Governance Review Task Group

All Councillor Workshop – 5 September 2018

Summary Note

Purpose:

1. The workshop had been commissioned by the Task Group to complement and explore further the all councillor survey previously undertaken.

2. The Centre for Public Scrutiny and the Local Government Association worked with the Council to devise a session to arrive at a set of 'design principles' and member views which the Task Group could then consider in arriving at its final recommendations over the Autumn of 2018.

Attendees:

3. The session was attended by 25 councillors (40% of our membership). The session was introduced by Nick Graham, the Monitoring Officer and led by:

*   Ed Hammond, Director of Research at the Centre for Public Scrutiny; and
*   Cllr Philip Atkins, Conservative Leader of Staffordshire County Council and a Local Government peer councillor.

The session:

4. An outline of the session's approach and methodology had been emailed to all councillors in advance and copies were available in the meeting.

5. Ed Hammond gave a presentation which summarised:
    *   A methodology that councils had found useful in assessing potential governance change
    *   The core design principles for any such change
    *   Questions for members to consider in assessing their own expectations of engagement with any form of decision making
    *   Experiences from other authorities* (in addition to those the Task Group had already visited)
    *   Pointers for next steps

*Fylde, Cornwall, Guildford, Canterbury, Fenland, South Gloucestershire

6. Cllr Atkins contributed his experiences of opening up engagement to councillors within Staffordshire County Council.

7. Members in attendance asked questions at key points and then considered certain issues together in tables before feeding back to the main session.

Key themes

8. Certain key themes and questions for further consideration by the Task Group emerged from the presentation and discussions.

- Culture is more important than structure: the presentation, evidence from Staffordshire and from other authorities cited by Ed Hammond indicated that the success or otherwise of *any* form of decision making depended above all on the *culture* operated with each authority. It followed therefore that focusing only on structure (e.g. Leader/Cabinet versus Committee) was a false trail: emphasis and attention should first and foremost to understanding the present inter-councillor culture and how this might need to change
- Structures were not binary but a spectrum: when considering a structure it is also a false trail to consider it as a choice between fixed forms of governance e.g. Cabinet versus Committee. Slide 5 of the presentation (**see appendix 1 below)** visually depicted the spectrum of opportunities that exist and which relate in large measure to the cultural imperatives at work e.g. the extent to which there is consensus or not consensus in decision making
- Culture involves 'behaviour' and 'values': how do current behaviours and values contribute to the prevailing culture underpinning Oxon CC's decision making? Has sufficient attention been given to this?
  - for instance, what is:
    - the quality of engagement?
    - How many people are involved in decision making?
    - What levels of involvement do councillors themselves demonstrate?
    - Is consensus sought and if so achieved?
  - How far do behaviours and values across the board contribute to such things?
- Transparency of decision making is important: is it easy or hard for councillors to find out and to *understand* what is going on and how to be involved? To what extent is this related to culture – e.g. less consensus; councillors themselves needing to be proactive; communication and ICT clear and helpful?
- Are councillors able to exercise 'power': not simply decision-making power but *influential power* i.e. to what extent do members feel able to *influence change*? Is there sufficient support to councillors generally to help them be more influential – e.g. access to research and information?
- Inclusiveness: had been seen through the responses to the earlier survey as involving dissatisfactions around involvement/influence in *policy development* and *decision making*
- Local people: other than the Task Groups engagement with their elected representatives, is the Council going to be considering what *local people* require from a decision-making arrangement? That said, Ed Hammond advised against 'co-design' activities with local people in the sense that authorities that had tried it had not found it altogether successful.

Design principles

9. It was noted that the answers to these questions would assist the Task Group in achieving a set of 'Design Principles', bespoke for Oxfordshire CC, around which to shape its future governance.

Four principles were suggested:

- Inclusiveness
- Efficiency and speed
- Joined up
- Involvement

10. The Task Group's unpacking of these involves identifying:

- How people will need to *change how they work* – to live up to the principles
- What *barriers* might exist to making any needful changes?
- What are our *opportunities* now for changing existing structures as a result?

Next steps

11. For the Task Group to agree and reflect upon the Design Principles around which any Oxfordshire CC decision making arrangement should be based.

12. In doing so, to have regard to the all the evidence that it had thus far gathered, in addition to the themes and questions above, and in particular the issues of culture, behaviour and values.
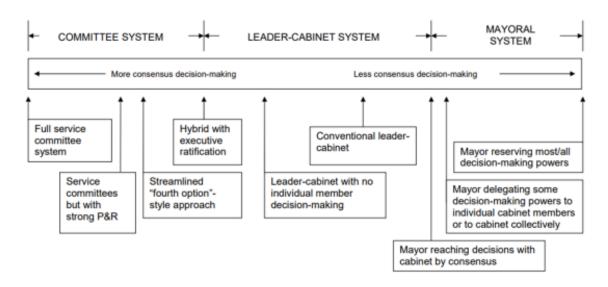
September 2018.

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Principal Governance Officer

Appendix 1 – Spectrum of decision making culture:

The spectrum

| COMMITTEE SYSTEM | LEADER-CABINET SYSTEM | MAYORAL SYSTEM |

More consensus decision-making ← → Less consensus decision-making

Full service committee system

Service committees but with strong P&R

Hybrid with executive ratification

Streamlined "fourth option"-style approach

Conventional leader-cabinet

Leader-cabinet with no individual member decision-making

Mayor reserving most/all decision-making powers

Mayor delegating some decision-making powers to individual cabinet members or to cabinet collectively

Mayor reaching decisions with cabinet by consensus

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