

REPORT TO AUDIT & GOVERNANCE

Date of Meeting: 17 July 2025

Report of: Simon Copper, Monitoring Officer

Title: Constitutional Changes

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Council

1. What is the report about?

1.1 This report outlines the proposed changes to the rules that govern how full Council meetings are run. This report explains these proposed changes, their benefits, explains other changes to constitutional documents to accommodate those adjustments.

1.2 New Council Procedure Rules have been drafted to replace those parts of the existing Standing Orders which govern how full Council meetings are run. The proposed changes are informed by recent reviews of existing practices and Standing Orders as well as feedback from councillors and officers. The proposed changes to the way Council meetings are run should reduce the time spent in meetings and burdens on officers. The old Standing Orders have also otherwise been updated to address procedural gaps, modernise the rules and align them with best practices and statutory requirements.

1.3 At the Audit and Governance Committee's meeting of 19 March 2025, it resolved to form a Governance Sounding Board to consider any draft proposals in detail in advance of a report being prepared for Audit and Governance Committee. The Governance Sounding Board has met on two occasions to consider the proposals. Other conversations have also been had with other internal stakeholders in the constitution and an opportunity given to consider these proposals. At the most recent meeting of the Governance Sounding Board, it was supportive of the proposals contained in this report and its feedback has helped shape its contents. More information about their specific contribution is contained in section 8 of this report.

1.4 These proposed changes are the first part of a review of the Constitution which will ultimately improve the governance framework and streamline decision-making processes at the Council. The next phase of work will cover amongst other things the procedure rules relating to Executive and Scrutiny Committees.

2. Recommendations:

That the Audit and Governance Committee recommends to Council that it gives delegated authority to the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Lord Mayor, to agree a date for the Council to:

2.1. make the following changes to the Constitution to:

2.1.1 adopt the newly drafted Council Procedure Rules;

2.1.2 accommodate the new Council Procedure Rules by:

2.1.2.1 removing Standing Orders 1-12(b), 21-30, 34, 36-38, 39(2), 46-48, 50-54, 56-60;

2.1.2.2 adopting a revised Standing Order 19 to remove references to full Council meetings.

2.1.3 adopt the following revised Articles: Articles 1-5 and 14.

2.2 adopt committee sizes of 11 councillors for the Planning, Licensing, Audit and Governance, Customer Focus Scrutiny and Strategic Scrutiny Committees.

3. Reasons for the recommendation:

Issue	Solution
Standing Orders Feedback suggested that Council meetings were not being run efficiently and were often too long. The Standing Orders governing Council meetings are also inaccessible and difficult to follow. Changes were required to the Standing Orders to streamline the meetings and be well understood.	<p>Standing Orders are to be replaced with easier to follow Council Procedure Rules. The rules have been updated and refreshed.</p> <p>Several key changes have been proposed to introduce a time limit to Council meetings and to provide the formal presentation of committee and executive minutes and the scope of member questions.</p>
Committees The increasing demands on councillors' time have made it difficult for them to fully participate in their committee roles, as many are required to serve on multiple committees. This has led to an uneven distribution of workload, with some councillors bearing a significant burden.	<p>It is proposed to reduce the standard committee membership from 14 to 11, decreasing the total number of committee positions from 68 to 55 while maintaining political balance. This change will be formalised through Council formally approving committee sizes of 11 members for Planning, Licensing, Audit and Governance, Customer Focus Scrutiny and Strategic Scrutiny Committees as well as adjustments to the Council Procedure Rules to allow for Council to further change the size of committees should that considered to be desirable. The reduction in members at committee will also be supported by the use of substitutes to ensure committee functionality during absences.</p>
Substitutes Councillors often face conflicts between their council duties and personal or professional commitments, limiting their ability to attend committee meetings and potentially impacting the effectiveness of committee proceedings.	<p>A provision for substitutes is proposed, enabling parties to appoint members to stand in when councillors are unavailable. This proposal will uphold the political balance and substitutes will be subject to specific rules including prior approval, required training for key committees and limitations on acting as</p>

