

Commentary

Background

At the start of this Council cycle a new structure and revised Standing Orders were introduced. As required a partial review was conducted during the year and some changes made to workings of Panels and Working Groups. A guiding principle associated with the new structure was that the Council was the primary source of decision making – the Panel and Working Groups only having an advisory role. Events during this cycle arising from previous Councils have confirmed that this is and continues to be a sound approach.

In the light of recent discussions and agenda items it is appropriate to revisit the Structure and Constitution and where appropriate make changes to enhance what has already been achieved.

What is working well:

- The principle that the Council is the source of all decision making
- Panels in general

The introduction of the concept of a Strategic Plan with an associated Panel was a major advance in regard to Council direction and planning for the future. A new approach such as this takes time to settle in and become established. Challenges inhibiting the work of the Strategic Panel and the Clerk were unexpected historic issues and other exigencies arising which required urgent action. It is to be hoped that we will have a more settled period in the future.

Though it is not explicitly mentioned in the Standing Orders or Structure documents what has worked well is the Council appointing a limited number of Councillors to represent the Council in regard to specific issues with reports being provided to inform Council decisions. I cite the discussions with Tesco; responding to urban expansion plans; the forthcoming rail franchise; liaison with NKDC about the future of Sleaford's Market and the owner and agent of the Woodbridge Road Depot.

What has worked less well:

- Working Groups

The same cannot be said for the Working Groups which have proved to be problematic. The concept behind Groups is that they are set up for specific short term tasks at which point they cease. This has not worked well as we have seen, for example, with Markets and the Christmas Market Groups. The latter is clearly not short term and crosses over Council cycles. Late in this cycle Terms of Reference were agreed for the two Groups but this did not help in allowing them to function properly. Some believed that an Allotment Working group existed but this was never formally established. An Asset Group was formed but only had one meeting. One relating to the letting of the Town Hall has established a base line for such activities. As indicated above there are ways of structuring the Council which work and we should build upon the successes.

Proposals

1. Remove the role of Leader from the structure of the Council and adjust the composition of the Clerk's Management Panel.

Mayor, Lead of HR Panel and an elected Councillor.

2. Remove Working Groups from the Structure of the Council and only have Panels which run for the full cycle.

3. Reconfigure the Panels related to the business and activities of the Council:

- A. HR – as at present**
- B. Assets – Town Hall, Cemetery, Recreation areas, Eastgate Car Park, toilets, Kiosk, allotments**
- C. Culture, events and markets – including the Christmas Market**
- D. Finance and Services – finance, grass cutting, litter collection and dog bins, street lighting, external contracts.**

In adopting a structure such as this the following operational processes will need to be adopted:

Numbers: HR Panel up to five members; Clerk's Management Panel three and the others up to a maximum of seven Councillors (but as currently there exists the ability to draw in external specialists to support the work of the Panel when required). At the end of a Council cycle each Panel will propose a Plan of action for the next cycle and provide a report on progress in the current cycle. Attendance record of Panel meetings to be maintained and published. The Grievance and Discipline Panels will be established as and when required. The Clerk/Proper Officer will additionally attend the HR and Finance and Services Panels. Office support for other Panels will be made available as appropriate.

4. Voting procedures for the Annual Meeting. Return to secret ballots for Mayor, Deputy and Panels.

The Proposals

It is self evident that there is recognition that as currently formulated certain areas of the Council's work and functions are not properly addressed – markets; Christmas Market and the Town Hall as a major asset. All reflected in a suggestion that a new Panel be formed and called Town Hall and Events. What is unclear is if this is a harmonious relations and whether we can do better in reformulating the work. Assets and areas of activity of the Council.

Proposal 3 presented here attempts to better reflect Council's activities and bring together coherent strands. It is our contention that with the removal of the Working Group approach and the adoption of the revised Panel Structure better long term outcomes and planning can be achieved.

All proposed and seconded by:

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