

REPORT TO CABINET

Open		Would any decisions proposed :			
Any especially affected Wards	Discretionary	(a) Be entirely within Cabinet's powers to decide NO			
		(b) Need to be recommendations to Council YES in part			
		(c) Is it a Key Decision NO			
Lead Member: Cllr S Dark E-mail: cllr.Stuart.Dark@west-norfolk.gov.uk			Other Cabinet Members consulted:		
			Other Members consulted:		
Lead Officers: Lorraine Gore E-mail: Lorraine.Gore@west-norfolk.gov.uk			Other Officers consulted: A Baker, B Box, S Winter, M Drewery		
Financial Implications	Policy/ Personnel Implications	Statutory Implications	Equality Impact Assessment required	Risk Management Implications	Environmental Implications
YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO

Date of meeting: 8 February 2023

COUNCIL MEETING ARRANGEMENTS

Summary

The report presents the findings of the Corporate Performance Panel (CPP) Informal Working Group and the recommendations from CPP.

RECOMMENDATION

That Cabinet recommend to Council the arrangements for council meetings as detailed in section 2 of the report.

That Cabinet approve the appointment of a Senior Democratic Services Officer as detailed in section 3 of the report.

Reason for Decision

To respond to the Motion to Council on 23 February 2022 and the arrangements for council meetings as covid restrictions are removed.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 To ensure Member input into the consideration of council meeting arrangements it was agreed at Corporate Performance Panel on 13 April 2022 to establish an Informal Working Group (IWG) for evidence gathering and preliminary analysis. The IWG met on 6 June 2022 and 4 July 2022 and the findings of the IWG were reported to CPP on 4 January 2023.

2. ARRANGEMENTS FOR COUNCIL MEETINGS

- 2.1 The Planning Committee and Licensing Committee should remain during the day as per current arrangements.
- 2.2 The Panels should determine their meeting start times. There was no agreement by the IWG on a recommended start time.
- 2.3 Cabinet will continue to determine the start times of their meetings.
- 2.4 CPP recommended that full Council meetings to continue to start at 4.30pm.
- 2.5 The arrangements for live streaming and hybrid meeting arrangements should continue. Officer presentations and audio quality to be kept under review.

3. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The Democratic Services team have continued to deliver live streaming and hybrid meeting arrangements which were introduced during the response to covid and these arrangements are now recommended to continue but this does have resourcing implications.
- 3.2 A separate report on the agenda recommends changes to the constitution to allow for call in of officer delegated decisions which will also have resourcing implications for the Democratic Services team.
- 3.3 Whilst additional support is currently being provided within the Democratic Services Team by a corporate apprentice it is recommended that a Senior Democratic Services Officer is appointed from within the team to provide senior level support to the Democratic Services Manager and senior officer resilience in the team.
- 3.4 The grading of the Senior Democratic Services Officer post will be subject to job evaluation.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The equipment to provide live streaming and hybrid meetings has already been procured and is in operation.

- 4.2 The estimated annual cost, subject to job evaluation, of the appointment to a Senior Democratic Services Officer from within the team is £5,000 plus on costs. To be met from within the overall salaries budget.

5. STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS

- 5.1 Following the expiry of the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 in May 2021, local authorities no longer have the option to hold Council meetings remotely. All decision makers at a Council meeting must therefore be in the room.
- 5.2 This Council made the discretionary choice to continue to livestream and keep recordings of Council meetings available on Youtube, as it was considered this has a positive benefit on openness, transparency and public engagement. Cabinet also previously approved the attendance of 'non-decision makers' attending Council meetings remotely if they wished. The updates issued by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities continue to indicate that they intend to bring forward primary legislation to provide the permanent power to hold remote/hybrid meetings, however there is no current date provided on when this will happen.
- 5.3 As agreed at Cabinet on 3 August 2021 the council's constitution has already been amended 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.

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Minutes of the Informal Working Group meetings of 6 June 2022 and 4 July 2022.

Report to CPP on 4 January 2023