

Agenda Item No:	<b>8</b>	
Committee:	<b>Corporate Governance Committee</b>	
Date:	<b>19 June 2018</b>	
Report Title:	<b>Response to Corporate Governance Committee Motion</b>	

## **1 Purpose / Summary**

To receive a response from the Chief Executive to the motion agreed by Corporate Governance Committee at its meeting on 19 March 2018.

## **2 Key issues**

- Corporate Governance Committee agreed a motion (see 4.1) at its meeting on 19 March relating to communications between Members and Officers in relation to a waste to energy plant.
- The motion requested that the Chief Executive undertake a review of the situation and provide an update to the Committee.
- The Chief Executive has undertaken this review and held a number of meetings with Councillor Seaton, Leader of the Council and John Clark, Chairman of Corporate Governance Committee. The Chief Executive's response is set out at 5.1 of the report.

## **3 Recommendations**

- To note the response outlined at 5.1.

<b>Wards Affected</b>	
<b>Forward Plan Reference</b>	N/A
<b>Portfolio Holder(s)</b>	Councillor John Clark, Chairman of Corporate Governance Committee
<b>Report Originator(s)</b>	Paul Medd, Chief Executive
<b>Contact Officer(s)</b>	Paul Medd, Chief Executive Carol Pilson, Corporate Director Brendan Arnold, Corporate Director
<b>Background Paper(s)</b>	CGC Minutes; 19 March 2018

#### **4 Motion agreed by Corporate Governance Committee**

4.1 At its meeting on 19 March 2018, the Corporate Governance Committee agreed the following motion:

"You will be aware of the breakdown of communication of the Corporate Management Team to brief the Leader and senior members on meetings taking place over a number of months on a waste to energy plant (incinerator) in Wisbech.

Given there are ample channels for senior members to be briefed through, informal cabinet and portfolio briefings, on something as important as this and the experiences that Norfolk encountered when they discussed an incinerator.

The new Leader of the Council said at the last full Council meeting that something as sensitive and controversial as this, should never have happened. Therefore the Corporate Governance Committee asks;

1. The Head of Paid Service provides a written response how this could have happened.
2. What action is going to be taken to ensure that this does not happen in the future?"

#### **5 Response from Chief Executive**

##### **5.1 Statement to Corporate Governance Committee – Paul Medd: Chief Executive**

At its meeting on Monday 29th March 2018 Corporate Governance Committee stated as follows:

"You will be aware of the breakdown in communication of the Corporate Management Team to brief the Leader and senior members on meetings taking place over a number of months on a waste to energy (incinerator) plant in Wisbech.

Given there are ample channels for senior members to be briefed through informal cabinet and portfolio briefings on something as important as this and the experiences that Norfolk encountered when they discussed an incinerator.

The new Leader of the Council said at the last full Council meeting that something as sensitive and controversial as this should never happen again.

Therefore, this committee asks:

1. The Head of Paid Service provides a written response how this could have happened?
2. What action is he going to take to ensure this doesn't happen in the future?"

Corporate Governance Committee are asked to note the following:

- Several robust discussions between the Leader of the Council, Cllr Seaton, Chairman of Corporate Governance Committee, Cllr Clark and the Chief Executive, Paul Medd have now taken place to reflect on this matter. Cllr Clark has had the opportunity to

outline Corporate Governance Committees concerns about the level of member-officer engagement on the Wisbech Energy from Waste (Incinerator) issue.

- It has been accepted that the usual level of member-officer engagement could have been further improved. Lessons have been learned to ensure future engagement on issues that have the potential to be sensitive in the eyes of our residents. The Chief Executive acknowledges this and offers an apology for any embarrassment this may have caused the former Leader of the Council, Cllr John Clark, and any other members who feels adversely affected.
- The Chief Executive has written to CMT with clarification on expected levels of officer-member engagement and reinforced the need to ensure timely and effective member briefings on all sensitive matters.
- To further strengthen member-officer communication and engagement protocols, Fenland District Council has worked hard to ensure an effective flow of timely and fact based information between officers and members. As a consequence this has resulted in a mostly professional and trustworthy relationship that has created a strong foundation upon which FDC has achieved so many positive outcomes for its residents and businesses.
- For any Council to operate effectively a clear understanding of member and officer roles is important. FDC's culture makes this clear and sets out the key principles of this i.e elected members are responsible for setting the priorities for the Council on behalf of residents and officers are accountable for the delivery of these. In line with the Council's constitution officers are permitted an appropriate level of delegated accountability in delivering member priorities.
- During the past several years much has been done to further strengthen member-officer engagement protocols i.e meetings between senior members and officers to develop policy/project proposals, informal Cabinet meetings, All Member Seminars, member briefing notes and receipt of press releases before they are sent out. These have complemented Portfolio Holder briefings, ongoing informal briefings, effective day-to-day relationships, and the role of Council Committees to ensure an appropriate high level of member engagement and awareness of the Council's business.
- The provision of information to members needs to be respectful of legal, financial and data protection obligations in upholding the Council's best interests. However, the starting point should be officers seek to share information with their Portfolio Holders, Leader and where appropriate members more generally unless there are very clear and justifiable grounds not to.