

## PLYMOUTH CITY COUNCIL

<b>Subject:</b>	Councillor-led Democratic and Community Engagement
<b>Committee:</b>	City Council
<b>Date:</b>	29 January 2018
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Councillor John Riley (Cabinet Member for HR, Democracy and Governance)
<b>CMT Member:</b>	Giles Perritt (Assistant Chief Executive)
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<b>Ref:</b>	DECP2018
<b>Key Decision:</b>	No
<b>Part:</b>	I

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### **Purpose of the report:**

The report proposes to Full Council a multi-faceted programme of activities to help bring the work of Councillors and the Council closer to the communities we all serve.

In January 2017, Council considered the outcomes of a governance model review. The review concluded to retain the Cabinet Strong Leader model as the most efficient method in terms of decision making. It also concluded that feelings of disengagement from the democratic process experienced by some Councillors had resulted from cultural rather than procedural issues that could equally be addressed by either the Cabinet Strong Leader or Committee Structure governance model.

As such, Council requested the Constitutional Review Group (CRG), a cross-party group of Councillors, report back on a programme of work which:

- explores new forms of community engagement which develops new relationships with residents and communities;
- extends beyond service provision to the overall welfare of an area;
- enables local ward Members to take a lead role in ensuring that all resources available in the community are used for the good of its area; and
- develops changes to the current system to increase the engagement of all Members and allay the perception of increased disenfranchisement arising from the current model of governance.

During 2017, CRG worked with Councillors to listen to ideas and concerns. This included a workshop on the role of the frontline councillor in July 2017 from which many of the actions proposed here have their roots. CRG has therefore approached the request from Council through the lens of 'what is it that Councillors need to undertake their role well?'

With the Nolan Principles of Public Life at the centre and the corporate values of Fair, Democratic, Partners and Responsible as the guide, Councils request of CRG will be met by:

1. Providing a solid induction and good opportunities for follow-up training and development
2. Improving information and data flow about wards/the city

3. Engaging residents in different ways and responding to their concerns
4. Clarifying ways to connect back to the Council through officers and democratic/governance processes
5. Improving responsiveness from Council employees to questions and casework raised by Councillors
6. Appropriately devolved funds that are directed to ward priorities and complement the baseline service
7. Better utilising our networks to help solve problems collaboratively
8. Ensuring Councillors are visible and accessible to residents

The activities detailed in the enclosed slide pack therefore propose an approach to democratic and community engagement from the perspective of the front-line councillor. Proposed is a sustainable and impactful approach to how Councillors engage with their communities, which strengthens relationships and brings the work of the Council and Councillors closer to local residents. Key enablers to this are appropriately devolved funds which empower Councillors to direct resource to priority needs in their ward; form strong collaborative partnerships to identify holistic, long-term solutions to solve shared problems; and provide focus on a high-quality, responsive service to Councillors for their questions and casework.

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### **Corporate Plan 2016-19:**

The four corporate values of democratic, fair, responsible and partners provide the common guiding principles of this programme of work, anchored by the seven Nolan Principles of Public Life. The values guide consistency in how Councillors choose to engage with their communities. Such engagement is open and honest (fair) where people can have their say (democratic). Councillors provide strong community leadership (partners) and are considerate of the impact their actions and decisions have on others (responsible).

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### **Implications for Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications: Including finance, human, IT and land**

Resources to support this programme of work include:

- Existing devolved budgets:
  - Community Grants (£3,500 per Councillor; £199,500 in total per year)
  - Living Streets (£80,000 in total, allocated by ward)
  - Neighbourhood Initiative Fund (£100,000 per year)

This is a total of £379,500 in existing devolved funds to Councillors.

The existing devolved budgets are already approved within the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

- Coordination resource is required to support better use of the devolved funds, particularly with regards navigating their complexity for Councillors and identifying opportunities with colleagues internally and with partners which Councillors may wish to consider (e.g. pledges on relevant CrowdFund Plymouth projects). The existing approach to funding such administration is to source from within the relevant fund and it is intended that approach will continue.

## **Other Implications: e.g. Child Poverty, Community Safety, Health and Safety, Risk Management and Equality, Diversity and Community Cohesion:**

The recommendations from the report have implications with regards improving community cohesion by better enabling Councillors to engage with their communities, enable collaborative problem-solving with officers and partners, share knowledge with officers and therefore better address community needs.

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### **Equality and Diversity**

The Council has a duty to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote good relations between people who share protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 and those who do not.

**Has an Equality Impact Assessment been undertaken?** Elements of the package of work will require equality impact assessments (e.g. in terms of the types of ways Councillors wish to engage with residents and considerations of hard to reach groups) which will be undertaken as appropriate.

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### **Recommendations & Reasons for recommended action:**

That Council:

1. Agree the following priorities which comprise the programme of work proposed by CRG:
  - 1.1 Providing a solid induction and good opportunities for follow-up training and development
  - 1.2 Improving information and data flow about wards/the city
  - 1.3 Engaging residents in different ways and responding to their concerns
  - 1.4 Clarifying ways to connect back to the Council through officers and democratic/governance processes
  - 1.5 Improving responsiveness from Council employees to questions and casework raised by Councillors
  - 1.6 Appropriately devolved funds that are directed to ward priorities and complement the baseline service
  - 1.7 Better utilising our networks to help solve problems collaboratively
  - 1.8 Ensuring Councillors are visible and accessible to residents
2. Delegate to CRG responsibility for monitoring implementation of the detailed actions relating to the priorities within the programme of work outlined in recommendation 1.
3. Note the intention to approve use of the Neighbourhood Initiative Fund through the regular budget setting process.
4. Delegate to the Monitoring Officer, via CRG, relevant amendments required to Appendix One (3) Neighbourhood Working of the Constitution.

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### **Alternative options considered and reasons for recommended action:**

Pursue an alternative governance model. Moving from the existing Cabinet Strong Leader model to a Committee System of governance. A governance review was undertaken during 2016 and Council considered the outcomes in January 2018, confirming to retain a Cabinet Strong Leader model and commissioning this work from CRG.

No change. Make no changes to the existing support provided for Councillors and no changes to Council processes for democratic and community engagement activities. This was not an acceptable option as Councillors identified during the 2016 governance review concern that engagement with communities was not as strong as could be and that some Councillors experienced feelings of disengagement from the democratic process.

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**Published work/information:**

None

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**Background papers:**

Title	Part I	Part II	Exemption Paragraph Number						
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Changes to Governance Arrangements of the Council – 30 January 2017	X								

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**Sign off:**

Fin	AKH18.174	Leg	It/29760/180117	Mon Off	It/DVS/29760	HR		Assets		IT		Strat Proc	
Originating SMT Member – Giles Perritt													
Have you consulted the Cabinet Member(s) named on the report? Yes													