

## **REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE ORGANISATION POLICY AND SCRUTINY PANEL**

**DATE OF MEETING: 1 NOVEMBER 2016**

**SUBJECT OF REPORT: REVIEW OF MEMBER WAYS OF WORKING**

**TOWN OR PARISH: COUNCIL-WIDE**

**MEMBER PRESENTING: COUNCILLOR TERRY PORTER, CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE ORGANISATION POLICY AND SCRUTINY PANEL**

**KEY DECISION: NO**

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

That the panel receive and comment on reviewing Member Ways of Working following the first year of these new ways of working having been in operation.

### **SUMMARY OF REPORT**

#### **1. POLICY**

The review was originally undertaken having regard to the Council's target operating model and the opportunities afforded by a shift to greater use of digital technologies.

#### **2. BACKGROUND**

At the Annual Meeting of Council in 2015 the Chief Executive was requested to undertake a review of policy and scrutiny operating arrangements with a view to reducing costs in the order of £35,000 whilst not reducing the ability of scrutiny panels and working groups to play an effective role.

The Chief Executive met with the panel chairmen and group leaders to undertake the requested review. The findings of that meeting were reported to Council on 29<sup>th</sup> September 2015, at which the following recommendations were agreed:

- (1) that Council retain the current number and terms of reference of the Policy and Scrutiny Panels for the immediate future but consider a further review when alternate working has operated for a period;
- (2) that the frequency of formal panel meetings be reduced so that normally each panel would meet in formal session no more than three times a year but the

current scheduled times of panels be retained so that those not used for panel meetings are available for working group meetings;

- (3) that the scheduled dates for the formal panel meetings that would no longer be required should be retained as a starting point for having times allocated for working group meetings, with Panel Chairmen leading on planning additional working groups as needed to discharge the work of the Panels including determining the most suitable type of venue, timings and attendees (in terms of officer support and other advisers or contributors);
- (4) that Panel work activity be focussed on a number of key topics designed to make valued contribution to the work of the Council, with the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of Panels meeting taking a lead on co-ordinating activity across panels and agreeing resources required to support panels. Information items should not, as a matter of course, be reported via panel or working group meetings but by other more appropriate communications channels; and
- (5) that a Member Steering Group (similar to that which had overseen the introduction of iPads) be convened in order to work with ICT officers and partners to investigate how to exploit additional functionality of iPads and other Member IT systems to support transformed ways of working, and group leaders consider representatives for the Steering Group.

### **3. DETAILS**

As the new policy and scrutiny operating arrangements had been in place for one year, it was considered timely that a review of the effectiveness of these arrangements should be undertaken.

#### **3.1 Main structures arising from the new approach**

Each of the panels was at a different stage in development in adapting to the new approach.

The evolving structure had seen an emergence of two different types of Policy and Scrutiny Member Groups:

1. Steering Groups – these were standing groups of just a few Members which remained in place to monitor and review on either a regular or ad hoc basis. These operated under the charge of an identified Lead Member/Chairman for that work area. They had clearly defined remits, with the focus remaining on policy rather than specific ward detail. Examples of such groups could be seen across all five panels, examples being evident with the School Organisation Steering Group and the Waste Scrutiny Steering Group;
2. Working Groups – these were formed to conduct specific task and finish investigations once a need had been identified and prioritised. These groups still enjoyed support from the Democratic Services Scrutiny Team throughout the investigation, in scoping the Terms of Reference, identified aims, timelines, written reports and recommendations. Each Panel was restricted to only one or two such

investigations at any one time due to the intensity of officer input entailed. Again, examples could be seen across all five panels.

### **3.2 Members' access to Information Technology**

The new approach had also seen a move away from provision of paper reports for Councillors and an increased reliance on technology. Councillors had each been equipped with iPads, which introduced a Meetings App enabling Members to access their papers on the device.

Whilst feedback was generally supportive of the Meetings App, Members were still seeking improved IT solutions for informal steering and working groups, including a document storage facility on the iPad and access to the facilities available to those accessing the intranet.

As per Recommendation 5 agreed by Council, a Members' IT Steering Group has continued to meet regularly to prioritise and progress additional functionality of the iPads.

### **3.3 Review**

Policy and Scrutiny Chairmen and Vice Chairmen met to discuss the initial process for reviewing new ways of working and conducted a survey of their own views. Feedback showed that they felt that the use of designated Lead Members covering each of the thematic areas within the remit of each panel was a constructive step and was already considered as more effective. It was felt that agendas were now more councillor-led, and that relationships between Councillors and operational officers was becoming more relaxed and constructive.

The value in engaging the views of all Policy and Scrutiny Panel Members was recognised as crucial to the success of any review, by way of a questionnaire (attached as Appendix 1). It is the detail of this questionnaire which the Community and Corporate Organisation Policy and Scrutiny Panel is now being asked to consider.

## **3. CONSULTATION**

The process for undertaking a review had been considered at a meeting of the Policy and Scrutiny Chairmen and Vice Chairmen in September 2016.

## **4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

As well as developing more efficient ways of working in line with the council's Transformation Programme, the new ways of working have realised savings in staff costs within democratic services and costs associated with the meetings of panels of approximately £35,000.

## **5. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

None

## **6. OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

Failure to undertake a review of the new ways of working may result in a missed opportunities in achieving further efficiencies and continued development of the effectiveness of scrutiny.

### **AUTHOR**

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### **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 – Proposed questionnaire for Policy and Scrutiny Councillors

### **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Council Report – 29<sup>th</sup> September 2015 -  
<http://apps.n-somerset.gov.uk/cairo/docs/doc26923.pdf>