



Council	29 April 2014	Matter for Decision
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Title: **Evolving the Council's Governance Arrangements**

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1. Introduction

1.1 An initial report on this subject was presented to Council on 25th February 2014 which set out how the Leader of the Council, working with the Chief Executive, was trying to develop the Council's governance arrangements in response to members aspirations and in order to ensure that the Council is best able to face future challenges

1.2 The report also played back the results of the two consultation exercises that had been carried out with members.

1.3 At the Council meeting in February members approved two specific elements of the report which were to delete the Standards Board and Overview & Scrutiny Committee. Members also asked the Chief Executive to do some further work and to change the format of the report to make the information contained within it more accessible.

1.4 Since that meeting the Chief Executive has completed that work and members have been consulted on the revised draft papers. Senior officers have also been consulted.

2. Recommendations

2.1 The recommendations are contained within the information set out below

3. Information

This report consists of three individual sections which form three appendices. In summary these are:

3.1. Governance – Appendix A

This section focuses on three main elements:

3.1.1. It makes proposals to streamline and delete any unnecessary committees, working groups or meetings. To this end the Council meeting in February agreed to delete the Standards Board and Overview & Scrutiny Committee. This report also now proposes the deletion of the ICT Steering Group which, will be encompassed within the new Customer Services Task Group, and the Housing Scrutiny Panel.

3.1.2. It makes proposals that should give members a greater opportunity to get more actively involved in governing the Council and setting policy

To do this it is being proposed that the number of members who can sit on a range of existing Groups and Committees should be increased. It is also proposed that two new task limited working groups should be created.

There would be a new *Waste Task Group* as the Council has work to do to review its policies both in order to achieve efficiencies and improve health & safety. The Working Group will need to consider the policy implications of the County Council's intention to withdraw recycling payments for garden waste from 2015/16 from all district councils which will reduce this council's recycling income by approximately £100,000 pa from next year. The County Council is also intending to stop paying the annual inflationary increase on all recycling credits.

There would also be a new *Customer Services Task Group* which will focus on the policy changes that need to be made as a result of the national welfare reforms, whereby the Government is determined to make changes that will result in residents having to become more self-reliant when claiming benefits. Against that national backdrop the Council needs to look at its policies on how it will improve the way it works to assist residents, particularly the more vulnerable.

3.1.3. It makes a proposal that a review is carried out early in 2014/15 of all working groups and their relevance and to also ensure that where they do continue that they are more focused with a named lead officer and a work plan in each case.

3.1.4 There is also the opportunity to create new Task Groups however before this happens there should always be a full and rigorous evaluation to establish if there is a true need. If there is then the group should be task orientated and time limited. These groups should not become involved in operational issues.

Recommendations

In accordance with the details set out in Appendix A:

3.1.5 The number of places available to members on existing committees and working groups should be increased as proposed in Section 3 of Appendix A

3.1.6 Two new Task Groups should be created - Waste and Customer Services

3.1.7 The ICT Steering Group and Housing Scrutiny Panel should be disbanded

3.1.8 All existing working groups should be reviewed early in Municipal Year 14/15 to assess their relevance

3.1.9 The governance structure as set out and illustrated be approved

3.2. Member Services – Appendix B

This section focuses on identifying ways in which members support can be strengthened and communication with members improved.

3.2.1 It proposes that a more comprehensive induction programme and training package is developed and provided for members together with detailed supporting documentation. This will then be updated throughout the life of the Council and will therefore hopefully assist members when trying to fully understand how the council operates and when dealing with their constituents' queries.

3.2.2 It also proposes that a dedicated resource is provided to better support members based in the Chief Executive's office. This will improve communication and will facilitate 3.2.1 above.

Recommendations

In accordance with the details set out in Appendix B:

3.2.3 A more detailed and comprehensive induction and ongoing training programme and work plan should be developed and introduced for members.

3.2.4 That this should be supported by the production of a comprehensive information pack for members that is regularly updated.

3.2.5 That this information pack should be produced so it can be used by members when assisting their constituents.

3.2.6 That a permanent full time post should be created in the Chief Executive's office in order to more effectively support members, the Mayor and the Management Team.

3.3 Member/Officer Protocols – Appendix C

The purpose of this section is to re-establish the fact that members and officers will always need to work very closely together and that each has a very separate and different role.

3.3.1 The Members role is to set policy and govern the Council, review performance, represent the Council and fulfil their ward based roles.

3.3.2 The Officers role is to implement committee decisions, deliver Council services professionally and in accordance with statute and to provide professional unbiased advice to members.

3.3.3 Officers should respect the right of members to make decisions that may be contrary to officer advice. Similarly members should respect the professional advice of officers even if they are minded to make a decision which is contrary to that advice.

3.3.4 Appendix C then also goes on to propose some working protocols of how that would work in practice. This is primarily so that members don't feel that they have to get involved in operational day to day issues. Officers also need to communicate better and earlier so Members again don't feel the need to have to get involved in the operational issues.

3.3.5 The Constitutional Task Group has started to look at this and have agreed some basic principles which are set out below as recommendations.

Recommendations

In accordance with the details as set out in Appendix C:

3.3.6 The Principles as recommended by the Constitutional Task Group are approved:

Members

- Govern the Council
- Make decisions on behalf of the whole borough
- Set Council Policy
- Review service performance
- Represent the Council
- Fulfil ward based role
- Respect the political neutrality of officers

Officers

- Implement Committee decisions
- Deliver Council services professionally
- Provide unbiased, politically neutral, fact based advice to members
- Pro actively communicate and share information with members
- Be sensitive to the politics of members but not to be influenced by it

It is not the role or expected of members that they would be involved with, or that they would try to influence, any day to day operation of council services or staffing issues (with the exception of the formal Appeals Panel process)

Behaviour Expected from Members and Officers

- Mutually supportive
- Polite
- Courteous and considerate
- Not over familiar or too close on a personal level
- Trusting and respectful

In addition it is proposed that the following is added:

Officers should respect the right of members to make decisions that may be contrary to officer advice. Similarly members should respect the professional advice of officers even if they are minded to make a decision which is contrary to that advice.

3.3.7 That the working protocols as set out in Section 1.6 of Appendix C are approved

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Background Papers:- Evolving the Council's Governance Report to Council on 25 February 2014

Implications	
Financial (JD)	<p>4.1 Governance – Members Special Responsibility Allowances</p> <p>The deletion of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee will save the Council £4,600 whilst the introduction of the new working groups will cost an additional £3,000. This is as recommended by the Independent Remunerations Panel.</p> <p>4.2 Member Services</p> <p>The additional dedicated post to provide additional support will cost approximately £30,000 which has been incorporated into the 2014/15 base salary budget.</p> <p>There are no other direct financial implications</p>
Risk	CR1; Decreasing Financial Resources CR6; Regulatory Governance
Equalities (KG)	Consultation comments have been provided by Officers of the Council.
Legal (KG)	Need to ensure that the constitution of the Council reflects any changes to governance arrangements in respect of the new proposals.