

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CORPORATE PERFORMANCE PANEL HELD ON 21 JULY 2021 TO CABINET 3 AUGUST 2021.

CP23

CABINET REPORT: MEMBERS ENQUIRIES INBOX

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The Chief Executive presented the report and responded to questions and comments, a summary of which is set out below.

Councillor Spikings commented that the current response time of 10 days was too long and asked if it could be reduced in any way,

Councillor Joyce addressed the Panel under Standing Order 34 and concurred with the comments made by Councillor Spikings.

The Chair commented that he also concurred with the comments made by Councillor Spikings and thanked the Assistant to the Chief Executive for the introduction of the Members Enquiries Inbox. The Chair referred to the Member/Officer Protocol and the timescale to respond which was 3 working days and proposed that:

Recommendation 3.1 be amended to read: It is recommended to Cabinet that the Constitution is changed to permanently retain the Members Enquiries Inbox. This will enable responses to questions to be collated and responded to in a timely manner in consultation with the appropriate officers. **ADD – in line with the timescale set out in the Member/Officer Protocol.**

In response, the Chief Executive explain that she was happy to retain the existing Member/Officer protocol of 3 working days but highlighted that some complex enquiries required longer than 3 working days but would aim to respond within no longer than 10 working days.

Under Standing Order 34, Councillor Joyce commented that if no response was received from the relevant officer within the timescale then the enquiry to be referred to the Executive Director or Chief Executive.

In response, the Chief Executive agreed to the request from Councillor Joyce set out above.

Following questions from Councillor Spikings on the monitoring undertaken, the Assistant to the Chief Executive explained that details were kept of the enquiries received and response times were monitoring.

The Chair invited the Panel to agree to the recommendation subject to the amendments set out above, which was agreed by the Panel.

There was general consensus from the Panel that they would like to receive an annual update.

RESOLVED: The Corporate Performance Panel supported the recommendation that Cabinet amend the council's constitution to retain the Members Inbox as a permanent measure to respond to general Member enquiries to enable them to carry out their roles within their constituencies, subject to the amendments set out below:

- 1) Recommendation 3.1 be amended to read: It is recommended to Cabinet that the Constitution is changed to permanently retain the Members Enquiries Inbox. This will enable responses to questions to be collated and responded to in a timely manner in consultation with the appropriate officers.
ADD – in line with the timescale set out in the Member/Officer Protocol.

If no response was received from the relevant officer within the timescale, then the enquiry be referred to the Executive Director or Chief Executive.

- 2) The Panel to receive an annual update report.

CP24 **CABINET REPORT APPOINTMENT OF MONITORING OFFICER**

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In presenting the report, the Chief Executive provided an overview of the current arrangement with Eastlaw and the reasons why the council should appoint a full time monitoring officer. The Chief Executive outlined the recruitment process.

The Chief Executive responded to questions and comments in relation to:

- The job description and personal specification.
- Role of the Monitoring Officer
- Provision of assistance and advice to both Town and Parish Councils.
- The separate requirements/arrangements for the subsidiary companies.
- The role of the council's Appointments Panel in the recruitment process.

Under Standing Order 34, Councillor Joyce addressed the Panel and highlighted the importance of the Monitoring Officer role and supported the proposal.

Under Standing Order 34, Councillor Holmes addressed the Panel and asked what support would be available for the Monitoring Officer. Councillor Devereux commented that the Chief Executive would

monitor the performance/workload of the Monitoring Officer. The Chief Executive added that currently Eastlaw provided the legal service to the council which had a Deputy Monitoring Role together with admin support. The next stage of the process would be to undertake a review of the provision of legal services going forward.

The Chair commented that he shared the concerns raised regarding the subsidiary companies and Director roles, but that he welcomed the proposal that the Monitoring Officer would be attending meetings of the council.

RESOLVED: That the Corporate Performance Panel supported the recommendation to Cabinet to agree that the borough council create a post and proceed with the recruitment and appointment of a full time Monitoring Officer to be employed solely by the council.

CP25 **CABINET REPORT - PROPOSED COUNCILLOR COMMUNITY GRANT SCHEME**

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The Assistant to the Chief Executive presented the report which proposed that the borough council introduce a Councillor Community Grant Scheme with the aim of funding community projects and initiatives that will deliver better outcomes for residents in their Ward as well as contributing to the achievement of the Council's Corporate Business Plan priorities. Each ward councillor will be given a budget of £1,000 per annum to assist their constituents with funding for projects which meet the criteria for the scheme.

