

## COUNCIL

11 SEPTEMBER 2018

### REPORT OF THE CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

#### PRAYERS AT FULL COUNCIL

#### **Purpose**

To feed back on the Corporate Scrutiny Committee's review of the inclusion of prayers at the start of full council meetings. To seek approval of the Committee's recommendations from Council on the inclusion of prayers at full council.

#### **Recommendations**

- In the light of modern times prayers should be held before the mayor opens the formal part of a full council meeting.
- A signal to be given for to either enter the chamber for a moment of reflection or to attend another room (committee room 2 gives access to the chamber) for prayer at 17:55, at 18:00 member will all enter the chamber.
- When the meeting is in order the Mayor is informed by the Deputy or assistant to make their entry in the traditional way.
- The Mayor under opens the meeting with a 'thought of the day' style comment to remind attendees why the council exists.

#### **Executive summary**

During the last cycle the corporate scrutiny committee had a small working group looking at procedures of the mayor, during which it was mentioned that the parish chaplain always provides prayers at full council. The working group considered that this may not appropriate as it is not inclusive of all denominations present. Prior to this recommendation going to Cabinet the Council received an Equality and Diversity update training session in which the speaking raised the issue of prayers at full council as a potential for alienation or inequality. It is with these two items in mind that the Corporate Scrutiny Committee chose to create a working group to look at the broader issue of prayers at Full Council meetings.

The working group considered the increasing secularisation of society as well as increasing sectarianism within religious communities of all types. During these discussion it the working group arrived at a conclusion that to have one 'preacher' at a full council meeting did not give due regard to the diverse nature of an elected body. The working group also gave due regard to the traditions of the council including the virtues of prayer time at the start of a full council meeting.

It was concluded that prayers, whilst providing a moment of reflection and consideration, were no longer appropriate to the whole membership however the rights of those who chose to be religious should not be lost and therefore a mechanism should be in

place for those to exercise their religion. It was also concluded that the quiet moment of thought should not be lost at the start of a meeting and therefore the Mayor should lead a moment of thought.

The mechanism proposed includes the opportunity for those who wish to pray to do so regardless of their religion without this being imposed on those who chose not to pray. Those who chose not to pray should also be able to have some quiet reflection time before the meeting away from the members room. It is therefore envisaged that the chamber will be open but remain a relatively quiet place with informal discussion taking place in the member's room. It is proposed to use committee room 2 for prayer as this leads into the chamber whilst giving distance from what could be a noisy corridor or members room.

Following prayers and reflection time both the public and councillors will then take their seats prior to the meeting being called to order.

The recommendation that the Mayor be informed that the meeting is ready comes from the inevitable need for members to on occasion exchange information very late before a full council meeting with officers or members, rather than the Mayor entering whilst members scurry to their seats, they can be seated in readiness for the Mayor to enter and call the meeting to order.