, the car park would therefore also benefit local individuals as well as visitors.

Councillor Turner stated that as Chair of Environment Committee she felt that there was a conflict between SDCs economic regeneration objectives and the 2030 objectives. She advised that she would like to see ecological improvements and secure cycle parking as part of the scheme. Despite her reservations she confirmed that she respected the right of local communities to bring forward projects and was therefore going to support the request.

Councillor Crews believed they could think more creatively to adjust car parking hours to increase footfall in the town and was conflicted as to whether to support the initiative.

Councillor Hurst stated that he didn't see any conflict in extending the car park and looking after the design issues around ecology and that any issues could be dealt with in the detailed design stage which would come back to the council.

Councillor Hynd suggested that Berkeley was an example of a market town where there was a clear need for more car parking spaces. He looked forward to seeing exciting, ecological designs and argued that this could be an opportunity for Berkeley to be a pioneer and show what could be done with a car park in terms of renewable energy and sustainable drainage.

Councillor Brown advised that he had been swayed by what he had heard from Councillors and the confirmation of local support but was still torn as he was reluctant to increase car parking as this would inevitably lead to more cars.

Councillor Bennett offered support for the extension of the car park as one of the commitments the Council had made was to support the market towns.

Councillor Braun was pleased to see the proposal come forward and congratulated Berkeley Town Council on the work they were doing to support their town centre regeneration. She stated that she saw an opportunity in the next phase of future use of our car parks and suggested that they could think more about electric vehicles and car clubs.

On being put to the vote, the Motion was carried with 38 votes in favour and 3 abstentions.

**RESOLVED****To**

- 1) Appropriate the SDC Garage Site from the Housing Revenue Account into the General Fund**
- 2) Add to the Capital Budget the required sums for completion of the project to extend the public car park - subject to the grant of planning permission.**
- 3) Delegate Authority to the Strategic Director of Communities to make the appropriate parking orders as required.**

The Chair asked members if they wished to continue the meeting given that the time was approaching 10pm and in accordance with the Councils' Constitution section 3 paragraph 6, members would need to vote in order to continue the meeting.

After being put to a vote, the Motion was carried.

**RESOLVED****To continue the meeting beyond 10pm.****CL.050****Recommendation from Housing Committee**a) Safe and Legal Routes to the UK

The Chair of Housing Committee, Councillor Ross, introduced the report and advised that the Government was asking local authorities to pledge how many households, of people who arrive in the UK via Safe and Legal Routes, could be housed by each local authority in 2025. The aggregate figure would then be used by Government to cap the number of migrants that would be allowed into the UK. The UK currently operated 7 Safe and Legal Routes for migrants to enter the UK, these included resettlement schemes such as the UK Resettlement Scheme as well as bespoke schemes for individuals from Afghanistan, Ukraine, Hong Kong and close family members of refugees. The Government had stated that the objective of the cap was to check that the UK could accommodate and support those arriving through safe and legal routes effectively. She confirmed that the timescales were tight and that the deadline to provide the figures was 15 December 2023. The Housing Committee had recommended that the Council pledge a nominal 2 housing units at this time, with Housing Committee committed to review the capacity to increase this pledge within the next financial year.

In response to Councillor Brown, the Chair of Housing Committee confirmed that refugees wouldn't have any priority over local people but the houses would need to come from SDC stock. She also confirmed that they had not heard of any funding being provided.

Councillor Hurst asked for confirmation of how many houses the Council were building at the moment. The Chair of Housing Committee confirmed that there had been 229 completions of new affordable homes in the District but there were 3966 local residents on the waiting list. There were 54 new homes left in the new build programme.

Proposed by Councillor Ross and seconded by Councillor Schoemaker.

A number of Councillors raised concerns and highlighted the following points:

- Councillor Jockel stated that it felt like passing the buck and that framing the host population and refugees as being in competition with each other was entirely false.

- Councillor Prenter stated that he had concerns as to why central Government wanted the information.
- Councillor Aldam was angry by the appalling way that the country was treating people who needed help. She stated that the language from the Home Office outlined coldly the cost and burden refugees had on local authorities and that Councils were being manipulated to produce ridiculously low figures so government could hold it up as a hard limit. She highlighted government actions against core British values in relation to its recent legislation on refugees and immigration.
- Councillor Turner was disgusted by the ideology behind the questionnaire they had been asked to complete but respected the work by Officers that had gone into the report.
- Councillor Baker stated that the paper had upset her as she believed that the Government was asking cash strapped councils to justify low limits on refugees being housed.
- The Chair advised that it was a trap for local councils whether they did or didn't respond and objected to the premise that those asylum seekers were seen as burdens on services.

Proposed by Councillor Ross, seconded by Councillor Schoemaker.

Councillor Ross stated that it was a difficult decision to come to and shared concerns about the request from government.

On being put to the vote, the Motion was carried unanimously.

