

GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 26 February 2015 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Pett (Chairman)

Cllr. McGarvey (Vice Chairman)

Cllrs. Mrs. Clark, Fittock, London and Walshe

An apology for absence was received from Cllr. Ms. Chetram

Cllr. Miss. Stack was also present.

15. Minutes

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting of the Governance Committee held on 18 September 2014 be approved and signed as a correct record.

16. Declarations of Interest

No additional declarations were made.

17. Actions arising from the last meeting

The actions were noted.

18. Individual Electoral Registration (IER)

The Electoral Services Manager presented the report which explained that the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 introduced Individual Electoral Registration (IER), which was the most significant change to the electoral registration system for 100 years. The change was aimed at tackling perceived electoral fraud and improving both the perception and the integrity of the registration process. Individual Electoral Registration was also intended to provide a more convenient, secure and modern way for individuals to register and thereby maximise both the accuracy and completeness of the electoral register. It also provided the ability for residents to register online. The Cabinet Office and the Electoral Commission had published an IER guide for Members in June with an update in December 2014.

In response to a question as to whether, in addition to Care Homes, Gypsy and Traveller sites were being visited, the Electoral Services Manager responded that this was something that could be looked at. Members noted that there was no guarantee for the current Government funding support to continue after the initial two years, and that there was possibly an ongoing resource issue.

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Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Resolved: That the current position of Individual Electoral Registration, be noted.

19. The Local Government (Electronic Communications) (England) Order 2015

Members considered a report which advised them of the Local Government (Electronic Communication) (England) Order 2015 came into force on 30 January, and allowed a meeting summons to be deemed served to a nominated electronic address. To date two Members had nominated an electronic address. It was noted that if every individual Member of the Council nominated an electronic address for service then agendas could always meet statutory deadlines by being published electronically and the link emailed to the members of the meeting, and that this would not prevent paper copies being available to those who still wished to receive them, merely alter how or when they were received.

Cllr. Miss. Stack addressed the Committee in her capacity as Deputy Portfolio Holder of Strategy and Performance and lead on the Communications working group. With 'channel shift' (the process of moving service or contact mechanisms from one channel to another in order to reduce cost to serve and enhance your service) and the general move towards being 'paperless', there was a general move towards digital as default and Members needed to be aware. She was in the process of setting up a meeting with the Council's I.T. department and asked whether the Committee would consider setting up a working group for getting Members more 'digitalised' and how. Members briefly discussed various needs, past hindrances such as unreliable Wi-Fi in the Council offices, and equipment. It was noted that this was more the remit of the Strategy and Performance Advisory Committee but agreed that the Chairman and Vice Chairman to attend her meeting with the Chief Officer Corporate Support.

Resolved: That the new legislation and action already taken, be noted.

20. Arrangements for Member Induction and Training

The Chief Officer Legal and Governance presented a report updating Members on the progress made on arrangements for the New Members' Induction following the elections in May 2015.

Members were keen that there should be more practical help, and liked the idea of a mentor or named officer for new Councillors going forward.

The Vice Chairman reported that he had been advised by his Parish Clerk that each Parish had been allocated a Sevenoaks District Council Chief Officer, Members were not aware of this and considered that this was something they all should have been made aware of and requested that this information be circulated.

Resolved: That the progress made on arrangements for the New Members' Induction following the elections in May 2015, be noted.

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21. Future Report on Governance Arrangements

The Chief Officer Legal and Governance presented the report. As requested from the previous meeting, further research had been undertaken with particular reference to London Borough of Sutton and the research results from Cornwall's independent review carried out in 2011/12, which was detailed in the report. It was noted that all Councils in Kent were working under some form of cabinet governance model. Tandridge District Council over the border in Surrey was working under the Leader and Committee System as a result of their population falling under the threshold for the previous requirement to change to the Cabinet system of governance. However, Canterbury City Council had passed a resolution on the 24 July 2014 to return to the Committee system at the next Annual Council meeting in 2015 and Maidstone Borough Council had similarly resolved in December 2014 to return to the Committee system in May 2015. It was noted that it was difficult to quantify the financial impact of a change.

A Member considered it necessary to convene a working group in order to have a proper analysis. Other Members believed there would be more information available once Canterbury and Maidstone had been running under the system for a few months, and that it would be more fruitful to delay a review until the Autumn.

The Chairman moved, it was duly seconded and

Resolved: That

- a) this be revisited in ten months time with representatives from Canterbury and Maidstone Borough Councils invited to attend; and
- b) the report be noted.

22. Work Plan

The work plan was noted, with a review of governance arrangements added to the autumn meeting.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 8.34 PM

CHAIRMAN