The Assistant to the Executive responded to questions and comments in relation to:

- Risk exposure of £55,000 and reputation of the council.
- Admin required for the scheme.
- Due diligence checks to be undertaken.
- 2.1 Financial Assistance Grants Scheme – the total amount and 5.1 Financial implications. The Assistant to the Chief Executive undertook to email details regarding the total amount of grants and current underspend in the Financial Assistance Grants to the Panel.
- The level of minimum grant of £100.
- Applications not being considered during the period of purdah up to borough and county elections.

RESOLVED: That the Corporate Performance Panel supported the recommendation to Cabinet to introduce the Councillor Community Grant Scheme and set aside the budget required for the scheme.

CABINET REPORT - INTERIM MEETING ARRANGEMENTS

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In presenting the report the Assistant to the Chief Executive explained that following the expiry of the powers granted by Section 78 of the Coronavirus Act 2020, from 7 May the council had reverted to face-to-face meetings for Members, supported by Democratic Services Officers in the room. The report considered the impact of the decision not to extend the facility of virtual meetings for councils and to recommend to Cabinet/Council, interim measures to enable the council to fulfil their statutory obligations in respect of council meetings whilst maintaining social distancing and COVID-19 safety measures at all times.

The Assistant to the Chief Executive informed Members of the increase in the number of Covid cases in Norfolk and the difficulties to allow all officers back in the meeting room. The advice therefore was to have as few officers as possible in the meeting room to reduce the risk of infection. Officers presenting reports would join the meeting via Zoom.

Councillor Mrs Spikings commented on the efforts of officers undertaken to allow meetings to take place, but added that the sound quality in the Assembly Room was poor and in some cases inaudible and asked if any changes could be made to improve the sound quality.

Councillor Hudson concurred with the comments made by Councillor Spikings.

Councillor Nash explained that he was using headphones via Bluetooth which could be used for all microphones.

With regard to the comments made regarding the use of headphones, Councillor Morley added that he had observed Councillor Nash and that headphones and a mask was too onerous and asked if IT could come up with a better system with the use of loudspeakers. In conclusion, Councillor Morley commented that he was against the recommendations and it was far better for physical presence of officers in the meeting room.

Councillor Devereux commented that the compromise should be made as effective as possible for the decision making process.

Councillor Kirk added that he favoured hybrid meetings as in the meeting room he found it difficult to hear and that he was in favour of the use of headphones.

Councillor Rose made reference to internet difficulties when zoom meetings took place.

Councillor Tyler commented that he had taken the advice of Councillor Nash and had invested in a set of earphones.

Under Standing Order 34, Councillor de Whalley commented that he found it difficult to hear in the Assembly Room and commented he had discussed earphones with Councillor Nash. Councillor de Whalley asked if there was a possibility that sound engineers could be contacted to improve the sound quality.

Under Standing Order 34, Councillor Joyce addressed the Panel and commented that better sound quality was required but emphasised the importance of reducing the risk and protecting everyone against Covid.

In response to the comments made, the Chief Executive provided an overview of the increase in the number of Covid cases both in West Norfolk and Norfolk and highlighted the importance of limiting the number of people in the meeting room. It was explained that the interim arrangements would be reviewed in September 2021. The Chief Executive undertook to discuss the use of headphones with IT. Members were advised that IT had tested the sound quality that morning and improvements had been made. The council was looking at investment into both better visual and audio equipment. A trial was planned to take place on 2 August 2021 and would remain in situ until the tender exercise was conducted.

The Chair explained that in a previous meeting he had experienced difficulty in hearing an officer presentation via zoom and commented that at tonight's meeting it was difficult to hear those present in the meeting room. The Chair commented that at the beginning of the meeting two IT officers had been present and added that perhaps there could be an IT presence for the duration of meetings.

In conclusion, Councillor Mrs Spikings stated that the Planning Committee was a regulatory body which made decisions and the use of headphones be explored prior to the next meeting. In response, the Chief Executive advised that for the next Planning Committee the trial equipment would be in place and those joining the meeting via zoom should use a headset.

RESOLVED: That the Corporate Performance Panel supported the recommendations to Cabinet and Council as set out below, subject to special consideration be given to the Planning Committee in relation to the comments made above by Councillor Mrs Spikings:

- 1) That Cabinet agree with the recommendations for the interim arrangements for council meetings.
- 2) It is recommended that Council and Scrutiny Panel meetings continue to meet at their current start times.

- 3) Officers will attend meetings via Zoom to limit the number of people in the room at one time.
- 4) Members attending under Standing Order 34 may do so via Zoom or in person.
- 5) That a further review of council meetings is conducted at the end of September 2021, when the impact of the relaxing of national covid measures are more widely known.