

Report to: Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 4 March 2020

Public Document: Yes

Exemption: None

Review date for release None



Subject: Update on the work of the Governance Review Working Group

Purpose of report: To update Cabinet on the activity of the Governance Review Working Group.

Recommendation: To note the content of the report

Reason for recommendation: As the report is simply to provide an update there is no specific decision required.

Officer: Henry Gordon Lennox, Monitoring Officer

Portfolio Holder: Choose Portfolio Holder.

Financial implications: There are no financial implications arising

Legal implications: There are no legal implications arising

Equalities impact: Low Impact

Climate change: Low Impact

Risk: Low Risk

Links to background information: [Council 23rd October 2019](#)

Link to [Council Plan](#): Outstanding Council and Council Services

Report in full

1. On 10th July, the Cabinet considered a report relating to the carrying out of a review of the Council's governance arrangements. The resolution was as follows;

RESOLVED:

1. *that Cabinet ask the Overview Committee to carry out a review of the Council's governance arrangements and options for change and reports its findings and recommendations back to Cabinet in due course. The Overview Committee to set*

the terms of reference for carrying out the review and consideration of the alternative models,

2. *that the Portfolio Holder for Transformation establishes a Think Tank for the purpose of investigating the options for change and to enable engagement with the wider membership of the Council on the necessity for and objective of change.*

2. At the meeting of the Overview Committee of 25th July, the committee resolved as follows;

RESOLVED:

1. *That the request from Cabinet to carry out a review of the Councils governance arrangements and options for change, and report back on its findings, be accepted;*
2. *That at the 29 August 2019 meeting, Members put forward and agree the reasons for change to the current governance arrangements and the objectives for the Council's governance arrangements going forward;*
3. *That at the 29 August 2019 meeting, Members consider, discuss and agree the method and process to be followed for undertaking a review of options;*
4. *That additional meetings of the committee be considered specifically to debate this item.*

3. There was an update at 29th August meeting of the Overview Committee as follows;

Review of the Council's Governance Arrangements - update

Minutes:

The Chairman advised the committee that circumstances had prevented a meeting between him and the Portfolio Holder for Transformation, but that work would continue on this issue.

An additional meeting for the committee was set for the 17 October 2019 to debate this issue only. Further discussion had also been timetabled in for the scheduled meeting in February 2020.

4. Subsequently the Portfolio Holder for Transformation ceased to be a member of the Cabinet and left the Independent Group. The Council also received the outcome of the Peer Review. There was also an informal meeting of the Overview Committee on 17th October in which a number of issues were considered and which concluded that a cross party group should be established. Accordingly, the matter was reported to the Council at its meeting of 23rd October. The resolution is below and a copy of the report (with hyperlinks to the various meetings referred to above) can be accessed from the background links.

RESOLVED;

A Governance Review Working Party be set up on the basis set out in paragraph 7 of the report but with the word 'thereafter' added before Cabinet in (j). Delegated authority be given to the Monitoring Officer to finalise the composition of the Working Group and agree membership with the Group Leaders/non-affiliated members.

5. Subsequent discussion between the Monitoring Officer and Group Leaders resulted in a group comprising the following membership;

Independent Group 4 (including the Chair)

Conservative 4

EDA	3
Liberal Democrats	1
Green	1
<u>Independent</u>	<u>1</u>
Total	14

Made up of Cllrs Hookway (Chair), Pratt, Bloxham, Blakey, Allen, Hartnell, Skinner, Barrow, Arnott, Rixson, Hayward, Wragg, Davey and Millar.

6. The Group's first meeting was an informal meeting on 17th October. The LGA were present to facilitate discussion and help determine the way forward. Items discussed included a reminder of why the group was meeting, summary of issues to explore and precise of potential options that may be available and discussion over what the Council is trying to achieve. The LGA confirmed their availability to assist throughout the process.
7. At the next meeting of 11th November, a facilitated discussion was undertaken by the LGA to determine what the group were trying to achieve (i.e. what were the goals) and what was stopping the goal being achieved currently. There was then discussion on what works well and what would be the priorities for the group in terms of improvement / focus going forward.
8. At the meeting of 25th November, there was further discussion on the goals of the review with an extra goal being added. There was a general discussion around shadow cabinet arrangements but there was no specific outcome as it was not seen as a priority for the group. There was a brief discussion in relation to our current Overview and Scrutiny arrangements. It was discussed that there needed to be engagement with other Councils (operating different models) to help inform the work of the Group to ensure appropriate assessment and evidence in relation to options due to being committed to a legal change for 5 years. This was discussed as including a survey to a number of councils (to include the Leader, Group Leaders / minority members, CEO and Monitoring Officers). The need to assess cost implications was referenced as were the overall timings of the review. Given the importance of understanding the rationale for change and because it would underpin the Monitoring Officer's report to Council, the goals were looked at again. Finally, the options to be considered as part of the review were agreed as being;
 - a. Remain the same
 - b. 'Leader-Cabinet' model with constitutional change to strengthen accountability
 - c. A hybrid model
 - d. Committee system
9. At the meeting of 9th December, the Group agreed the survey questions and that the survey would be sent to the persons identified above at South Somerset District Council, South Gloucestershire Council, Stroud District Council, Worcester City Council, Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils, North Devon District Council, Mendip District Council and Newark and Sherwood District Council. It was also agreed that there would be some research undertaken on the Councils that were being considered as possible options to visit with an online vote of the membership of the Group being taken.
10. The survey was sent out on 19th December and members, having received the analysis from the Monitoring Officer, agreed to seek to visit Mendip (Executive arrangements), South Somerset (Hybrid arrangements), Stroud (Committee system) and North Devon (Committee system).

11. At the meeting on 21st January, members discussed the visits and it was agreed that a small number of councillors (no more than 6) would visit two of the Councils (each visiting one of those with a committee system) with the intention of having a number of open sessions to hear the views of the Leader, the wider membership and a core group of officers comprising the Chief Executive, Monitoring Officer and key senior officers. In light of progress, it was considered that the Group should refine the goals with a view to making it easier to assess whether a particular option meet a goal. Members also agreed that it was important to get the decision right and that therefore meeting the deadline to present this to Annual Council was unrealistic. Not rushing the work would also permit the Council to consult / engage with the public and stakeholders prior to final decisions being taken. The Group agreed that they would look to conclude the review by September / October 2020. Finally, it was noted that only six responses had been received (from four councils) to the 100+ surveys sent. It was agreed that the Monitoring Officer would send a chaser in relation to the survey and make contact with those councils that had been identified for visits.
12. At the meeting on 11th February, it was noted that there had been no further responses to the survey. North Devon had confirmed their willingness to facilitate a visit but no response had been received from the other Councils. The Monitoring Officer agreed to progress the visit with North Devon and to chase the other three Councils. Other topics discussed, which were to be factored into the review as it progressed, where political group assistants / apolitical assistants within Democratic Services, the scrutiny call-in procedures, timing and number of Overview meetings and shadow cabinet arrangements.
13. The goals were further refined following discussion and have been agreed to be;

Increased member involvement and engagement in decision-making	
Improved public involvement to aid decision-making	
Improved efficiency in the running of the Council	
Resilience to future political change	
Ability to foster consensual decision-making	
Increased openness on interactions with partners	
Increased availability of information	

14. The next meeting of the Working Group is the 10th March.