

**COUNCIL BUSINESS  
COMMITTEE**

**6.00 P.M.**

**17TH JANUARY 2013**

**PRESENT:-** Councillors Richard Newman-Thompson (Chairman), Roger Mace (Vice-Chairman), June Ashworth, Melanie Forrest, Janet Hall and Vikki Price

Apologies for Absence

Councillor Sylvia Rogerson

Officers in attendance:-

Debbie Chambers

Democratic Services Manager

Peter Baines

Senior Democratic Support Officer

**20 MINUTES**

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as a correct record.

**21 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS AUTHORISED BY THE CHAIRMAN**

There were no items of urgent business.

**22 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**23 ARRANGEMENTS FOR CALL-IN**

The Democratic Services Manager introduced a report on proposals made at the previous meeting about changes to the call-in system.

The proposals had been put forward in an attempt to make the call-in process less confrontational and technical and, as requested by the committee at the last meeting, the Monitoring Officer had prepared a report to assess their feasibility and legality.

In the course of discussion, Councillor Mace proposed that the 'exceptional circumstances' for calling-in a decision, set out in Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 16, Part 4, Section 5 of the Council's Constitution, be amended to allow members to request that a decision be called-in on grounds other than those set out in Article 13 (Decision Making), provided that full reasons for the call-in request are specified on the call-in form.

It was noted that this change would widen the grounds for call-in and that the onus would be on councillors to use call-in in a responsible manner.

***Resolved:***

- (1) That the 'exceptional circumstances' for calling-in a decision, set out in Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 16, Part 4, Section 5, of the Council's Constitution, be amended to allow members to request that a decision be called-in on grounds

other than those set out in Article 13 (Decision Making), provided that full reasons for the call-in request are specified on the call-in form.

- (2) That officers be requested to revise the call-in form accordingly and notify the change to Council.

## 24 INSTALLATION OF WIRELESS NETWORKING IN COUNCIL MEETING ROOMS

The Democratic Services Manager introduced a report on whether to install wireless networking (Wi-Fi) in committee meeting rooms, including the Council Chamber of Morecambe Town Hall. It was noted that the installation of Wi-Fi would be relatively inexpensive, quick and easy to carry out.

This issue had arisen as a supplementary question from Councillor Mace at Council on 13<sup>th</sup> June 2012. The question on notice related to facilities in the Council Chamber and the supplementary question raised was:

*Could Wi-Fi be introduced to the Chamber as part of the development of the new facilities?*

In the course of discussion, members broadly supported the idea of installing Wi-Fi in all of the council's meeting rooms. Whilst acknowledging that some members may be concerned about the possible effects of Wi-Fi on health, the available evidence was deemed insufficient to preclude installation on public health grounds.

### **Resolved:**

That Wi-Fi be installed in all committee meeting rooms, as soon as it could be arranged by council officers.

## 25 USE OF MOBILE PHONES AT COUNCIL MEETINGS

The Democratic Services Manager introduced a report on whether councillors should be permitted to use mobile phones and other such devices during council meetings. The report included information on current practice at other Local Authorities and an extract from the City of Westminster Council's protocol on conduct at meetings and use of modern media tools.

This issue was raised by a question on notice at Council from Councillor Scott, which read as follows:

*Please can we have an agreement that all mobiles are switched off unless Councillors are expecting an emergency call from the family and a definite ban on texting during council proceedings, as it looks unprofessional?*

A consensus emerged during the course of discussion that mobile telephones should not be banned during meetings, as many members were reliant on them to remain in touch with work commitments and family members, whilst emergency calls could not be anticipated. Other members used mobile telephones and tablets to make notes during the meeting, write down questions, or read agenda papers. However, members acknowledged that members of the public attending meetings might perceive this as inattention, and felt that a particular paragraph in the City of Westminster Council's

protocol expressed the situation well:

*Members are in a different position to members of the public and their actions affect the reputation of the Council. Members have an obligation to pay close attention to the proceedings of meetings they attend and demonstrate that they are playing an active part. This is in addition to the general point of showing respect and courtesy to other participants. Any use of modern media tools by participants in meetings should be considered in this context.*

**Resolved:**

- 1) That mobile telephones, and other such devices, not be banned from use in committee meetings or meetings of Council.
- 2) That the Democratic Services Manager be asked to draft an email to all members, for clearance by the Chairman, summarising this decision and including the protocol wording above to remind members of their role and obligations.

**26 APPOINTMENTS TO COMMITTEES AND CHANGES TO MEMBERSHIP**

There were no appointments to committees or changes to membership.

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Chairman

(The meeting ended at 6.40 p.m.)

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact  
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