

## **CABINET – 22 JANUARY 2019**

### **GOVERNANCE REVIEW**

Report by Strategic Director for Resources

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to:**
  - (a) **endorse the proposal to move to a ‘hybrid’ system of governance;**
  - (b) **request the Governance Review Task Group to draw up a specific proposal for Cabinet’s consideration based on the following design features:**
    - (i) **Cabinet Committees –The membership of the Committees should be politically proportional;**
    - (ii) **Cabinet Members should attend Cabinet Committee meetings when issues in their portfolio are on the agenda. The Cabinet and Cabinet Members would still need to make the final decisions;**
    - (iii) **The Chairman and Deputy Chairman of each Cabinet Committee will be elected by the members of the Committee as usual but political group leaders should try to ensure that the Chairman and Deputy Chairman come from different political groups;**
    - (iv) **The proposal should address any improvements required in the Forward Plan process to ensure that sufficient lead time is allowed for Cabinet Committees to discuss issues at an early stage;**
    - (v) **The proposal should take into account the partnership arrangement with Cherwell District Council and the County Council’s relationships with all local authorities and partners in Oxfordshire;**
    - (vi) **The proposal should include an estimate of any changes in the overall number of Committee meetings in the new system as well as any changes to the costs in supporting meetings.**
  - (c) **request the Task Group to draw up a timetable to implement the changes within six months of a Cabinet decision on the final proposals. The change programme should include training for Members and Officers and specific training for Chairmen to ensure that the new committees encourage inclusive debate;**

- (d) request the Task Group to include a review mechanism 12 months after the introduction of the new system. The review should include asking Members to complete the same questionnaire that they were given at the start of this process in order to measure any improvements;**
- (e) request the Task Group to explore further the idea of establishing Area Committees with budgets addressing how they would relate to City and District Councils;**
- (f) request the Chairmen of Scrutiny Committees to ensure that time is allowed in their work programmes to discuss policy matters;**
- (g) request Facilities Management to draw up plans to reformat the rooms on the Members' corridor to provide more shared Members' facilities in the place of political group rooms.**

## **Executive Summary**

2. Following a Council motion to consider changing to a committee structure of governance, Cabinet set up a Governance Review Task Group to examine this as well as considering potential improvements to the current system.
3. Having examined questionnaires completed by Council Members, the Task Group agreed at the outset that the new structure should be
  - efficient
  - effective
  - transparent and
  - inclusive.
4. After conducting a series of visits to councils with committee systems as well as a workshop with Members, the Task Group considered three main options:
  - A list of potential improvements to the current system in order to be more inclusive and improve communications;
  - A 'hybrid' system including many features of a committee system but without requiring a formal change of model;
  - A formal change to a committee model which would have to be introduced at an AGM of the Council.
5. The Task Group decided to recommend exploring further how a 'hybrid' system might look. It was agreed that this would allow greater involvement by "backbenchers" – councillors who are not Cabinet Members – at an earlier stage of decision-making where they would have a real possibility of influencing the outcome. In this way all councillors could better represent their local residents.
6. The Task Group also recommended exploring the establishment of Area Committees as well as how Scrutiny Committees could become more involved in policy discussions.

## **Background**

7. Council motion (11 July 2018)

“This Council, wishing to ensure that governance arrangements for the County are transparent, inclusive and reflect the political situation which exists, asks the Cabinet to work with Political Group Leaders to come forward with a plan to replace the Cabinet with a committee structure or alternative governance and committee models which could further strengthen the work of the Council.

These Committees would have delegated decision making powers from the Council and would be politically balanced. Locality Committees would be consulted on policy and budget matters by the Committees. Robust Scrutiny Structures would be put in place. The Plan to be worked on with a view to the change in the structure being put in place as soon as practicable.”

8. Cabinet decision (17 October 2018)

Resolved to:

- a) agree that the governance review should also include a review of potential improvements to the existing arrangements, in the interests of completeness;
- b) note the headline themes arising from the councillor survey;
- c) agree in principle to the setting up of a Governance Review Task Group;
- d) note that Group Leaders will be asked to make appointments to a Task Group (once Cabinet has agreed to its constitution and terms of reference);
- e) agree that the Task Group report back to Political Group Leaders and to Cabinet with recommended options for change.

## **Task Group Report**

9. At its meeting on 19 September 2018, the Task Group agreed in principle to recommend the “hybrid” system. The report was completed with the formulation of specific recommendations for Cabinet to consider.
10. In accordance with the Cabinet decision, the Task Group Report was presented to Political Group Leaders and they accepted the report at their meeting on 27 November 2018. The full report is attached along with its six annexes.

**NICK GRAHAM**

Strategic Director for Resources

Background papers:

[Changing to a committee system in a new era](#) – Local Government Information Unit

[Rethinking governance](#) - practical steps for councils considering changes to their governance arrangements – Local Government Association and Centre for Public Scrutiny

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