

Objection to F&G Agenda item 149.2b by Cllr. Alice Taylor

The purpose of this letter is to voice my opinion on agenda item 149.2b, which says “For the Deputy Mayor to have automatic membership and full voting rights on the Town Council’s Committees and Sub-Committees, as the Mayor currently does”

I think this is a very ill-considered amendment to our Standing Orders for the following reasons. I urge the committee members to vote against it.

When Cllr Coleby responded to my objections during full council, he stated that “it was his experience with other parish councils” this was a done thing and that it was not to insert an extra vote, but to replace the Mayor if he was absent.

Another point was made that “any councillor can join in and vote at any time”.

I’ll address those points.

Lowestoft is not a small parish council, but in budget and population is one of the largest councils in the UK, so we need to compare ourselves to other established large councils, not to tiny parishes like Kessingland.

The top 4 parish councils in the UK are Sutton Coldfield, Weston-super-Mare, Crewe, Shrewsbury. After this census, Lowestoft could very well be in that list.

Sutton Coldfield does not have a mayor and the chair of the council does not have a special vote on committees and neither does the deputy chair. Weston-super-Mare, Shrewsbury, and Crewe have a chairman, a mayor and a deputy mayor. None have special voting privileges other than a casting vote in event of a tie when they are chairing a committee. All have been Town and parish councils for decades and have not experienced any need to give extra voting privileges to the Mayor and Deputy Mayor.

So giving the Deputy Mayor the privilege of voting at any meeting, whether he is a committee member or not, is not a normal procedure for large councils like ours.

Yes, any councillor can join a committee and vote. The normal procedure is that a councillor must ask to join,

usually through the committee in question, who then puts the request to full council and the councillor's membership is then voted on. This means that it takes at least a month and often 6 weeks to join a committee with full voting rights. This is just the opposite of being able to swoop in as desired and vote and then leave. So it is not at all the same as what a councillor can do now and what is being asked in this amendment. What is being asked is indeed a "superpower" and not something any regular councillor can do. For instance, since I'm not a member of F&G I can't pop in to vote against this agenda item without going through the formalities of rejoining the committee. The meeting discussing the amendment is March 11 and I can't possibly get on the committee until the end of the month at FC.

The custom of the LTC has been to allow anyone who asks to join a committee. This is *custom* and not in Standing Orders. We vote people in and we can certainly NOT vote them in. If a group of people aligned in the council and decided to not vote a person in, it can certainly happen. Unlike what is being proposed here, where voting rights for the Deputy Mayor would be automatic, there is no automatic guarantee for regular councillors.

Mostly importantly, we can only vote on what is written, not what is intended. If the intention is to have a substitute for the Mayor when he or she is absent, then that needs to be what is written in the amendment. It does not say that here, even though that was explicitly discussed in full council.

This wide ranging amendment is open to abuse.

Just last month we decided as a council to have a standard of 4 committee members needed to make a committee quorate. If a meeting is called and only two people show up, then the Mayor and Deputy Mayor can pop in and by doing so create a quorate meeting and control the discussion and the votes.

If the Mayor and Deputy Mayor are aligned in any way- by party,

relationship or simply because they are mates- that means that the majority of our 20 person council would be following the decisions of a small minority. All an aligned Mayor and Deputy Mayor would have to do is show up and vote their preferences.

I'll remind the council that we set up regulations like this not just to meet our own desires, but for future councils to use when none of us are here. Once it is obvious that two people have "superpowers", then the likelihood of this regulation being removed is almost nil. All they would have to do is ram any amendment through tiny committees and vote it down every six months.

I urge the Finance and Governance Committee to commit themselves to a fully inclusive council of equals, not a council of those with extra privileges and powers and those who do not. Many councils, for instance, have rules in their Standing Orders that exclude co-opted members from committee votes and allowances. We don't do that because the guiding principle has always been openness, transparency and inclusion. I sincerely hope that the LTC recommitts to that path and that this council leaves equality and inclusiveness as its legacy.

Kind Regards,

Alice Taylor
Kirkley Ward Councillor