

COUNCIL

10 July 2023

THE COUNCIL PRAYER

Report of the Constitution Commission

Strategic Aim:	A modern and effective Council		
Exempt Information	No		
Cabinet Member(s) Responsible:	Cllr G Waller, Leader of the Council		
Contact Officer(s):	Angela Wakefield, Strategic Director of Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer)	01572 758220	awakefield@rutland.gov.uk
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Ward Councillors	NA		

DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

That Council, on the recommendation of the Constitution Commission:

1. Resolves that the Council Prayer be replaced at Council meetings with a moment of reflection as follows:

“Let us stand for a moment of quiet reflection or prayer as you wish.

As we are about to take Council together, on matters concerning this County, we should seek to faithfully discharge our duties of office, both in our debate and in our decisions, and promote the health, safety and wellbeing of those we serve.

Thank you, please be seated”

2. Approves the inclusion of the exact wording of the moment of the reflection within the Council’s Constitution.

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To seek Council approval for the adoption of a moment of reflection in place of the current Council Prayer.

2 BACKGROUND TO THE COUNCIL PRAYER AND MOMENT OF REFLECTION

- 2.1 Council Prayers are held at the very start of every Council meeting before any items on the agenda are considered. Prayers are listed in Procedure Rules 19 and 20 as an item of business at Council meetings.
- 2.2 The Local Government (Religious etc. Observances) Act 2015 enables the consideration of “prayers and other observances” at meetings of the Council and its Committees but this is not mandatory.
- 2.3 Concern over the current practice was raised by several Councillors in the 2020-21 municipal year and arising from this the Constitutional Review Working Group (CRWG, since superseded by the Constitution Commission) met twice and suggested the following revised wording.

“Let us stand for a moment of quiet reflection or prayer as you wish.

As we are about to take Council together, on matters concerning this County, we should seek to faithfully discharge our duties of office, both in our debate and in our decisions, and promote the health, safety and wellbeing of those we serve.

Thank you, please be seated”

- 2.4 The CRWG considered on balance that the proposed reflection would strike a balance that would allow those of faith to take the introduction as a prayer while enabling others to reflect and not be excluded.
- 2.5 When this was presented to Council in July 2021 (Report No. 97/2021) it was agreed to defer any decision on the matter until 2021 Census data on the religious breakdown of Rutland had been released in order to allow a more-informed debate on the matter.
- 2.6 The census data was released in November 2022 and the relevant results are detailed in section 3.
- 2.7 The Constitution Commission met in January 2023 and having considered various options alongside the census data felt that the wording was still the most appropriate for the reasons set out in 2.4
- 2.8 It was also felt important that Members should come together before each Council meeting to reflect on their duties and responsibilities to residents before taking significant decisions affecting the county, even if such reflection was not undertaken through a religious prayer.

3 CENSUS DATA

- 3.1 Detailed religious data was released by the Office for National Statistics on 29 November 2022. Full details can be found on the ONS website (<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/bulletins/religionenglandandwales/census2021>) but in summary:
- 3.2 The optional religion question was answered by 94.6% of respondents in Rutland, broadly in line with the England and Wales average of a 94% response rate.

- 3.3 55.4% of people in Rutland identified as Christian, whereas 46.2% of people identified as such across England and Wales. This is also a decrease from the 68.2% in Rutland who identified as Christian in the 2011 Census.
- 3.4 37.1% of people on Rutland identified as having no religion, almost identical to the 37.2% of people identified as such across England and Wales. This is also higher than the 23.4% in Rutland who identified as having no religion in 2011.
- 3.5 2.1% of people identified as belonging to another religion (Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh or a different religion), compared to 10.9% across England and Wales. The 2.1% represents small increases across each of these religions since 2011.

4 CONSULTATION

- 4.1 The Constitution Commission and its predecessor contained representatives from political groups when they met to consider the matter and make their recommendation to Council.

5 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 5.1 Alternative options were considered by the Constitution Commission, including continuation of the current prayer, removal of any form of words and proceeding straight to the meeting, or undertaking to find a new form of words, or leaving the decision to the discretion of the person presiding.
- 5.2 These options were not a recommendation of the Commission who felt that of all options, the proposed moment of reflection was the best compromise and most likely to be suitable for all Members.

6 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no financial implications arising from the report.

7 LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1 The Local Government (Religious etc. Observances) Act 2015 inserted the following section into the Local Government Act 1972 (miscellaneous powers of local authorities) after section 138:

138A Prayers and other observances

(1) The business at a meeting of a local authority in England may include time for-

(a) prayers or other religious observances, or

(b) observance connected with a religious or philosophical belief.

- 7.2 As set out in Section 2 this only provides an option for Council prayers or other religious observances but does not mandate them.
- 7.3 Procedure Rules 19 and 20 (Agendas for Annual and Ordinary Meetings of Council) currently require prayers before any other item and so should Council agree the recommendation, reference to prayer will be removed and replaced with the proposed moment of reflection.

8 DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS

8.1 A Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIA) has not been completed as no personal data was processed in the preparation of the report.

9 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

9.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has not been completed as no changes are proposed to the Council's overall services or policies.

9.2 However, it is noted the adoption of a non-religious form of wording is more inclusive to those of any or no religious background.

10 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no community safety implications arising from the report.

11 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are no health and wellbeing implications arising from the report.

12 ORGANISATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

12.1 There are no organisational implications.

13 CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

13.1 The Constitution Commission and Constitution Review Working Group met to consider the Council prayer on several occasions and on the basis of a wide variety of views and the census data felt the proposed moment of reflection was the option to recommend to Council.

13.2 The recommendation of the Commission is for Council to determine.

14 BACKGROUND PAPERS

14.1 Report No. 97/2021 The Council Prayer – considered by Council on 5 July 2021

14.2 Office for National Statistics 2021 Census results on religious identity:
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/bulletins/religionenglandandwales/census2021>

15 APPENDICES

15.1 There are no appendices to the report.

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