

Feedback to Extraordinary Council

Meeting name	Governance Committee discussion note
Date	Tuesday 20th November 2018

The Chief Executive presented the background to the report and the journey that the Council had been on since December 2017 when the Council invited local government colleagues to the Council to conduct a Peer Challenge. Members were reminded of the results of the Peer Challenge, the subsequent Governance Review completed in March 2018 and Council's decision on 8th May 2018 to implement phase 1 of the review but for the Governance Development Group to continue its work and undertake a review of alternative governance arrangements.

The Director for Legal and Democratic Services presented the research and findings of the Governance Development Group. In particular it was noted that the Group had met with Councils throughout the country that had adopted different models of governance, had met with external stakeholders and conducted a public survey. Key findings were that the public believed the most important elements of the Council's decision making to be clarity of responsibility and accountability of councillors, communication and meaningful engagement with the community and stakeholders, and effective scrutiny of decisions.

It was noted that the Groups findings formed the basis of the recommendation to Council to change governance arrangements to a Leader and Cabinet form of governance.

In reaching this recommendation, the Group considered how the Leader and Cabinet model would better meet the following objectives than the current Committee System.

Ability to make quicker and more timely decisions

Cabinet meetings would be more regular and members could make decisions outside of meetings enabling the Council to move quicker if needed.

Ability to review decisions and maintain checks and balances

Effective scrutiny is a vital part of the Council's wider system of checks and balances. There is no route within the Councils current structure to scrutinise the decisions of Committees however a dedicated Scrutiny Committee would be created as part of a Leader and Cabinet structure and would hold decision makers to account, pre-scrutinise important matters, and challenge policy.

Increase public understanding of who is accountable for what

Within the current system, the public are not clear about the role of members and how they influence decision making; this is as a direct result of the Committees not being understood. The Group believe that having a simpler structure through Cabinet and Portfolio Holders who could take an active part in the promotion of policies and decisions would increase public accountability.

Decisions must be taken in context and not in isolation

In the current system, members can only get involved in the business of committees they are on. The Leader and Cabinet model would allow members to look a wide variety of policy decisions and shape and influence them; they would be able to think more corporately rather than in silos.

Ensure the Council is democratically member-led

The Leader and Cabinet model permits individual members to make decisions whereas only officers can currently do so outside of formal meetings.

Members positively received the report and asked questions.

In particular it was noted that members were positive about having an effective scrutiny function to provide the necessary checks and balances and review important issues. Members accepted that there was a gap within the current system that members of the Committee naturally wanted to fill. Their desire to scrutinise sometimes blurred the lines between audit functions and the scrutiny function.

Members were positive about constitutional reform. It was noted that the draft constitution would be presented to the Governance Committee before Council approved it. The Chair asked members to notify the Director for Legal and Democratic Services of any suggested amendments to the constitution prior to a review commencing. The Director for Legal and Democratic Services confirmed that any suggestions would be welcome and that she had kept a log of issues raised over the past year to enable these to be included in the constitution.

A member queried about whether the ability to challenge decisions through scrutiny might slow decision making down. Officers explained that scrutiny should be a core component of good democratic decision making and that it is necessary irrespective of what system is in place. It was further explained that ultimately a Cabinet system enabled quicker decision making than a committee system.

Members noted that it had been almost a year since the Peer Review had started and that since then there had been lots of opportunities for members to get involved in the review work and regular consultation had been undertaken throughout the year.

Members thanked the Governance Development Group for their work and the wider membership for positively engaging in the review process.

The Leader stated that considering Melton Borough Councils size he believed he could find more meaningful roles and provide better inclusivity in a Leader and Cabinet model than in the Committee System. In particular, the membership would have more opportunity to be involved in corporate policy development and influencing decisions.

Members noted that they would like Council wide development days to continue as they are considered important for keeping members involved and shaping important decisions. Officers confirmed that there is an ongoing commitment to maintain the development days for developing the policy framework. The Leader also confirmed that he is committed to maintaining 3 development days per annum.