

### **1) Response from South Wootton Parish Council 18/12/19**

Following the letter sent to us by Ms Lorraine Gore on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2019, I can inform you that the Parish Council discussed the matter and felt that the current system where decisions are made by the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet of Executive Members is the best, it was felt that this is the simpler and quicker system.

It was also felt that members of the Cabinet must receive training in order to scrutinise decisions made.

### **2) Response from Castle Acre Parish Council 24/12/19**

The letter addressed to all Town and Parish Councils and dated 20 November 2019 was read out to Cllrs at their December meeting.

Cllrs were surprised at the lack of information contained with this letter. There was no paper detailing the pros and cons of the different decision making processes of local government to allow an informative judgement to be made. How could Cllrs not involved in the day-by-day running of the Borough form any view without being properly briefed? There was not even a deadline date by which to reply!

Cllrs are of the opinion that this letter was just sent out as part of a 'consultation exercise' because it had to be, rather than a genuine attempt to canvass views on the best way to govern West Norfolk.

This is very disappointing.

### **3) Response from Lee Stevens**

Lee Stevens - Thank you for your letter dated November 20th concerning the review of the council's decision making process. Having attended the last three council meetings, I would like to suggest that the current Cabinet system is less than transparent. The main council meeting appears to refer most key decisions to the Cabinet and yet there is no time scale for the Cabinet to bring recommendations or decisions back to the council. This could be seen as at best inefficient, at worst deliberate obfuscation.

My understanding is that Cabinet meetings are not open to the public and yet, given the level of interest in issues such as transport policy and climate change, would it not be possible to allow the public to witness the key discussions and decisions undertaken through the Cabinet system?

May I wish you a happy Christmas.

Yours sincerely,  
Lee Stevens

SW Response - Dear Mr Stevens

Thank you for your email. I thought I should let you know that Cabinet meetings are open to the public with the exception of exempt items which are clearly marked on the agenda as such.

Mr Stevens response

Many thanks for getting back to me and I'll look on the council web site for dates of the

meetings. If you could therefore just forward my comment re. having a timescale for reporting back, I would be grateful.

Yours sincerely,  
Lee Stevens

#### **4) Response from Sandringham Parish Council**

I refer to correspondence last month in which you asked for views on the Borough's governance structures by the end of the year. As Sandringham Parish Council does not meet again until 15<sup>th</sup> January it is not possible to have a roundtable discussion on the issue, and I am therefore replying in the light of responses from each Parish Councillor.

I explained – to the best of my knowledge – the essential differences between the current Cabinet system of management, and that of the formerly widely used Committee system, and asked them, simplistically, to choose between the two. We should have seven Councillors but are one short, and the outcome was three in favour of retaining the Cabinet system and three preferring to revert to a Committee system.

I shall therefore put my own take on the situation and reflect my observation and the view of those more strongly favouring a return to a Committee system. Whilst I believe there is a strong case for reverting to a Committee system, I am willing to give the Parish's support to retaining the Cabinet system, but with important reservations and a call for change to the detailed practices which have grown up, and which cause increasingly widespread concern amongst Borough residents with regards the integrity and transparency of the system.

If the Cabinet system is retained, then it needs two important changes to the procedures used:

- 1                   The right of the Cabinet, or Leader, to call-in for Cabinet discussion matters raised in either Full Council or Scrutiny Committees, must, under all circumstances, end. This appears to be increasingly being done, and it is an abuse of the system of proper scrutiny of the Cabinet, and therefore brings a feeling that all is not right if matters cannot be considered with integrity following open debate. It is entirely wrong in particular that matters are snatched away from properly and appropriately constituted scrutiny committees to what are, in effect, because of the party-based Group Meetings, closed door decisions not made in open forum.
- 2                   As a subset of this, the Sifting Panel which considers which Planning Applications go before the Planning Committee must be abolished. In extremis, this system could be used to stifle proper public examination of major projects such as the Knights Hill or West Winch developments, and that cannot be right, even if the probability is very slight. The alternative is that the sifting panel should include more Councillors who are not from the governing party and should not include, in a decision making position, any officers.

With these important changes, the Cabinet system will work more efficiently than the Committee system, whilst injecting some of the transparency and accountability of the Committee system which is certainly lacking from a Cabinet system, and all the more so a Cabinet system which has evolved to be increasingly removed from proper scrutiny.

With best wishes  
Ben Colson  
Chairman, Sandringham Parish Council