

Constitution Committee

Date of Meeting: 19 September 2019

Report Title: Civic Issues and the Mayoralty

Senior Officer: Jan Bakewell, Director of Governance and Compliance

1. Report Summary

- 1.1. This report provides an opportunity for the Council's civic arrangements and Mayoralty to be considered.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. That Members review options for the Council's civic arrangements and the future style of the Cheshire East Mayoralty.

3. Background

- 3.1. The way in which the Mayor of Cheshire East operates has not changed since the Council was created in 2009. At that time, the style adopted was an amalgam of the ways in which the Mayors of Macclesfield, Crewe & Nantwich and Congleton had worked. The former County Council had a Chairman rather than a Mayor. As the Council has been in existence for over ten years, now is an opportune time for consideration to be given to the way in which the Mayoralty operates.
- 3.2. The view has been expressed in a number of forums that the way in which the Cheshire East Mayoralty works should be modernised. This report outlines a number of ways in which this could be achieved
- 3.3. Across the local government family nationally, there is no one way in which Principal Councils treat the position of a civic Mayor. Councils have differing customs reflecting the way in which the position has developed over the years together with local priorities and expectations.
- 3.4. The way in which the Mayor of Cheshire East works is described in the Council's Constitution and in the Mayoralty Code of Practice, which is annexed to the Constitution. An extract from the Constitution is attached as Appendix I. A copy of the Code of Practice is attached as Appendix II. Any

changes to the way in which the Mayor works could be codified in a revised Constitution and an amended Code of Practice.

- 3.5. A common theme across the local government family in relation to the position of civic Mayor is that during their year in office they remain politically impartial in all matters of policy. This has been the practice in Cheshire East since 2009; it is not suggested that this should be changed.
- 3.6. There are a number of areas where there are differences in the ways that the Mayors of Borough Councils work and the way in which the position of Mayor is viewed by Members. These areas include:
 - The formality surrounding the position of the Mayor;
 - The policy in relation to Mayoral transport;
 - The number of engagements undertaken by the Mayor each year and the policy in relation to accepting invitations; and
 - The appointing of a Chaplain and the offering of prayers at Council meetings.

The formality of the Mayoralty

- 3.7 Formality can manifest itself in a number of ways, including the deference shown to the Mayor at the start of Council meetings (everyone standing and the Mayor and civic party parading into the meeting etc.), the wearing of robes and the use of the ceremonial mace.
- 3.8 The current Mayoral Code of Practice specifies that the Mayor should wear his / her ceremonial robes on “all formal occasions”. In practice, the robes are worn on relatively few occasions, but these have included Council meetings and citizenship ceremonies. Robes are also worn on a small number of occasions each year at events outside the Borough, an example would be at the Legal Service held in Chester Cathedral. Some Cheshire East Mayors have worn robes on more occasions than others.
- 3.9 The Code of Practice specifies that the Council’s mace, a symbol of the Mayor’s authority, should be used on all ceremonial occasions.
- 3.10 The Committee may wish to review the degree of formality surrounding the Mayoralty; moving towards the approach adopted by some other Councils where, whilst having the position of Mayor, many of the ceremonial aspects which are still associated with the role in Cheshire East, have been abandoned, if indeed they were ever introduced.
- 3.11 For example, the wearing of robes could be dispensed with altogether, or the Mayoral robe simply retained for use on very rare ceremonial occasions; examples of which could include high profile Royal visits and occasions outside the Borough where there is an expectation that robes are worn. Similarly, the mace could be dispensed with or just placed on display at Council meetings as a symbol that the Council meeting was in session.

This would dispense with the current practice of processing into the meeting with the mace. The Mayor would simply take their seat at the top table and call the meeting to order, as would the Chair of any other meeting.

- 3.12 The Committee is asked to make recommendations to Council upon the above matters.

