

Report of the Member Officer Working Group – Political Governance Structures

Meeting 3: 8 September 2014 - Summary

At its meeting on the 25 July, the Working Group considered a report setting out some of the key features, and advantages and disadvantages, of committee, cabinet and hybrid systems. At that meeting, it was agreed that officers develop more detailed draft structures for the three alternative governance models, taking into account the issues raised by the working group.

At the meeting on 8 September, the Working Group therefore considered a report on three initial models for political governance (Cabinet, Committee and Hybrid), presented for consideration.

In considering the models presented, it was recognised that full account would need to be taken of the organisational transformation in the Council and to the resources which would be required for each of the models.

Some concerns were raised about a suggested change to the O&S Call In procedure which, it some felt, would result in making a Call In harder to achieve. It was explained that the suggestion had been made following comments from scrutiny members about some recent Call Ins. It was felt that, where a matter had been subject to a full debate at the Executive Scrutiny Committee and a decision had subsequently been made by the Cabinet or Cabinet member which did not contradict the resolution of the ESC, that a further debate on the same issue generated by a Call In request did not substantially add value in terms of democracy, debate or accountability. It was recognised that a Call In process could be developed which distinguished between decisions already considered and approved without modification by ESC and those which hadn't been, with a higher threshold to submit a request for the former. It was also agreed that the precise nature of the threshold and the appropriate level would be given consideration at a future meeting of the Working Group.

Some members expressed the view that Full Council required reinvigorating to improve debate and allow current issues to be discussed in more depth. This would include a review of the current Question Time. It was agreed that this would be the subject of further consideration by the Working Group.

There was general support for the proposals, across the three models in relation to the proposals for non-executive committees. It was also recognised that further detail would need to be agreed on issues such as committee numbers, allocation of chairs and levels of remuneration.

It was agreed that the three models outlined should now be developed further, in line with the comments made by the Working Group, in order to add further details to the proposals and to address issues such as committee sizes, frequency of meetings, required constitutional changes, as well as critically the relationship to the organisational transformation and the impact on resources.

The Working Group considered the issue of the governance around locality working. A number of issues were discussed in relation to the current Three Tier Forums, and it was agreed that any arrangements had to reflect genuine joint working at a strategic level, with all tiers of local government taking a full and active part in meetings. Consideration should be given to the appropriate geographic footprint for engagement, and also to the appropriate issues where engagement would achieve most. It was recognised that the current arrangements on a District footprint were resource intensive for the County Council, and that there was pressure from many districts for more County resource to be invested in the current Forums, a position that would prove unsustainable going forward as the Council progresses through the transformation and restructuring process.

The Working Group also noted the recent decision of Chorley Borough Council to investigate options relating to Unitary Status, and views expressed publicly by Wyre Borough Council on the same issue.

It was agreed that officers should develop a number of options for future locality working for discussion at a future Working Group meeting

The Working Group agreed that officers should seek further evidence from other authorities as appropriate. It was agreed that this could be achieved through email and telephone contact, and that no visits by officers or members to other authorities (or visits by other authorities to Lancashire) would be necessary at this stage.

Decisions:

- That the initial proposals for three governance models be developed by officers for further consideration at the next meeting.
- That the comments in relation to Full Council be noted and subject to future consideration
- That officers develop options for future locality working for discussion at a future Working Group meeting