

# Governance Committee

## Minutes

Monday, 18 January 2016 at 14:00

PRESENT :

Councillors Annison, Carpenter, Grey, Myers, Plant, Thirtle, T Wainwright and Williamson.

Mrs S Oxtoby (Interim Chief Executive Officer), Mr D Johnson (nplaw), Mr R Hodds (Cabinet Secretary), Mr J Cade (Consultant)

### **1 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN**

RESOLVED :

That Councillor Plant be appointed Chairman of the Governance Committee.

### **2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Walker.

### **3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **4 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC**

The Committee agreed that Governance Committee should meet in public and agreed therefore that public should not be excluded from this meeting.

### **5 COMMITTEE FORM OF GOVERNANCE**

The Committee was reminded that Council at its meeting on the 21st December 2015 had agreed the following :-

1. To approve the creation of a Committee as detailed in the Chief Executive Officers Report.
2. To settle the Terms of Reference of the Committee.
3. To approve the proposed budget for the change in Governance.
4. To require the Governance Committee to formulate proposals, which are as far as possible, cost neutral.

The Cabinet Secretary reported that Council when considering this matter had agreed to amend (4) above by the inclusion of the words "without comprising on the efficiency of the decision making of the Council".

## **6 Q&A SESSION**

John Cade detailed his background of experience in respect of dealing with Governance issues for Local Government. Mr Cade stated that the agreement of Structures and Cultures will be very important and he reminded the Governance Committee that following the decision at Council, Great Yarmouth Borough Council was now locked into a Committee Form of Governance for the next 5 years. He referred to the Terms of Reference as detailed in the Chief Executive Officers report which he fully endorsed.

Mr Cade advised Members that he had recently carried out work at Cambridge in respect of a change to a Committee Form of Governance and that following 9 months of operation Members of the Council in Cambridge had stated that they had liked the fact that under this system Councillors were now more engaged in the decision making process; they had a greater sense of collective ownership; and that there was a broader spectrum of Councillors wishes being acknowledged. The issues that the Cambridge Members disliked were that reports to committees were too lengthy; too many operational issues were presented to Committees and the role and remit of the Policy Committee needed greater clarity; and that generally too many items were being presented to Committees for consideration.

Councillor Wainwright reported that the Labour group had considered a structure for a Committee System and he presented his Groups details as follows :-

### **Principles**

Committees can make decisions balanced with a Call In Procedure (as per the current Cabinet System), so that decisions made at Committee could take effect after a agreed number of days if not called in. The Scrutiny and Audit and Risk Committees could merge to form a new Oversight Committee with the Chair not being from the ruling party. Key decisions taken by Full Council where rules could be set (e.g. expenditure/saving One Hundred Thousand Pounds), Policy decisions and that Committees should be restricted to spending their own Budget within rules.

The Labour group were proposing the establishment of the following Committees :-

- Economic Development, Tourism and Regeneration Committee
- Environmental Health Committee
- Neighbourhood Committee
- Housing Management Committee
- Policy, General Purposes and Resources Committee

The regulatory Committees of Planning and Licensing would continue as at present. As previously stated it was proposed to have an over size Committee combining Audit and Risk and Scrutiny Committees.

### **Partnership/Outside Bodies**

Councillor Wainwright raised the issue of how do we work with our Partners to hold

them to account. He suggested Partnerships should be married to Committee so for example Preservation Trust would come under the Economic development Committee.

### **Contracts**

Councillor Wainwright reported on the issue of how do we manage Contracts and set Award Contracts. Monitoring could be carried out at corresponding Committee however awarding contracts cuts across Finance and Service so both may have a role . he raised the issue of a joint Service and Finance Meeting as and when needed.

Councillor Wainwright also stated that all Committees should be subject to the Widdecombe Process where by all Committees would be politically balanced and he also suggested that the Chairs of the agreed Committees should be divided amongst the Political Groups on the Council.

The Chairman suggested that the Officers should come back with a recommendation with regard to the suggested Committees as outlined above, fully costed up.

The Chief Executive Officer asked the Committee to agree Key Principles in respect of a Committee Form of Governance and the Committee agreed that 3 Key Principles would be :-

1. To align the Committees in accordance with the Borough Councils Corporate Plan.
2. Oversight through a Policy and Resources/General Purposes Committee.
3. Determination of how Chairs are appointed.
4. The Policy/General Purposes Committee should have responsibility for the strategic direction of the Council.

Councillor Myers commented that in his opinion there should be a maximum of five Committees with an overall Policy Committee. He also suggested that representatives from each political groups should come up with their own proposals for a Committee Structure to determine if there is common ground amongst all the political groups.

David Johnson confirmed that it would be possible to establish a Call In System of Committee decisions that have been made. With regard to Chairs of Committees he suggested that this may have to be written specifically into the revised Constitution.

The Governance Committee agreed that all political groups should formulate their own proposals for a Committee Structure.

As a result of the discussions at the meeting, Mr Cade stated that he understood the wishes of Members were as follows :-

1. That there should be a Policy/General Purposes Committee established
2. Committees need to align to the Corporate Plan
3. Retention of the current regulatory Committees (i.e.. Development Control, Licensing, Audit and Risk)
4. To determine the role of an Oversight/Audit Committee
5. Certain decisions could be referred upwards to either a Policy Committee or Council, if the Committee thought it appropriate.
6. Policy Committee could have a level of delegation to be agreed

7. Committees to spend within their own Budgets
8. Public Consultation to be coordinated by Full Council, protocol by Policy and Resources/General Purposes Committee.
9. Council will set the scheme of delegation.
10. Urgent decisions to be carried out by Group Leaders.
11. Retention of the Public Speaking Protocols as at present.
12. The protocol for setting up Working Groups to be left to the Policy and Resources Committee to determine.

With regard to the frequency of Committee Meetings, the Governance Committee generally of the opinion that it seemed most appropriate for this to be based on a six weekly cycle of meetings. With regard to Membership of Committee it was generally agreed that numbers on Committees should be no greater than 13 as at present.

The issue of delegated powers to Officers would also need to be reviewed.

In response to a question from Councillor Thirtle, David Johnson confirmed that the revised and amended Constitution would be completed in time for the Committee System adoption in May 2016. David Johnson also referred to the establishment of a Independent Review Panel that had been set up by North Norfolk District Council to consider Members allowances and it was suggested that this panel be asked if they would be willing to consider Members allowances on behalf of Great Yarmouth Borough Council. The Governance Committee agreed that Council at its meeting on the 26th January should be asked to agree to the establishment of an Independent Review Panel on the lines detailed above.

## **7 TIMETABLE OF MEETINGS**

The Committee agreed to the following Timetable of Meetings :-

- Tuesday 2 February 2016 at 2:00pm
- Tuesday 1 March 2016 at 2:00pm
- Thursday 24 March 2016 at 10:00am

## **8 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The Chairman had not been informed of any other business.

The meeting ended at: 16:05