

**CONSTITUTION WORKING GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES
LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 6.00pm on 25 April 2017**

Present: Councillors V Ranger (Chairman), R Chambers and B Light.

Officers present: D French (Chief Executive), A Bochel (Democratic Services Officer) and S Pugh (Head of Legal Services).

CWG13 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 March 2017 were signed and approved as a correct record.

CWG14 MEMBER OFFICER PROTOCOL

The protocol had returned to the Constitution Working Group after the following changes were proposed at the Council Meeting on 4 April:

1. To include the word 'advocate' in the definition of a member.
2. To include the following clause either at the beginning or the end of the protocol: "nothing in this protocol shall prevent or hinder a council member from fully engaging with officers of the council, including calling or attending meetings, or offering information and advice in the furtherance of any issue within their wards or wards for which they have responsibility".

Council had voted in favour of these changes but the item was then withdrawn to allow for further consideration by the Working Group, prior to resubmission to the Council meeting on 16 May.

The Chairman proposed that Paragraph 7.2 list commercial sensitivity as a reason why information might not be disclosed to members. This would ensure if there was an occasion when members were refused access to information due to commercial sensitivity, this would be clearly indicated as a valid reason in the protocol.

In response to Councillor Light's concern this would limit members' access to information, the Chief Executive and the Head of Legal Services said access to commercially sensitive information would only be restricted if there was a legal reason for it. If ever there was a feeling by members that information was being withheld by officers, then members should raise the issue with the Chief Executive or the Monitoring Officer.

Members agreed to include 'commercially sensitive' as a reason in Paragraph 7.2.

Councillor Light suggested that a reference to a commitment to 'openness' and 'transparency' within the Council be included at the beginning of the protocol.

Members agreed the following sentence would be included in the first section of the protocol: 'the Council is committed to the highest possible standards of operation, integrity, openness and accountability'.

An amendment to Point 2 of the proposed changes above was made on the basis that members could request meetings with officers, but that it might not be appropriate for them to attend all meetings considering Council business.

The Chairman moved a number of drafting changes to the text. These were agreed by the Working Group.

Members agreed to recommend to Council an amended version of Cllr Artus's proposed wording as follows: 'Nothing in this protocol shall prevent or hinder a council member from fully engaging with officers of the council, including requesting meetings with officers, or offering information and advice concerning any issue within their wards or wards for which they have responsibility'.

RESOLVED to recommend the adoption of the revised protocol to Full Council on 16 May, as amended at the Constitution Working Group meeting.

The meeting ended at 19:15.