	chair or vice-chair unless appointed for that meeting. This change will be formalised in the updated Council Procedure Rules.
Article 1 - The Constitution - Summary and Explanation This was slightly dated and required revision.	A new draft has been prepared which has been expanded upon. No significant alterations have been proposed.
Article 2 – Members of the Council The original Article 2 lacked clarity in outlining Councillors' roles, responsibilities, and expectations, including gaps in procedures for resignations and attendance.	The revised Article 2 provides clearer procedures. Some standing orders that are more appropriate in the articles have been included here.
Article 3 – Citizens and The Council Whilst adequate, it could be updated to be more comprehensive.	A new draft has been prepared which has been expanded upon slightly. No significant rights powers or authority are governed by this document.
Article 4 – Full Council Meetings This article had no real substance and needed an overhaul.	A revision has been proposed which more clearly sets out what a full council meeting is, its role and functions.
Article 5 - The Lord Mayor and Chairing of the Council This article was sparse on details.	This article has been updated and fleshed out. It now includes a more detailed explanation of the role of the Lord and Deputy Lord Mayor.
Article 14 – Changes to the Constitution This lacks specific details, timeframes and mechanisms for reviewing and updating the Constitution, creating ambiguity and inefficiency, particularly in distinguishing minor from significant amendments.	Its proposed revision introduces formalised annual reviews, clearer processes for stakeholder engagement, explicit criteria for amendments, a defined role for the Chief Finance Officer and the removal of the Executive's ability to propose changes to the Constitution.

4. What are the resource implications including non-financial resources

There are no significant direct financial implications arising from the proposed constitutional changes. However, there are resource implications in terms of officer time required to implement the changes, including updating documentation, communicating changes to members and staff as well as ensuring any relevant training and support is provided.

5. Section 151 Officer comments:

There are no direct financial implications associated with the constitutional changes as presented. The proposals do not impact the Council's financial standing or budgeting processes.

6. What are the legal aspects?

The changes proposed relate to the Council's Constitution and are within the powers of the authority to amend in accordance with the Local Government Act 2000 and associated guidance. The amendments aim to enhance governance, transparency and the clarity of constitutional procedures. Legal Services have been involved in drafting the changes to ensure they comply with relevant legislation, statutory guidance and best practice. Full Council approval will be required to formally adopt the revised constitutional provisions.

7. Monitoring Officer's comments:

The Monitoring Officer supports the proposed changes. These changes are intended to clarify current practices, address procedural inefficiencies and ensure compliance with statutory obligations. They reflect recommendations made through both officer review and member feedback.

8. Report details:

Council Procedure Rules - Presentational Change

The Standing Orders have been redrafted to be new 'Council Procedure Rules' to make them more accessible and user friendly. This has provided an opportunity to review its contents, reorganise into a more logical order and remove duplication as well as redundant Standing Orders.

The new Council Procedure Rules is available at **Appendix 1**.

A side-by-side comparison comparing the text of the existing standing orders with the new Council Procedure Rules and other comments is available at **Appendix 2**.

The Governance Sounding Board considered the Council Procedure Rules in detail which have been included in this final version of the Committee Procedure Rules attached to this report. The Governance Sounding Board:

- provided officers with comments and suggestions on the wording for the agenda for ordinary meetings of full Council, which has been updated to reflect current practice (Council Procedure Rule 2).
- scrutinised the circumstances in which extraordinary meetings of full Council can be called when requested by five councillors. This was later reviewed and then changed to reflect the substance of the wording of the Local Government Act 1972 where five members of the Council must lodge a requisition of the Lord Mayor (Council Procedure Rule 3(c)).
- discussed whether questions from members of the public as well as questions from the councillors should be permitted at extraordinary meetings and the Annual General Meeting of the Council (Council Procedure Rule 9.1(a) and 10.1(a)). The majority of the Governance Sounding Board considered that to preserve the specialist focus and nature of extraordinary Council meetings and ceremonial nature of the Annual General Meeting that this would not be taken forward.

- The provisions around public questions were clarified (at Council Procedure Rules 9.1-9.3). Questions will now be specifically posed to the Leader of the Council, who will be able to answer those questions directly or defer to other Executive members or chairs of various committees.
- considered the scope of motions on notice (Council Procedure Rule 11.4). It was considered that the Monitoring Officer or the Lord Mayor, would have the say on which motions should be permitted.
- Noted provisions in the Council Procedure Rules that will need further consideration in the proposed annual review of the constitution.
- Noted other proposals which required further consideration such as the Protocol on the Award of Civic Honours.
- picked up a few typographical errors, which have now been updated.

