

RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET 3 AUGUST 2021 FROM THE AUDIT COMMITTEE HELD ON 26 JULY 2021

A25

COUNCIL MEETINGS INTERIM ARRANGEMENTS - CABINET REPORT

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In presenting the report the Assistant Director, Resources 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.

Councillor Collingham commented that the report would also be considered by the Regeneration and Development Panel on 27 July 2021 and she endorsed the proposed structure and added that the continuation of remote meetings - sifting meetings, etc on Teams and Zoom would reduce the cost of travel and reduce emissions. Councillor Collingham added that there were difficulties hearing in the Assembly Room and that the current audio system was not fit for purpose. Councillor Collingham also stated that she had envisaged holding meetings of the Regeneration and Development Panel in other locations - Downham Market and Hunstanton and did not know if the social distancing would allow it.

Councillor Rust stated that she supported the current arrangements but added that many Councillors stood for election on the understanding that they could attend evening meetings and having meetings during the day therefore placed some Councillors at a disadvantage to attend.

Councillor Collingham supported Councillor Rust on the comments made above.

Councillor Gidney concurred with the comments made by Councillor Collingham.

Councillor Storey commented that the distance between Councillors should be maintained to allow Councillors to spread out their documents on the table and added that evening meetings would help himself to attend.

Councillor Morley commented that the present sound system was not fit for purpose to enable decisions to be made and required

improvement. Councillor Morley expressed his concerns regarding the Planning Committee and the difficulties experienced with officers presenting reports via Zoom. Councillor Morley also added that 4.30 pm was not a convenient time for himself or other Councillors who had parent responsibilities to attend meetings.

In response to the comments made above, the Assistant Director, Resources explained that if hybrid meetings continued this would provide a saving and that the current audio system was being looked at and a new system would be installed and trialled during early August 2021.

The Chair commented that there was a need to recognise the requirements for the Planning Committee and that Councillors should recognised their responsibility to ensure attendance at meetings at whatever time they are held.

The Chair thanked the Assistant Director, Resources for presenting the report.

RESOLVED: The committee supported the recommendations to Cabinet and Council as set out below:

- 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 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.