

## **AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE – 29 November 2023**

### **FUTURE COUNCIL GOVERNANCE GROUP**

Report of the Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

1. **The Committee is RECOMMENDED to note the report**

#### **Background**

2. The report presented to the committee on 29 September 2023 summarised the purpose and activities of the Future Council Governance.
3. For reference, the membership of the group is:

Liberal Democrat Green Alliance (4) Cllrs Robin Bennett, Andrew Gant, Judy Roberts and Roz Smith

Conservative Independent Alliance (3) Cllrs Yvonne Constance, Ted Fenton and Eddie Reeves (Cllr Kieron Mallon has replaced Cllr Ted Fenton)

Labour and Cooperative Party Group (2) Cllrs Brad Baines and Charlie Hicks  
Non-aligned Independent (1) Cllr Stefan Gawrysiak

4. Cllr Stefan Gawrysiak is the chair of the group.

#### **Governance model**

5. There is no consensus among members of the group for changing from leader with cabinet to a committee system. It is felt too late in the current council cycle, with the next election in May 2025, to consider a governance change. Members believe that changing to a different governance model at the present time would provide an unnecessary distraction from critical service issues.

#### **Improving the current governance arrangements**

6. The group has identified the following key issues:
  - a) Backbench members need to be more engaged in policy development with opportunities provided to influence decision-making. This might involve the appointment of deputy cabinet members for cabinet portfolios and setting-up cabinet advisory groups on a time-limited basis to focus on particular policy areas.

- b) More opportunities for scrutiny of young people services were essential, particularly in light of the outcome of the Ofsted inspection of Special Educational Needs. This involves establishing a Young People Scrutiny Committee which will focus on the lived experiences of young people (up to the age of 25) and future generations.
- c) Developing an integrated forward plan that brings together the business of the Cabinet and Cabinet Members with full Council and Scrutiny.

### **Participatory process**

- 7. Kellogg College, Oxford, has shown how local people could participate on citizen panels and influence local policies. Key to their success, however, is topic selection and appropriate resources for support staff, subject matter experts and expenses for participants.

### **Locality working**

- 8. Members value the current format of meetings which allow them to meet with members from neighbouring divisions and share areas of concern with each other and council officers.

### **Democratic Processes Working Group**

- 9. Following a relaunch discussion, the Democratic Processes Working Group has agreed to wait until the conclusion (or at least agreement of recommendations) of the Future Governance Working Group to allow for its findings to feed into the discussions of the Democratic Processes Working Group. The Democratic Processes Working Group's focus will be on three key areas:
  - a) Changes to Democratic Services, and how this fits in with the needs of members.
  - b) How members can be more effectively communicated with.
  - c) Whether political support is necessary for members to undertake their role.

Recommendations regarding these areas will be presented to the Performance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

### **Next steps**

- 10. The next meeting of the Future Council Governance Group will be held on 27 November 2023 to consider the areas identified at 5, 6, 7 and 8 and formulate recommendations, if necessary, for full Council. Subject to the outcome of discussions at that meeting, a report setting out the recommendations of the group will be presented to the committee (Annex A will follow if necessary).

### **Corporate policies and priorities**

- 11. The Council has a stated priority to ensure a vibrant participatory democracy

## **Financial implications**

12. Should there be a change in governance model, the cost of implementation, plus any on-going costs from 2024-25, would need to be considered as part of the budget agreed by Council in February 2024.

## **Legal implications**

13. Governance arrangements are included in the Local Government Act 2000 (LGA 2000), as amended by the Localism Act 2011. Section 9B of Part 1A of the LGA 2000 sets out the three governance models: executive arrangements, committee system or prescribed arrangements. Section 9BA sets out the power of the Secretary of State to prescribe additional permitted governance arrangements.
14. Any change of the model of governance or changes to the Council's Scrutiny arrangements or Constitution would require approval of Council.

## **Equality and inclusion implications**

15. Any proposal to change the Council's governance arrangements would need to be accompanied by an equality impact assessment which will identify how the changes affect protected groups.

Anita Bradley  
Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer

Background papers: Centre for Governance and Scrutiny publication  
'Rethinking Council Governance'

Annex A to follow if available: Report setting out the recommendations of the Future  
Council Governance Group.

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