Reduction in the number of Councillors in committees

Members' ability to fully participate in committees is limited due to the increasing demands on members' time. Many members are required to serve on multiple committees, which divides their attention and focus. It often leads to some members bearing a considerable burden. In the last municipal year, one member was simultaneously Deputy Lord Mayor, chair of the planning committee as well as being a member of the scrutiny committee and audit and governance committee.

To address this challenge, it is proposed to reduce the standard number of committee members from 14 to 11. This would reduce the overall number of councillor positions (to sit on the Planning, Licensing, Audit and Governance, Customer Focus Scrutiny, Strategic Scrutiny committees) down from **68 to 55**.

The current committee sizes of 14 (except Audit and Governance which is 12) based on the current political balance rules translates into the following allocations:

Party	No of Councillors	Proportion	Total no of Seats (14)	>	Total no of Seats (11)
Labour	22	56%	39		31
Conservative	3	8%	5		4
Progressive	11	28%	19		16
Equity Independent	2	5%	3		3
Reform	1	3%	2		1
	39	100%	68		55

14 Seats (Current)

Committee	Size	Lab	Round	Con	Round	Lib Dem	Round	Green	Round	EQ	Round	Ref	Round
Planning	14	7.90	8	1.08	1	1.44	1	2.51	3	0.72	1	0.36	
Licensing	14	7.90	8	1.08	1	1.44	1	2.51	3	0.72	1	0.36	
A & Gov	12	6.77	7	0.92	1	1.23	1	2.15	2	0.62		0.31	1
CF Scrutiny	14	7.90	8	1.08	1	1.44	1	2.51	3	0.72		0.36	1
S Scrutiny	14	7.90	8	1.08	1	1.44	1	2.51	3	0.72	1	0.36	
	68		39 57%		5 7%		5 7%		14 21%		3 4%		2 3%

11 Seats (Proposed – Indicative)

Committee	Size	Lab	Round	Con	Round	Progress	Round	EQ	Round	Ref	Round
Planning	11	6.21	7	0.85	0	3.10	4	0.56		0.28	
Licensing	11	6.21	6	0.85	1	3.10	3	0.56	1	0.28	
Audit and Governance	11	6.21	6	0.85	1	3.10	3	0.56	1	0.28	
Customer Focus Scrutiny	11	6.21	6	0.85	1	3.10	3	0.56		0.28	1
Strategic Scrutiny	11	6.21	6	0.85	1	3.10	3	0.56	1	0.28	
	55		31 56%		4 7%		16 29%		3 5%		1 2%

The reduction from 14 to 11 seats proposal provides a meaningful reduction in seat allocations and is a workable reduction preserving the political balance in the current makeup of the Council.

This change would be achieved by revising the Council Procedure Rules to clarify that committee sizes are determined at the Annual General Meeting and can be adjusted thereafter at the discretion of the full Council.

If there is a residual concern about not having sufficient numbers on committees (due to say absences), this concern should be offset by the introduction of substitutes.

Substitutes

The demands of council duties can conflict with personal obligations and professional commitments for some members, limiting their ability to participate fully in committee meetings. This may lead to reduced attendance at committee meetings.

To enhance flexibility, it is proposed to incorporate a provision into the constitution allowing for substitute members under specific conditions. This measure would enable political groups to designate substitutes to attend committee meetings in place of members who are unavailable. Members facing barriers to regular attendance can continue to contribute to council activities without feeling excluded or penalised.

Substitutes would be used on the following basis:

- The use of substitutes would uphold the principle of political balance as substitutes would be drawn from the same political group as the member they replace.
- Substitutes would need to be approved in advance by the group leader or the chair of the body concerned.
- Substitute members may not act as chair or vice-chair unless specifically appointed at that meeting by the committee/other Council body.
- Substitutes for the Planning, Audit and Governance and Licensing Committee must have had the appropriate training.
- Other usual restrictions will apply such as members of the Audit and Governance Committee and any Scrutiny Committee/Board member not being members of the Executive.

