

REPORT OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE No. 02/2014-15

COUNCIL 14 MAY 2015

Chair: Councillor Reg Rice

INTRODUCTION

1.1 This report to Full Council arises from consideration of the attached reports considered by our Standards Committee regarding (i) abolition of Area Committees and Area Forums, (ii) amendment to the Members' Allowances Scheme for 2015/16, and (iii) removal of the Designated Independent Person requirement for the dismissal of the Head of Paid Service, Monitoring Officer and Chief Finance Officer, considered by the special Standards Committee that took place on 12 May 2015.

1.2 **Abolition of Area Committees and Area Forums**

1.2.1 On consideration of the attached report marked **A** – Abolition of Area Committees and Area Forums – the following questions and concerns were raised by Cllr Engert:

- i) The paper included insufficient financial detail regarding the arrangements proposed to replace the area committees and area forums. Without this information, it was not possible for the Committee to make an informed decision. It was also ambiguous from the report whether the proposals for area budgets would be considered by the Cabinet, or a Cabinet Member signing process.
- ii) It was not clear what public consultation had been undertaken in relation to this recommendation – local residents' organisations advised that they had not been consulted on these proposals.
- iii) The previous area funding initiative had been expensive to operate – this report did not set out how ward budgets would be administered, what financial safeguards would be put in place and what resources would be required in the form of officer time. There was also the potential for the abolition of area committees and area forums to increase the demand for neighbourhood forums, which would have a cost implication.

Cllr Engert felt that no decision on this matter should be taken without a report setting out full details and costings, and setting out evidence of public consultation.

1.2.2 Our Assistant Director of Corporate Governance responded and confirmed that a report proposing ward budgets would be considered at a Cabinet Member signing. In terms of public engagement, this proposal formed part of wider work looking at changing the way in which the Council engaged with residents. We noted that attendance at all but one of the area committees and area forums had been low, and illustrated that they were not proving effective

means of engaging with local residents. It was confirmed that costs associated with the proposed ward budgets were still being calculated, and would be fully set out in the report regarding this matter. Details of the way in which the ward budgets would be administered were also being developed, but the need for a streamlined approach was emphasised.

1.2.3 We discussed the possibility that ward budgets would enable those areas where area committees and area forums had been successful to use their funding to continue with similar arrangements, while enabling those areas where the area committees and area forums had been less well-attended to adopt different approaches. We noted that this report related primarily to the abolition of the area committees and area forums, and that proposals regarding area budgets would be covered by a separate report.

1.2.4 On a vote of four in favour and one against, we agreed the recommendations of the report.

WE RECOMMEND

1.2.5 That Full Council:

- i) Approve the abolition of area committees and area forums;
- ii) Direct the Assistant Director of Corporate Governance to make any necessary and consequential amendments to the Council Constitution; and
- iii) Note that a report proposing ward budgets will be prepared for a Cabinet Member signing in June 2015.

1.3 Amendment to the Members' Allowances Scheme for 2015/16

1.3.1 We considered the attached report marked **B** – Amendment to the Members' Allowances Scheme for 2015/16.

1.3.2 On a vote of four in favour and one abstention, we agreed the recommendations of the report.

WE RECOMMEND

1.3.3 That Full Council resolves to amend the current Members' Allowances Scheme for 2015/16 to take effect from 15 May 2015 to increase the Basic Allowance, Mayoral Allowances and Special Responsibility Allowances as set out in the Members Allowances Scheme at Appendix 1 to the attached report marked **B**.

1.4 Removal of the Designated Independent Person requirement for the dismissal of the Head of Paid Service, Monitoring Officer and Chief Finance Officer

1.4.1 We considered the attached report marked **C** – Removal of the Designated Independent Person requirement for the dismissal of the Head of Paid Service, Monitoring Officer and Chief Finance Officer.

WE RECOMMEND

1.4.2 That Full Council:

- i) Note the proposed changes as set out in the attached report **C** and its appendix; and
- ii) Delegate to the Monitoring Officer authority to establish the Independent Panel subject to any statutory requirements and to agree its terms of reference in consultation with the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development.