

Committee(s): Policy & Resources Committee	Date(s): 07 May 2020
Subject: Member Consultation	Public
Report of: The Town Clerk	For Decision
Report author: Polly Dunn, Senior Committee and Member Services Officer	

Summary

This report outlines plans for the revision of current informal Member consultation groups and the introduction of new ones, for the imminent COVID-19 'recovery' period.

Recommendation(s)

Members are invited to note the report and endorse the proposed arrangements.

Main Report

Background

1. Members will be aware that, in order to facilitate the Corporation's emergency response to COVID-19, a number of formal decisions had to be made in a short space of time, without the legal ability for Committees to meet and agree these virtually. To increase Member consultation with the consequent urgency procedures, and to ensure a corporate steer was taken on what were often significant, cross-cutting issues, an informal Member-level Sounding Board was established by the Chair of Policy & Resources. This group significantly helped officers by providing advice when a steer on time-critical matters was needed.

Current Position

2. Now virtual committee arrangements are in place for decision-making Grand Committees and some Sub-Committees, the number of urgencies being processed has lessened. However, it has been widely recognised that we are now approaching a new period of the crisis as the current lockdown measures are eased. As with the entry into lockdown, we anticipate that the Government and Public Health England (PHE) will continue to issue advice and directives and we will need to be alive to pan-London issues which need to be coordinated. It is therefore likely that we will need to respond to some of these changes before the relevant committee(s) can be held in the usual way. It is also likely that these decisions will impact a wide range of service areas and will therefore require involvement a number of Committees, even if the formal approval lies with only one.
3. In light of this, a set of Member **Thematic Consultation Groups** are suggested as a way of engaging a wide range of Members informally. This proposal was

developed in consultation with the Town Clerk, CPR, the current COVID-19 Sounding Board, and a forum of all Grand Committee Chairs. These can be found at appendix 1 and have been developed to mesh with the officer groups found at appendix 2. In summary the areas covered are:

- Public Services
 - Communities
 - Culture & Events
 - Finances
4. In addition to certain urgency consultation, it is proposed that these groups will meet routinely with their corresponding Chief Officers, to advise at an early stage on reports that will then be developed for consideration at Committee. This is to supplement the existing arrangements which see Chief Officers routinely consulting with Chairs to garner their view before committing resource on a report. It is hoped the introduction of these groups will encourage corporate thinking that will ultimately help prevent any silo working.
 5. Each thematic consultation group will be convened by their corresponding lead Chief Officer(s).
 6. In addition to the thematic groups, the same groups (Town Clerk/CPR/Sounding Board/Chairs' Forum) were consulted about the current **Sounding Board** arrangements and proposals for a revised membership. Following comments, particularly at the Chairs' Forum, it was suggested that, instead, the function previously served by the Sounding Board should now pass to the Committee's Resource Allocation Sub-Committee (RASC). RASC also performs the role of a Reference Sub-Committee and as such can consider and make recommendations on matters referred to it by the Committee. Its composition is set by the Court of Common Council. It is suggested that, for the time being, **informal meetings of RASC** should be convened on a fortnightly basis with Chairs of relevant committees that are not already represented on RASC, being invited to attend and participate in discussions as and when matters concerning their service areas arise.
 7. The groups listed in Appendix 1 will therefore be established at the earliest opportunity, subject to comment at Policy & Resources Committee, but **will be kept under constant review**. The landscape in which we are working is ever changing and it is therefore not surprising that we too will need to adapt as time progresses.
 8. These arrangements will not preclude the authority of the CPR to convene meetings with any combination of Chairs/Members in order to seek their views. However, it is hoped that these new consultation structures will mean that there will be no need to do so.
 9. To provide assurance, **these groups will not have any decision-making powers and they will exist in supplement to, not in place of, our usual governance arrangements**. Together with the informal RASC meetings, they

will ensure that a good level of democratic oversight is maintained as we approach a new phase of COVID activities.

Conclusion

10. The consultation groups will be established in order to increase Member engagement in a corporate way. This joined-up informal consultation will assist officers in the preparation and delivery of reports, which will ultimately enable the best possible decisions to be made at Committee, for the betterment of the City.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Thematic Working Groups
- Appendix 2 – Transitional Arrangements

Background Papers

None

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