This proposed amendment would be codified within the updated Council Procedure Rules (see new Council Procedure Rule 26).

Flexibility for the Presentation of Executive and Committee Minutes at Full Council Meetings and Members Questions

It is proposed to provide more flexibility to the formal requirement to present minutes of each Executive and Committee meeting at full Council meetings. This is achieved by not reproducing Standing Orders 11 and 12 in full in the new Council Procedure Rules. This will save time in the meeting as a summary of the minutes can be presented (but not required) and then any associated ad hoc questions can be answered at the conclusion of consideration of those minutes.

Members' ability to ask questions continues and questions can be of course raised under the part of the meeting reserved for members' questions. The new Council Procedure Rule 10 relating to members' questions has been expanded to provide more flexibility.

It is proposed in particular that members questions:

1. Councillors may ask questions at Ordinary Council meetings only (as before).
2. Questions may however be directed to **any** of the following the Leader of the Council, any Executive member, the Chair of any Council Committee, the Chair of a Scrutiny Committee (where previously it was limited to Chair of a Committee or the Leader of the Council)
3. Each councillor may ask up to **two questions**, excluding supplementary questions (there was no limit previously).
4. There is **no requirement to give notice** to Democratic Services of the question (previously this had to be on the working day before Council). Whilst this gives more flexibility to the ability to ask questions, it must be emphasised that in order to receive a substantive response to the question as much advanced notice of the question should be given as possible.
5. Questions must concern matters within the Council's powers, duties, or issues affecting the area, falling under the recipient's responsibility (as before).
6. Each question is limited to a **single part** and will be asked and answered without discussion (and thereby clarifying that multi-part questions cannot be posed).
7. The councillor asking the question may follow up with one supplementary question, **provided that** it relates directly to the original question and does not introduce new topics (whereas previously the standing orders did not specify that it must relate to the original question).
8. Individual questions must not exceed **one minute** (there was no limit).
9. Answers must not exceed **two minutes** (again there was no limit).
10. Supplementary questions are answered orally, but the recipient may decline to respond.
11. Answers can be given either: (i) Orally at the meeting, (ii) by delegating the response to another member with relevant responsibility, (iii) by referencing readily available published Council material or (iv) in writing after the meeting with the answer circulated to all councillors (as before).
12. All questions, supplementary questions and their answers (whether oral or written) will be recorded in the Minutes.
13. If an answer is provided in writing after the meeting, it will be annexed to the Minutes if possible.
14. A maximum of **30 minutes** is allocated for councillors' questions during a meeting (whereas previously there was no time limit).

By allowing questions to be directed not only to the Leader of the Council and Committee Chairs but also to Executive members and Scrutiny Chairs, members are provided with more opportunities to hold key decision-makers to account and enhance the democratic process. The focus on single-part questions eliminates ambiguity, ensuring that responses are clear and concise. This fosters more effective debate.

For officers, these changes reduce the pressure of preparing answers under tight deadlines by allowing written responses to be provided after meetings if needed. The removal of the requirement for advance notice of questions also decreases administrative burdens, enabling officers to allocate their time more efficiently while still ensuring comprehensive responses. This approach improves the quality and accuracy of answers, supports better resource management and allows officers to focus on other critical functions while still supporting Council proceedings.

Overall, these changes aim to streamline Council meetings by focusing on key decisions, strategic matters and healthy debate rather than routine updates already available through other channels.

Limits to the Duration of the Meeting

Limits are proposed to the duration of meetings in new Council Procedure Rule 15. This rule proposes a time limit for meetings by implementing a closure procedure after three hours, preceded by a short break after two hours.

During the closure procedure, remaining business is quickly voted upon with minimal debate, although brief introductory speeches may be permitted. The Council has the option to suspend this rule if needed (for example if members consider that the meeting should be extended to debate the remaining items on the agenda), but otherwise, it takes precedence over other procedures to ensure timely completion of meeting business.

Motions

Members have the ability to propose motions for debate at Council. A few proposals have been included to streamline this process. The proposed changes include allowing more time for proposed motions to be considered by officers, introducing a new power to combine similar motions and further clarifying the scope motions which can be debated.

