
Governance Committee: Select Committee Business Planning Group membership/Webcasting criteria

Select Committee Business Planning Group membership

- 1 The Constitution makes provision for each Select Committee to have a Business Planning Group (BPG), an informal group of five members of the Committee which oversees the planning of its business. BPGs also have a responsibility for deciding whether call-in requests should be accepted for that Committee and whether Task and Finish Groups should be established.
- 2 The membership of the BPG is currently set out in the Constitution, Part 3 Appendix 8 as follows:

'Each Select Committee shall have a Business Planning Group comprising the Chairman of that Committee and four other members, two of whom shall be minority group members. The Chairman of the Select Committee shall be the chairman of the Business Planning Group.'

- 3 It is a long-standing arrangement that the Committee's Vice-Chairman has been one of the appointees to the BPG. This is helpful as the Committee's Vice-Chairman will generally deputise for a Chairman in their absence and will naturally work closely with the Chairman in carrying out work programme planning and finalising arrangements for Committee meetings.
- 4 As the Committee Vice-Chairman is generally always appointed to the BPG, it is proposed to formalise the arrangement through the following amendment to the Constitution (Part 3, Appendix 8):

'Each Select Committee shall have a Business Planning Group comprising the Chairman **and Vice-Chairman** of that Committee and ~~four~~ **three** other members. ~~Two of the five members~~ **Two of the three members** shall be minority group members. The Chairman of the Select Committee shall be the chairman of the Business Planning Group **and the Vice-Chairman of the Select Committee shall be the vice-chairman of the Group.**'

Recommended

- (1) That the Constitution should require the Vice-Chairman of a Select Committee to be a member of its Business Planning Group and to be Vice-Chairman of this Group, as set out at paragraph 4;

Webcasting criteria

- 5 The County Council has been webcasting meetings since February 2008. Webcasting is seen as an important part of open and transparent government and as a way of increasing accessibility to the authority's decision-making functions and democratic debate. The Council webcasts all of its meetings of the County Council (six a year) and other committee meetings where it is judged there is likely significant public interest. This may include Planning

Committee or any of the Select Committees. It is a convention that the committee chairman and vice-chairman will take the decision whether a meeting should be webcast. For select committees, this is sometimes done by the Business Planning Group

- 6 The current contract for webcasting allows up to 60 hours a year of committee time. This level has never been reached to date. For some years, webcasting was only possible in the formal environment of the Council chamber, but a mobile kit now enables meetings to be webcast in any committee room and from other venues external to County Hall. Webcasts are usually streamed live and are archived for view for up to six months after the meeting. This enables members of the public to watch meetings at a time to suit them and most viewing statistics show that meetings webcast often reach the hundreds in a whole six-month period. There is a target in the West Sussex Plan to increase the number of meetings webcast in the interests of transparency.
- 7 At its last meeting the Governance Committee considered the decision-making and criteria for webcasting and proposals to increase webcasting so as to improve access to the democratic process. The Committee is recommending that there should be a presumption in favour of webcasting all meetings of Planning Committee and of the Select Committees plus the Cabinet when it meets in public.
- 8 It is proposed that any decision to waive that presumption should rest with the chairman and vice-chairman of a committee and, for select committees, if a difference of opinion should arise between those two members, that the decision should be referred to the members of the Business Planning Group who should be consulted by email.
- 9 Finally a set of criteria are proposed to inform a decision to webcast either all or part of a meeting or to waive the presumption to as set out below:
 - The subject is/is not of significant interest to residents
 - The subject has/does not have a significant impact on the Council's budget or on an area of service delivery
 - The subject is/is not a call-in at a Select Committee
 - The subject relates/does not relate to a matter of current national or local interest
 - The location of the meeting will/will not inhibit public attendance
 - There are/are no specific reasons for webcasting in order to ensure the widest possible audience or accessibility by the public.
- 10 Amendments to Standing Orders governing webcasting to put these proposals into effect **are set out at Appendix 1.**

Recommended

- (2) That there should be a presumption in favour of webcasting all meetings of Planning Committee, Select Committees and formal meetings of the Cabinet;

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- (3) That the decision to waive the presumption of webcasting should rest with the chairman and vice-chairman and that, for select committees, if a difference of opinion should arise between those two members, the decision should be referred to the members of the Business Planning Group; and
 - (4) That the criteria to be used to inform the decision as to whether to webcast all or part of a meeting, be as set out in paragraph 9 of the report and be included in Standing Orders as set out at Appendix 1.

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Background Papers None