

Report to: **Audit Committee**
Date: **22 March 2018**
Title: **Annual Review of the Council's Constitution**
Portfolio Area: **Support Services**
Wards Affected: **All**

Urgent Decision: **N** Approval and clearance obtained: **N/A**

Date next steps can be taken: **The Committee recommendations will be presented to the Annual Council meeting on 17 May 2018**

Author: **Sue Nightingale** Role: **Acting Lead Specialist – Legal**

Contact: sue.nightingale@swdevon.gov.uk

RECOMMENDATION

That the Audit Committee RECOMMEND to Council that the amendments to Parts 1, 2 and 3 of the South Hams District Council Constitution (as summarised in paragraph 2.7 of the report and fully outlined on the website) be approved and formally adopted at the Annual Council Meeting on 17 May 2018.

1. Executive summary

1.1 The Council is required to formally adopt its Constitution at the Annual Meeting in May for the forthcoming Municipal Year.

1.2 The Audit Committee is responsible for '*maintaining an overview of the Council's Constitution*' and for making any necessary recommendations to the Council. This report seeks to ensure that the Constitution is amended to reflect the changes that have either occurred in the Council over the previous year, or to implement any necessary changes to ensure that it is up to date, lawful and reflects the Council's current practices and priorities.

2. Background

2.1 In order that the Audit Committee can make informed recommendations to the Council on the adoption of the Constitution at the Annual Meeting, the Committee is required to review the Council's Constitution;

2.2 Changes to the Constitution are made throughout the year by the Council and through its consideration of recommendations arising from Committee minutes, and are effective from the date of approval (unless otherwise agreed by Council). Examples over the past year include:

- Changes to the Delegation Scheme as a result of the recent review of duties amongst the Senior Leadership Team (e.g. the Group Manager: Commercial Services being appointed to the role of Returning Officer); and
- Removal of some Member Bodies, including the Beach Management Working Group and the Joint Staff Consultative Forum.

2.3 In addition, the Monitoring Officer has delegated authority to make minor (or legal) amendments to the Constitution during the course of the year. The changes that have been made under these powers this year mainly relate to officer job titles and evolving areas of responsibility following the recent review of duties amongst the Senior Leadership Team;

2.4 Members will note that the proposed changes are extensive and it is therefore suggested that the Review is divided into two parts. This part of the Review focuses on Part 1 (Summary and Explanation); Part 2 (Articles of the Constitution) and Part 3 (Delegation Scheme) and the recommended amendments are outlined in Appendix A;

2.5 It is then suggested that the second part of the Review be considered within the next six months and focuses on Part 4 (Rules of Procedure); Part 5 (Codes and Protocols) and Part 6 (Members' Allowances Scheme). This will ensure that the Rules of Procedure can be extensively reviewed before the May 2019 local elections and enable for the Members' Planning Code of Practice to be subject of a detailed review;

2.6 The key proposed amendments to this Part of the Review are as follows:-

- A drive to remove duplication and attempt to make the Constitution a more concise document;
- An additional requirement whereby a Chairman is required to have relevant experience (as determined by the Head of Paid Service) or undergo relevant Chairmanship training;
- Removal of reference to thematic areas in the Overview and Scrutiny Panel section of the Delegation Scheme;
- Removal of reference to Statute in the Delegation Scheme as it is no longer up to date.

2.7 The Committee will also be aware that the Political Structures Working Group is currently reviewing the merits of Public Questions at meetings of full Council and potential electronic voting solutions.

3. Outcomes/outputs

3.1 The Council is required to have an up to date Constitution which reflects the law, its working practices together with best practice to ensure that it delivers efficient services and lawful decisions. The Constitution is a living document and changes are made throughout the year when necessary.

4. Options available and consideration of risk

4.1 The options are limited as the Council has a statutory duty to adopt its Constitution annually and to review that document to ensure that it is fit for purpose and reflects both statutory requirements and the Council's working practices;

4.2 If the Council does not review the Constitution there is risk that the Council may make unlawful decisions with a consequent risk of challenge;

4.3 Senior Officers have been consulted on the Constitution and any necessary amendments incorporated.

5. Proposed Way Forward

5.1 The Audit Committee is asked to review the first part of the Constitution and make any necessary recommendations to Council in order that the Constitution can be adopted at the Annual Meeting in May for the forthcoming year.

6. Implications

Implications	Relevant to proposals Y/N	Details and proposed measures to address
Legal/Governance	Y	The Local Government Act 2000 requires the Council to have (and to maintain) a Constitution. The Monitoring Officer must review the Constitution annually and make recommendations to the Audit Committee, who in turn must recommend its adoption to full Council. Only the Council can approve and adopt the Council's Constitution.
Financial	N	There are no financial implications to this report
Risk	Y	There is a risk arising from a failure to review the Constitution and approve the necessary changes because it may lead to unlawful decisions being taken by the Council.

		By undertaking an annual review of the Constitution the Council mitigates this risk by ensuring that the Constitution is up to date and reflects current practice and law.
Comprehensive Impact Assessment Implications		
Equality and Diversity		None arising from this report
Safeguarding		n/a
Community Safety, Crime and Disorder		n/a
Health, Safety and Wellbeing		n/a
Other implications		n/a

Supporting Information

Appendices:

A: Proposed revisions to Parts 1, 2 and 3 of the Council Constitution.

Background Documents:

Constitution Review 2017