The time for the submission of motions has been brought forward from 5 clear working days before the meeting to 8 clear working days to allow officers to review the proposed motions. Officer capacity is limited on the day of publication, the day on which the previous deadline fell.

A new power is also proposed (at 11.5 and 11.6) to permit the Monitoring Officer an opportunity to seek to combine two motions which are of the same intent. This introduces the possibility of only one motion being debated rather than two similar motions and thus saving time. The proposal above, of increasing the amount of time for which a motion must be submitted in advance of the meeting, will ensure that there is time for the Monitoring Officer to have those conversations.

It is also proposed to narrow the scope of motions that can be debated. Currently, motions which did not relate to a Council responsibility or a matter which affects the City as well as matters concerning employment/staffing or the disclosure of confidential or exempt information can all be refused. It is now proposed to narrow the scope further by having the power to rule out amongst other things a motion which is substantially the same as a motion or petition which has been put at a meeting of the City Council in the past six months. This should cut down on an item being repeatedly heard across multiple meetings, which has happened in the past.

Overall, these changes will streamline the process for proposing and debating motions at Council meetings by improving efficiency and ensuring effective use of officer time. By extending submission deadlines, consolidating similar motions and narrowing the scope of permissible motions, the proposals aim to reduce repetition and save time while maintaining transparency.

Administrative Changes to existing Standing Orders

Most of the existing Standing Orders have been reorganised into the new Council Procedure Rules (as set out above).

Standing Orders have otherwise been deleted/amended as follows:

1. Deletion of Standing Order 34 (Inspection of Documents) as this was already referenced in the Access to Information Procedure Rules (Part 4);
2. Deletion of Standing Order 38: Proceedings of Committees & Executive To Be Confidential as its contents is better suited in the proposed new Article 2;
3. Deletion of Standing Order 46: Members' Absence from Meetings as this was better suited in the proposed Article 2;

4. Deletion of Standing Order 50: Standing Orders to be given to Members as this was a dated provision and is of course now freely available to the website;
5. Deletion of Standing Orders 50(A) to 54 (Appointment of Head of Paid Service, Appointment of Chief Officers, Appointment/Dismissal of Chief Officers and Some Second Tier Officers, Other Appointments and Dismissal of Statutory Officers) as these were already included in the Officer Employment Procedure Rules (Part 4);
6. Deletion of Standing Orders 56 to 58 (Register of Interests, Pecuniary Interests, Other Interests) as this is already contained in the members' code of conduct; and
7. Deletion of Standing Orders 59-60 (Canvassing of and Recommendations by Members and Relatives of Members or Officers) as these were already included in the Officer Employment Procedure Rules and/or the Officer/Member Protocol (Part 4).

The remaining Standing Orders will remain until the second phase of amendments to the Constitution.

Article 1 - The Constitution - Summary and Explanation

This contains only minor alterations to general explanations about the following areas:

- The Council's Constitution - Overview of the Constitution's purpose and how it governs the Council's operations.
- Powers of the Council - Describes how the Council exercises its powers and duties under the law and the Constitution.
- How the Council Operates - Explains the composition of the Council, Councillors' responsibilities, and adherence to the Members' Code of Conduct.
- How Decisions Are Made - Includes information about Full Council meetings, the Lord Mayor's role, the Executive Committee, and scrutiny processes.
- Delegated Powers - Details how certain powers are delegated to Officers for efficient decision-making.
- The Council's Staff - Covers the role of Officers in implementing decisions and delivering services.
- The Chief Executive - Describes the Chief Executive's responsibilities as Head of Paid Service.
- Monitoring Officer - Outlines the duties of the Monitoring Officer, including maintaining and advising on the Constitution.
- Chief Finance Officer - Explains the financial oversight responsibilities of the Chief Finance Officer.
- Chief Officers - Lists the Council's Strategic Management Board and their respective functions.
- Interpretation and Review of the Constitution - Sets out how the Constitution will be monitored, reviewed, and interpreted.

Article 2 – Members of the Council

The original Article 2 provided a broad outline of the roles, responsibilities and functions of Councillors but lacked specific clarity and detail in key areas. The article lacked clear provisions about resignation procedures, attendance expectations and the conduct of Councillors.

Key enhancements to the revised Article 2 include:

- Greater clarity on how a member is elected, resigns and the trigger of a byelection.

