

Response to Exec Minutes 23th July 2024

Point 1.21 – community space – which of the vice chairs is responsible for ensuring that the engagement with community groups is pursued

Point 1.3 Constitution Review Workshop

The minute reads:

1.31 William noted that WDCO shouldn't have to constantly refer to the constitution whenever an issue arises. Jackie and Adrian agreed that the constitution should not be the sole basis for decision-making.

ACTION: Adrian, Jackie, and William will meet to discuss strategies to reduce the Board's reliance on the constitution for decision-making and explore potential changes to the constitution if necessary.

My recollection is that what we actually spoke of was the abortive “50% representation” motion proposed and subsequently withdrawn by the board. I expressed the view that there were very strong underlying feelings/fears that gave rise to the proposal, and that there were almost certainly ways in which those feelings/fears without prejudice to the democratic process. Given that I do not have direct experience of the circumstances giving rise to those fears I wished to lend my support to ensure that the fears were not realised.

I believe that the ACTION should read:

ACTION: Adrian, Jackie, and William will meet to discuss strategies to address the feelings/fears arising in the long term residents minds that their voice would be lost.

The meeting proposed in the original minute did take place but between Jackie, Adrian and Oonagh. The meeting did not address the specific resolution identified, but was very positive in its tone about future proceedings. It is Jackie's role as chair to nurture the ideas and suggestions of her Executive members in order to make the board as effective as possible. One of Jackie's main points in the un-minuted meeting was that the voices of all the tenures should heard, and that discussions should aim to achieve the best answer for Woodberry Down rather than to win an argument. I look forward to seeing this happen.

The reference to the constitution arose because the strategies would need to be included there to ensure that they were honoured in the future.

Since the question of the constitution has been raised I believe it is a point worth exploring further.

I have been disturbed by the way the constitution has been used recently to stifle progress and to suppress good ideas.

Example 1) on 12th September at 18:05 Simon Slater wrote

“Your idea about pen portraits might be a good idea, but the constitution is very clear that the candidates for the Exec address the Board in person. As returning officer Roda has to follow the constitution as currently written.”

And indeed, there was widespread agreement that it was a good idea to prepare the board by allowing them to have advance knowledge of the candidate. But, despite his years of experience in such matters, Simon’s statement is open to question in the light of board elections which had just taken place many months out of step with the constitution. Clearly, as Returning Officer Roda had found a reason **not** to “*follow the constitution as currently written*”.

I also believe that Simon is not justified in assuming that if something is not explicitly allowed in the constitution it is forbidden. That candidates are allowed 2 minutes to speak does not debar them from submitting written statements.

There was a further intervention by the ITLA to prevent the implementation of this admittedly good idea. Roda sent me an email stating that requesting this communication with board members was not “*within my remit*”, when evidently the remit of the Vice Chair Communications is to communicate. The remit is not defined anywhere except in its title. If I am mistaken in this please could I see the definition.

In the same email quoted from above Simon goes on to demote the board’s decision to assign roles to Vice-Chairs to the status of a recommendation. Again very much open to question. There was a properly constituted motion submitted to the board on 24th June, within the rules of the constitution. This motion was passed on the perfectly constitutional show of hands. The purpose of the motion was twofold, firstly to focus the minds of the Vice-Chairs and to direct their efforts to particular tasks, and secondly to clarify the provision already made in the constitution to assign these roles. Simon’s attempt to devalue the motion does not stand. Indeed the idea that the definition of these roles require a change to the constitution whenever a new role is identified would be a substantial and unnecessary administrative overhead.