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NEWARK AND SHERWOOD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of **Councillors Commission** held remotely via Microsoft Teams on Thursday, 25 February 2021 at 4.00 pm.

PRESENT: Councillor R Blaney (Chairman)

Councillor Mrs L Dales, Councillor P Harris, Councillor Mrs L Hurst,
Councillor J Lee and Councillor P Peacock

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillor L Brailsford and Councillor Mrs G Dawn

The meeting was held remotely, in accordance with the Local Authorities and Police & Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police & Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020.

36 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no declarations of interest.

37 MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 11 JANUARY 2021

AGREED that the minutes of the meeting held on 11 January 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

38 GOVERNANCE REVIEW UPDATE

The Director - Governance & Organisational Development presented a report updating Members on progress of the Governance Review. Further to the last meeting of the Commission, the workshop sessions for all Members were held during the week commencing 1 February 2021. These were well attended and gave the Members the opportunity for a discussion around their role, purpose and responsibilities to help inform the direction of travel in relation to the governance review.

The report identified the common themes and issues which came out of the discussions in the three sessions. The report also captured how Members had been involved in different ways with their communities during the pandemic.

The Commission referred to the provision of ICT which was an item which appeared later on the agenda. The Director - Governance & Organisational Development explained that the regulations to enable virtual meetings was due to expire on 9 May 2021, however the LGA, and others were lobbying the Government to extend the current regulations, or introduce on a permanent basis which would allow 'hybrid' meetings going forward.

AGREED that the information arising from the Member workshops be noted, and the Chief Executive be requested to report to a further meeting of the Commission, no later than the end of April 2021, with conclusions, options and recommendations for

the Council's governance arrangements, having regard to the original Peer Challenge report and learning from the virtual visits, and feedback from the Members' workshops.

39 REPORT OF THE MEMBERS INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL

The Business Manager - Elections & Democratic Services presented a report which advised the Commission of the final report of the Members Independent Remuneration Panel. The report proposed various increases to Members allowances which were detailed in the report.

The Members were minded to recommend approval of the proposed scheme of Members Allowances, however they considered that the Council should determine if it was appropriate to implement at the current time given the impact of the pandemic.

The Commission did note that the Panel were not recommending any allowance for those Members on the Planning Committee, despite the amount of time those Members on this committee spent given the requirement to attend site visits and the length of some agendas. The Panel in their report had referred to this issue being addressed in 'other ways' and the Commission requested the Business Manager – Elections & Democratic Services go back to the Panel to clarify what they meant by this.

AGREED that the report of the Independent Remuneration Panel be presented to the Full Council at their meeting to be held on 9 March 2021, for determination.

40 PLANNING COMMITTEE - SCHEME OF DELEGATION

The Business Manager - Planning Development presented a report concerning the Scheme of Delegation. A number of changes were made to the delegation arrangements in late 2019 and it was agreed to undertake a further review 12 months after these had been in place. This report set out the findings of the review which highlighted both positive and negative impacts as a result of the amendments. The report made a number of recommendations as a result of those and requested the Commission to consider recommending to Full Council the proposed amendments to the Scheme of Delegation.

The report set out the scope for the review, the existing committee arrangements, existing scheme of delegation and some data relevant to the current process, before proceeding onto the proposed changes. The proposed changes were summarised as:

- i. Refer Applications for Minor Dwellings to Ward Members when the Town/Parish Council has objected and the Officer recommendation is for Approval and if request received, present application to Planning Committee;
- ii. Greater Clarity (i.e. planning reasons) from Member within Referral Requests; and
- iii. Amend the Scheme of Delegation as set out within Appendix 1 to the report.

The Commission welcomed the proposed changes but requested that these be subject to further review in 12 months after implementation. The opportunity for all Members to engage with the appropriate planning officer early in the process was also supported, and it was agreed that this could be implemented immediately by carrying out the proposal to changes to the weekly list to include a link to the planning application and for the case officer's name to be included.

The Commission also considered that further training regarding the planning process and what constituted material planning considerations would be useful, and the Business Manager – Planning Development confirmed that such training would be made available for all Members and Town and Parish Councils.

Given the changes to the Scheme of Delegation required changes to the Constitution, it was suggested that these be presented to the Annual Council Meeting in May for approval.

AGREED that the proposed revisions to the Scheme of Delegation be recommended to Full Council for approval and that these be subject to further review by the Councillors' Commission 12 months after implementation.

41 MEMBERS DIGITAL REQUIREMENTS

The Business Manager - ICT presented a report which detailed the use of digital media by Members during the pandemic and gave potential options to enhance the remote meeting experience. The report outlined how Members had been accessing meetings and agenda during this time, and some of the limitations of using the present equipment.

The report proposed that Members be issued with a laptop and headset to access remote meetings, and to continue to use their iPads to access agenda. The laptops Members would receive were already held within ICT as older stock, and could be reconditioned within existing budgets to reduce the financial impact. Headsets, or speakers if required, could be purchased at low cost. As there was no cost other than officer time, it was agreed that roll out of the reconditioned laptops should begin immediately.

In addition it was noted that the Zoom client application be installed on the Members iPads and that ICT were to provide testing and migration of emails into Microsoft Intune. These proposals were to be supported by additional training for Members as required.

Members were keen to seek speedy resolutions to the issues that had been experienced when accessing virtual meetings. It was acknowledged that the ability to undertake meetings remotely had many benefits, and whilst it did not replace face-to-face meetings, it was hoped that the ability to meet remotely would continue.

AGREED that the report be noted, with the proposals as set out being endorsed and recommended to the Policy & Finance Committee for consideration with any non-cost elements to be implemented with immediate effect.

Meeting closed at 5.10 pm.

Chairman