

Extract from the minutes of the Governance Committee meeting of 30 June 2015

3. Urgent Item – Appointment of High Steward

Councillor Liddy introduced the report by the Monitoring Officer for the Appointment of High Steward. The report recommended that Sir Bob Russell be chosen as the High Steward of Colchester, and that a special meeting of the Council be convened to pass the appropriate resolution.

Councillor Liddy stated that Sir Bob Russell has accepted the proposal of becoming the High Steward, and that a recommendation would need to be approved at 15 July Council meeting to ensure a special meeting could be convened without additional cost.

Councillor Willets, with the Chairman's permission, then addressed the committee regarding the reference in the report to consulting all group leaders. He stated that the Conservative Group had not given consent due to existing concerns regarding whether those in the position of High Steward are able to hold an elected office.

Councillor Arnold stated that there was a significant amount of concern in the Conservative group that the office of High Steward should be a non-political role. Councillor Arnold submitted an amendment to the recommendation in the report to state that in view of the non-political nature of the office of High Steward, the appointment shall cease immediately in the event that the holder gains elected political office either within or on behalf of any part of the Borough of Colchester.

Councillors discussed whether there were existing restrictions on the post of High Steward, and whether if the post holder gains election to an authority this would automatically end the arrangement. In addition Councillors discussed previous examples of High Steward and whether the amendment was a reflection on this particular appointment, considering that it has not been in place in the past. Councillor also questioned the length of the appointment and whether it was for a period of five years.

Councillors also commented on whether the Municipal Corporations Act 1835 was still in place regarding the High Steward advising the directing the Mayor, or whether it had been superseded by newer legislation.

Councillors voted on the amendment to the recommendation submitted by Councillor Arnold:

‘that in view of the non-political nature of the office of High Steward, the appointment shall cease immediately in the event that the holder gains elected political office either within or on behalf of any part of the Borough of Colchester’

FOR: Councillor Arnold, Councillor Locker, Councillor Lissimore, Councillor Hazell

AGAINST: Councillor Liddy, Councillor Hayes, Councillor P.Higgins, Councillor Havis

As the vote was a tie, the Chairman used his casting vote to vote against the amendment.

Councillors then voted on the original recommendation in the report:

FOR: Councillor Liddy, Councillor Hayes, Councillor P.Higgins, Councillor Havis

AGAINST: Councillor Arnold, Councillor Locker, Councillor Lissimore, Councillor Hazell

As the vote was a tie, the Chairman used his casting vote to vote for the original recommendation in the report.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND to Council that Sir Bob Russell be chosen as High Steward of the Borough of Colchester and a special meeting of the Council be convened on a date to be determined to pass an appropriate resolution.