Mayoral transport

- 3.13 A decision has already been taken to replace the Bentley with a cheaper to run, greener vehicle. Definitions of “greener vehicle” will vary over time, as technology develops. The current Mayoral Code of Practice does not refer to the type of vehicle provided for the Mayor.
- 3.14 The Committee may feel that it would be appropriate to refer in the Mayoral Code of Practice to the Mayor being transported in as environmentally friendly vehicle as resources and the prevailing technologies allow. The type of vehicle would be likely to change over time.
- 3.15 The Committee is asked to make recommendations to Council upon the above matters.

Mayoral engagements

- 3.16 Over recent years, Mayors have undertaken in the region of 300 engagements each year. The Mayoralty Code of Practice says, “The Mayor should accept as many invitations as possible....” Invitations are routinely accepted from a wide range of organisations including charities, schools, sports clubs and performance groups. Mayors have traditionally attended civic services and similar events organised by Town and Parish Councils across Cheshire East and those organised by adjoining Borough Councils.
- 3.17 The Mayoralty Code of Practice is silent on co-operation with Cheshire East’s Town Mayors, of which there are 12 across the Borough. There may be some invitations, which would be more appropriately attended by a Town Mayor, rather than the Mayor of Cheshire East.
- 3.18 The Committee may wish to recommend that the Mayoralty Code of Practice is amended to reflect this. Possible wording for an amended Code of Practice could be “The Mayor should review all invitations received and may if they thinks fit, suggest to those extending the invitation that the local Town Mayor should be invited in their place”.
- 3.19 The Committee is asked to make recommendations to Council upon the above matters.

The appointing of a Chaplain, civic service and the holding of prayers at Council meetings

- 3.20 There is no requirement for a Mayor to appoint a Chaplain or to hold a Civic Service. The Mayoralty Code of Practice simply indicates that the Mayor

“may choose to organise a civic service....and may also choose to appoint a Chaplain”. However, all eleven Mayors to date have appointed a Chaplain and a civic service has been held each year (the current Mayor has not yet decided if he wishes to hold a civic service). Chaplains have also on occasion assisted the Mayor with other duties such as remembrance events.

- 3.21 By tradition the Mayor’s Chaplain leads prayers before each meeting of Council. This is a practice inherited from the Council’s predecessor authorities, who in all likelihood modelled themselves on the House of Commons, where the Speaker’s Chaplain conducts prayers at the start of each day. There is no legal requirement for prayers to be held at the start of a Council meeting and practices across the country do vary.
- 3.22 The Committee may wish to review the practice of the Mayor appointing a Chaplain, the holding of a civic service and the saying of prayers at the start of Council meetings. These are separate, discrete issues although, if the practice of appointing a Chaplain was to be discontinued, it would be difficult (but not impossible) to hold a civic service or to start Council meetings with prayers.
- 3.23 The Committee is asked to make recommendations to Council upon the above matters.

4. Implications of the Recommendations

4.1. Legal Implications

- 4.1.1. There are no direct legal implications.

4.2. Finance Implications

- 4.2.1. There are no financial implications.

4.3. Policy Implications

- 4.3.1. Changes would need to be made to the Constitution and Mayoral Code of Practice.

4.4. Equality Implications

- 4.4.1. Prayers would generally be accepted as having a Christian context, which some might consider to be inappropriate in a modern, multi facet society.

4.5. Human Resources Implications

- 4.5.1. There are no HR implications.

4.6. Risk Management Implications

- 4.6.1. There are no risk management implications.

4.7. Rural Communities Implications

4.7.1. There are no implications for rural communities.

4.8. Implications for Children & Young People/Cared for Children

4.8.1. There are no implications for children and young people.

4.9. Public Health Implications

4.9.1. There are no implications for public health.

4.10. Climate Change Implications

4.10.1. A change to the Mayoral Code of Practice specifying that Mayoral transport should be as environmentally friendly as possible would help demonstrate the Council's commitment to combatting the climate change emergency.

5. Ward Members Affected

5.1. No individual Ward members are affected.

6. Access to Information

6.1. There are no supporting documents.

7. Contact Information

7.1. Any questions relating to this report should be directed to the following officer:

Name: Martin Smith

Job Title: Registration and Civic Services Manager

Email: martin.r.smith@cheshireeast.gov.uk