

Report to: **Council**

Date: **22 February 2018**

Title: **POLITICAL STRUCTURES WORKING GROUP REVIEW**

Portfolio Area: **Strategy & Commissioning**

Wards Affected: **All**

Urgent Decision: **N** Approval and clearance obtained: **Y**

Date next steps can be taken:
(e.g. referral on of recommendation or implementation of substantive decision) **Immediately following this meeting**

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RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Council RESOLVES that:

- 1. meetings of the Council and formal Committee meetings held at Follaton House be live streamed to an internal audience only initially for a three month trial period;**
- 1(a) following this trial, the Political Structures Working Group be given authority to gauge its success and to then determine whether or not Council and formal Committee meetings held at Follaton House should be permanently live streamed;**
- 2. it be noted that the provision for both Public Questions to be asked at full Council meetings and electronic voting solutions be deferred to a future Political Structures Working Group for further consideration; and**

3. unless in exceptional circumstances, no formal Member meetings be held during the month of August.
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1. Executive summary

- 1.1 The Council has appointed a Political Structures Working Group with the primary purpose of making recommendations to full Council on the decision-making processes and structure of the Council;
- 1.2 The Political Structures Working Group met on 25 January 2018 to consider (and make recommendations to the Council on) the following items:
 - Live Streaming of Council and Formal Committee Meetings;
 - Provision for Public Questions at full Council meetings;
 - Electronic Voting in Meetings; and
 - Scheduling formal meetings during the month of August.

2. Background

Live Streaming of Meetings

- 2.1 Ever since the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 became legislation, the Working Group has kept a close watching brief on the merits of webcasting Member Meetings;
- 2.2 On each previous occasion, the Working Group has recommended to the Council that webcasting did not constitute good value for money at that time, but did recognise that the matter should be kept under regular review;
- 2.3 To date, the Council has always approved the Working Group recommendations in this respect.

Public Questions at Council Meetings

- 2.4 Members will be aware that there is currently no provision for public questions to be raised at full Council meetings. In response to recent public requests, it was agreed that the Working Group would be tasked with reviewing this lack of provision.

Electronic Voting

- 2.5 As part of the agenda setting process for this Working Group meeting, Members were consulted for any additional items for consideration. During this process, a request was made for electronic voting at formal Member meetings to be reconsidered.

Calendar of Meetings – August

- 2.6 A Member also asked during the consultation exercise that the Working Group be given the opportunity to discuss the principle of scheduling formal Member meetings during the month of August.

3. Political Structures Working Group Deliberations

- 3.1 The Working Group meeting was attended by six of its eight Members (Cllrs Baldry, Green, Pennington, Saltern, Tucker and Wright). Apologies were received from Cllrs Hitchins and Holway.

Live Streaming of Meetings

- 3.2 The Working Group received a demonstration from the Community Of Practice Lead – Communications on the ability to live stream meetings via YouTube;
- 3.3 As part of the demonstration, it was emphasised to the Working Group that there would be no cost implications arising from live streaming meetings. Furthermore, since the equipment would be operated by Communications Officers (who already attended these Committee meetings), there would be no additional resource implications to the Council;
- 3.4 A number of Members recognised that the press and public were already attending and filming a variety of formal meetings. Furthermore, it was recognised that the vast majority of other local authorities were now live streaming their Committee meetings in one form or another;
- 3.5 Before making any recommendations, the Working Group requested greater clarity around the ability to photograph and film children in a public place. Officers advised that there are no laws prohibiting this provided that the images are of an appropriate nature and the main point was to ensure that all parties who attend a meeting are aware that filming is taking place and that they could potentially feature in it;
- 3.6 In order to gauge the effectiveness of the proposed system, the majority of Members in attendance were of the view that meetings of the Council and formal Committee meetings held at Follaton House should be live streamed for an internal audience only (i.e. officers and Members) initially for a three month trial period;
- 3.7 Assuming that the Council approves this proposal, the Working Group recognised that there would be a need for a learning and development session to be arranged for Members before the first meeting is live streamed;

- 3.8 Upon the conclusion of the trial period, the Working Group was of the view that it should then be reconvened to determine whether or not it had been a success;
- 3.9 In evaluating the success, the Working Group felt that it should be given the discretion to determine whether or not Council and formal Committee meetings held at Follaton House are permanently live streamed without the need to report back to full Council for further approval.

Public Questions at Council Meetings

- 3.10 Officers confirmed that the Council was one of only two in Devon that did not currently have any provision for Public Questions at its full Council meetings;
- 3.11 In discussion, it became apparent that, whilst supportive of the principle, Group Members had a variety of differing views over the format of a public question session. These included:
- Should a question be restricted to the items of business on that meeting agenda?
 - Should advance notice of questions be a requirement?
 - Should limits be put on the number of questions any individual can ask at a meeting?
 - Should questioners be given the opportunity to ask a supplementary question?
 - Should there be provision to ensure that repeat (or broadly similar) questions that had already been dealt with by the Executive / Overview and Scrutiny Panel / Salcombe Harbour Board were not raised again?

- 3.12 As a way forward, the Working Group concluded that a firm set of proposals should be presented to a future meeting for further consideration and a Member cited the Cornwall Council approach as a good model to base the draft scheme on;

- 3.13 Whilst not directly linked to this matter, some Members asked that, as part of the annual review into the Council Constitution, specific consideration be given to whether or not Members should be permitted to ask questions during the Public Question Time sessions at meetings of the Executive and the Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

Electronic Voting

- 3.14 The Leader introduced this item and advised the Working Group that the monies that had been set aside for the Council Chamber refurbishment project had been removed from the Capital Programme during the 2017/18 Budget Setting process;

- 3.15 Nonetheless, the majority of Members in attendance considered that, such were the recent technological advancements, there were now more cost effective Electronic Voting solutions available and it was therefore timely to revisit this matter at a future Working Group meeting;

Calendar of Meetings – August

- 3.16 In light of the Annual Calendar of Meetings recently including provision for formal Committee meetings during the month of August, the Working Group was asked to consider whether this recent trend should be reversed;
- 3.17 In the ensuing debate, the constraints and difficulties of drafting the Calendar of Meetings (especially when considering the Shared Services agenda) was recognised by the Working Group;
- 3.18 However, there remained a general acceptance that the month of August was sacrosanct and the majority of Members reaffirmed the view that, unless in exceptional circumstances, no formal Member meetings should be held during the month of August.

4. Implications

Legal/Governance		<p>The Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 makes provision for the public and press to be able to film and record Member meetings in their own right without requiring the prior approval of the Council</p> <p>In addition to the Annual Review, the Council has the ability to amend and/or update its Constitution throughout the year.</p>
Financial		There are no additional financial implications directly related to this report.
Risk		<p>As with all technologies, there are risks for potential failure. These will be mitigated through pre-meeting checks.</p> <p>In the event of the outcome of the trial being that the Council live streams its Member meetings, the public must always be made aware that this is happening and will be publicly available.</p>
Comprehensive Impact Assessment Implications		
Equality and Diversity		There are no equality and diversity implications directly related to this report.
Safeguarding		There are no safeguarding implications directly related to this report.

Community Safety, Crime and Disorder		There are no community safety or crime and disorder implications directly related to this report.
Health, Safety and Wellbeing		There are no health, safety and wellbeing implications directly related to this report.
Other implications		N/A

Supporting Information

Appendices:

None

Background Papers:

None