#### **RESOLVED**

**That a pledge of 2 housing units for migrants arriving via safe and legal routes in 2025 is made to Government with the pledge to be reviewed by the Housing committee during 2024/25 to determine whether it should be increased.**

#### **CL.051      Review of Polling District, Polling Places and Polling Stations 2023**

The Leader, Councillor Braun, introduced the report and confirmed that the council had a duty to conduct and complete a polling district and a polling place review between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025. The review was being carried out to ensure that the council was able to deliver the next UK parliamentary General Election on the correct boundaries and make any necessary changes following the community governance review which was agreed by council earlier in 2023. She confirmed that two consultations had taken place earlier in the year, the consultation sought the views from interested parties and the residents of Stroud District. It also sought views from the residents or groups that had specific expertise in disabled access. Consideration had been given to all consultation responses received and where alternative venues were listed officers had explored these locations against the accessibility criteria and guidance from the Electoral Commission. A number of proposed changes were outlined in section 2 of the report and the schedule of polling places had been included in Appendix B.

The Chair raised a question regarding the polling station in Dursley. The Democratic Services and Elections Manager advised that they had received a recommendation from Dursley Town Council to consider an alternative venue because of the closure of the car park next to the Methodist Church which had been used in the past. She advised that a visit to the Chantry Centre had been undertaken by Officers and although there was a 23 hour free car park nearby it was on a very steep incline which would make it difficult for

people to be able to access the polling station independently especially for wheel chair users. She confirmed that the Tabernacle was also considered as a polling station but the parking provision was also not suitable and so they were recommending that the polling station should remain at the Methodist Church. There was carparks nearby at the Pulse and Sainsburys which had flat and level access to the polling station.

Proposed by Councillor Braun and seconded by Councillor Bennett.

Councillor Bennett stated that it was important to make sure polling stations were accessible to as many people as possible and was in full support of the recommendations.

On being put to the vote, the Motion was carried unanimously.

- RESOLVED**      **To**
- a) Approve the schedule of polling districts and polling places as listed in Appendix B;**
  - b) Authorise the Corporate Policy and Governance Manager to make necessary amendments to the register of electors; and**
  - c) Delegate authority to the (Acting) Returning Officer to approve alternative polling places in the event any polling place becomes unavailable or unsuitable.**

#### **CL.052      Updates to the Constitution**

The Corporate Director (Monitoring Officer) introduced the report and confirmed that the Constitution Working Group had met on 21 September 2023 to consider a number of proposed changes. Following discussions at the working group it was agreed to recommend the following to Council:

- Include an additional article at 2.7 to provide some clarity around Member Attendance and the 6 month rule as set out in section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972.
- Amend the way political balance and seats were allocated for Committees to allow seats to be offered to independent councillors.
- To increase the number of seats on the Audit and Standards Committee to help ensure quorum.
- To agree that Audit and Standards Committee should not be subject to the rules of political proportionality so that seats were available to Councillors who had an interest in the work of the Committee. This amendment would need to be subject to a nem con vote,

The Corporate Director, in response to a question from Councillor Turner, confirmed that the nem con vote would be required at the AGM meeting if they wished to allocate seats for Audit and Standards Committee not based on political balance. She also confirmed that this was the case at a number of other Councils.

Councillor Green asked why the increase in membership on the Audit and Standards Committee was proposed to take place from May 2024 and not immediately. The Corporate Director advised that they were struggling to get enough people and that it was therefore considered to be the most sensible option with the elections being held in May.

Councillor Studdert-Kennedy asked whether it would be better to increase the number of seats for Audit and Standards Committee to 11 immediately.

Councillor Turner asked for clarification as to how the seats would be allocated. The Corporate Director confirmed that they would calculate the political balance and have discussions with Group Leaders to see if they were able to fill their allocation of seats and would be able to move things around if they were unable to fill them.

Proposed by Councillor Studdert-Kennedy and seconded by Councillor Green.

Councillor Studdert-Kennedy proposed an amendment to the decision box, he proposed a change to point 3 from 'May 2024' to 'with immediate effect' and added an additional point 5 to state 'agree that quorum for the Audit and Standards Committee remains at 5'

The proposer and seconder confirmed they were happy to accept the amendment.

Councillor Robinson requested that, due to the issues with quorum that the council had faced recently, that the Constitution Working Group be tasked with considering deputies so that if Councillors were not able to attend meetings their deputies could attend instead.

Councillor Green encouraged Members to support the changes.

Councillor Studdert-Kennedy provided reassurance that the reason he suggested the amendment was because 2 meetings had been cancelled in quick succession and he could not guarantee that they would have the necessary attendance at the next 2 meetings.

It was agreed to take a vote on each point separately.

On being put to the vote, the Motion was carried.

## **RESOLVED**

### **To:**

- 1. note the position regarding members attendance and agrees that the wording in paragraph 2.3 of this report is added to Article 2 of the Constitution;**
- 2. agree to adopt the updated process for the allocation of seats on committees as set out in paragraph 3, with effect from May 2024;**
- 3. agree that, with immediate effect the number of seats on the Audit and Standards Committee shall increase by two, to a total of 11 members**
- 4. agree at the Annual General Meeting in May 2024 Council are asked to agree that that Audit and Standards Committee should not be subject to the rules of political proportionality, noting that this will need to be the subject of a nem con vote to become effective.**
- 5. Agree that quorum for the Audit and Standards Committee remains at 5.**

The meeting closed at 11.01 pm

Chair