- Inclusion of standing order 38 which states that all agenda, reports and other documents shall be treated as confidential unless and until they become public. This is better suited in the articles.
- Inclusion of standing order 46 relating to the Councillor's term ending when they have not attended any meetings over a period of 6 months. This again is better suited in the articles.

Article 3 – Citizens and The Council

Whilst adequate, it could be updated to be more comprehensive. A new draft has been prepared which has been expanded upon slightly. No significant rights powers or authority are governed by this article.

Article 4 – Full Council Meetings

This article had no real substance and needed an overhaul. A revision has been proposed which more clearly sets out what a full council meeting is, its role and functions. This may need to be reviewed again when the terms of reference are reviewed.

Article 5 - The Lord Mayor and Chairing of the Council

This article was sparse on details. This article has been updated and fleshed out. It now includes a more detailed explanation of the role of the Lord and Deputy Lord Mayor.

Article 14 – Changes to the Constitution

Article 14 provides a framework for reviewing and revising the constitution but lacks specific details and mechanisms outlining how the constitution should be updated and reviewed. There is an absence of clear timeframes, processes as well as criteria for distinguishing minor from significant amendments creating potential ambiguities.

The revised Article 14 addresses these shortcomings. Key enhancements include:

- Formalising an annual review process to ensure periodic evaluation.
- Specifying the Monitoring Officer's methods of engagement with stakeholders.
- Establishing a clearer distinction between minor and significant changes.
- Introduction of the role of the Chief Finance Officer in updating the Financial Regulations.
- Removal of the ability of Executive to propose changes to the constitution. This strengthens democratic oversight and eliminates duplication/confusion in the review process as two bodies had the ability to propose changes. This will also need to be removed as line in the terms of reference for Executive.

New Articles 1-5 and 14 are available at **Appendix 3**.

New Articles 1-5 and 14 with a markup compared to the previous versions is available at **Appendix 4**.

9. How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Plan?

The proposed constitutional changes directly support the delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan 2025–2028, particularly the priority of maintaining a well-run Council. By modernising decision-making procedures, the changes will contribute to a more open, transparent and accountable local authority. The changes also reflect a commitment to good governance which is a key element outlined in the Corporate Plan.

10. What risks are there and how can they be reduced?

There is a risk of confusion or inconsistent application of the new procedures. This will be mitigated through clear communication, updated guidance and support from Democratic Services and the Monitoring Officer to ensure smooth implementation.

11. Equality Act 2010 (The Act)

11.1 Under the Act's Public Sector Equalities Duty, decision makers are required to consider the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other prohibited conduct;
- advance equality by encouraging participation, removing disadvantage, taking account of disabilities and meeting people's needs; and
- foster good relations between people by tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

11.2 In order to comply with the general duty authorities must assess the impact on equality of decisions, policies and practices. These duties do not prevent the authority from reducing services where necessary, but they offer a way of developing proposals that consider the impacts on all members of the community.

11.3 In making decisions the authority must take into account the potential impact of that decision in relation to age, disability, race/ethnicity (includes Gypsies and Travellers), sex and gender, gender identity, religion and belief, sexual orientation, pregnant women and new and breastfeeding mothers, marriage and civil partnership status in coming to a decision.

11.4 In recommending this proposal, no potential impact has been identified on people with protected characteristics as determined by the Act because:

11.4.1 The report relates to internal governance and procedural changes to the Council's Constitution and does not affect service delivery or public access to services.

11.4.2 The changes support principles of transparency, accountability, and inclusion and are designed to improve overall governance without disadvantaging any protected groups.

12. Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

No direct carbon/environmental impacts arising from the recommendations.

13. Are there any other options?

The Audit and Governance Committee could choose to retain the existing constitutional provisions; however, this would miss the opportunity to improve clarity, transparency and efficiency in the Council's decision-making processes. The proposed changes reflect best practice and ensure the Constitution remains fit for purpose.

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Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

None

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Appendix 1 – Council Procedure Rules (clean version)

Appendix 2 – Side-by-side comparison comparing the text of the existing standing orders with the new Council Procedure Rules

Appendix 3 – Articles 1-5 and 14 (clean version)

Appendix 4 – Articles 1-5 and 14 (mark up)