

**TAVISTOCK TOWN COUNCIL  
28<sup>th</sup> MAY 2019**

**BRIEFING NOTE  
INFORMAL MECHANISMS FOR PRE-POLICY  
DEVELOPMENT, MEMBER ENGAGEMENT & SCOPING**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 Members will recall at the Councillor Induction Session held on 9<sup>th</sup> May, 2019 reference was made to the possibility of a scheduled approach to policy development and associated scoping.
- 1.2 This report has been prepared to enable a discussion as to the approach(es) which might appropriately be adopted. It would in normal circumstances be brought before the Budget and Policy Committee which is tasked with making recommendations to Council on policy matters.
- 1.3 Historically the Council has tended to develop policy through a mix of forums including Workshops, Issue Briefings/Discussions and facilitated Policy Topic Sessions. These have been open to all Members of Council and (historically) most used either in significant/complex/high impact policy areas (eg Strategic Plan/Townscape Heritage Initiative/Guildhall Gateway Centre etc) or for subjects with particular sensitivity (eg Pannier Market Surround, major legal proceedings etc).

**2. CURRENT CONTEXT**

- 2.1 Some Members of the new Council have identified this as an area they wish to explore and which might be helpful in providing an opportunity for team/consensus building, developing thinking and dissemination of information. This also has the potential to be beneficial given how few Members of the new Council have served for a whole 4 year Council term or more.
- 2.2 It also acknowledges a change within the composition of the Chamber, namely that a number of Members either are identified with, or self identify as, a part of a particular grouping of interests. Whether or not that is the case a forum which brings all Members of Council together for discussion, whatever their background and outlook may thereby be well placed to foster and sustain a collaborative and inclusive approach to the work of the Council for all Councillors.

#### **4. NEXT STEPS**

- 4.1 As indicated above the Council has previously successfully used a range of informal fora on an ad-hoc basis to both inform and supplement policy in a number of areas. The desire within Council at this time appears to be to put such arrangements on a more regularised basis.
- 4.2 It is therefore submitted that, following the principles outlined above, the annual calendar of meetings might be amended to include, within each Committee cycle, a designated additional Tuesday evening slot when such sessions could be held. This would enable those Members of Council who work during the day to attend as Tuesday evenings are typically set aside for Council business, it would allow proper preparation by participants and permit a planned approach to items without placing unsustainable demands on organisational resources. Additional ad hoc slots could be agreed as/if necessary, likewise if there was not a matter there would be no obligation to hold an event. In either case Council, through the Budget & Policy Committee (which is tasked with responsibility on Policy matters) would determine how to proceed so as to ensure inclusivity and co-ordination of activity.
- 4.3 The approach to be adopted in such fora can be flexible, normally chaired by the Mayor – typically these might be:-
- a. Topic or Policy based sessions – discussion around a particular topic(s) or policy to elicit views and discussion in an informal and open environment;
  - b. Workshop sessions – where Councillors “breakout” into groups to discuss and review particular issues, typically then reporting back;
  - c. Presentations and questions – this format is principally about disseminating information and lends itself to some of the more technical/legal issues facing the Council often in collaboration with professional advisors;
  - d. Information and Discussion Sessions (a mix of (a) and (c)) – whereby the session is partially structured around receiving information partly around discussion.

#### **5. CONCLUSION**

- 5.1 For the Council to determine how it wishes to proceed, in particular whether:-
- i. To refer this matter to the Budget & Policy Committee to review and make recommendation in the normal way; or (if not)

- ii. Whether it wishes to continue with the past practice of arranging informal sessions on an ad hoc basis according to need; or (if not)
- iii. Instead it wishes to place matters on a more scheduled basis, whether:
  - a. To endorse the principles set out at Para 3.1 above for informal meetings to review and discuss policy and other matters (or if not determine what other principles should apply);
  - b. To recommend the inclusion of informal policy sessions to held in each Council cycle (on the basis as indicated in para 4 .2 above);
  - c. To agree the approaches as listed at para 4.3 above (or identify such other formats as it might wish to adopt).

CARL HEARN  
**TOWN CLERK**  
TAVISTOCK TOWN COUNCIL  
MAY 2019