

Appendix 2 : Wirral Council Response to the Local Government Association Report: ‘Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council: Working Effectively in the Committee System (Dec 2021)’

<u>LGA Recommendation</u>	<u>Response</u>
The Council should look to build on the areas of political consensus highlighted within this report in order to continue to respond positively to the findings of the external assurance reports of DLUHC.	Fortnightly Group Leader & Deputy meetings are held and chaired by the Leader of the Council. Group Leader away days were held in Dec 21, Jan 22, Mar 22. Further meetings are planned for the 22/23 municipal year.
Recognising the shared frustrations across all Groups on issues of timeliness and collaboration, these design principles should be given primacy when considering improvements to the Committee System.	Committee System Review has been undertaken. The revised Constitution was formally adopted at Annual Council May 22. Constitutional changes have been supported at an officer level via the implementation of a refreshed report sign off process. Key Decision reports signed off at SLT.
All Groups were keen to promote the credibility of the Committee System. This requires joint work across groups in joint forums, most notably, Full Council, and consideration for the required changes for these meetings to be used more productively	It is proposed that a review of the Council Meeting Procedure Rules will be undertaken by the Governance Working Group in the 22/23 Municipal Year.
There is a willingness from all Groups to reduce the number of Committees in operation. However, this work needs to be completed holistically to ensure that there are similar scopes and scales to Committees, and to avoid the risk of work being unevenly distributed or poorly aligned.	The adoption of a revised constitution in May 2022 saw the dissolution of the Housing Committee, Partnerships Committee, and the Decision Review Committee. The process for ‘dissent’ was also removed and replaced by the opportunity for the P&R Committee to ‘reconsider’ decisions made by Policy and Services Committee (in respect to key decisions)

	<p>Policy Committees are able to conduct their own reviews on any issues which fall within the remit of the Committee.</p> <p>Commitment to further review the Committee System at an appropriate time in the 22/23 Municipal year.</p>
There is a need to make sure that the agendas and work programmes of Committee meetings focus on the priority issues facing the Council. Given an average meeting length of approximately two-hours, issues of financial recovery need to be prioritised as far as possible.	The agenda for any Committee meeting will be carefully managed by the Chair and Group spokespersons. The Constitution stipulates that the items of business that require a decision should relate to budget and policy decision, performance monitoring or which are necessary to discharge their overview and scrutiny functions.
This focus on finance issues will require officers to ensure that these matters are presented concisely and clearly in reports. Furthermore, this will also require timely and accurate finance reporting in order to present appropriate information to Councillors to support strategic discussions.	<p>This will be achieved through frequent meetings of the Finance Sub Committee.</p> <p>Policy Committees have been encouraged to Chair and Group Spokes budget monitoring groups</p>
The Council should revisit their approach towards Scrutiny and consider the appropriateness of the Decision Review Committee given the existing systems in place.	See above in respect to constitutional changes
There is a need to empower the Policy and Resources Committee to provide leadership on the delivery of the Council's budget framework and act as a central and coordinating forum for reporting and monitoring progress. This may require changes to the Committees Terms of Reference but will also need careful communication with Councillors both on and beyond the Committee. The new role for this Committee may also require additional Member Development.	<p>The Budget process already agreed by P&R in March for 23/24 which details the interaction between P&R, Finance Sub, and the Policy Committees.</p> <p>The Council has a robust New Member Induction Programme and a Member Portal which hosts a library of training materials. A Member Learning & Development Strategy 2023-27 is currently being developed to align with the Council's electoral cycle. Furthermore, a designated Principal Officer in Democratic Services has been designated responsibility for co-ordinating and leading Member Development. Quarterly update reports will</p>

	be submitted to the Member Support Steering Group.
The Council should consider their practice against sector norms to ensure that they are appropriately aligned on issues of Group Leader input on staff appointments, Councillor input on disciplinary proceedings, and the Council's Financial Scheme of delegation. These practical issues have the potential to free up significant capacity within the Committee System, and support more empowered decision making.	The Constitution has been amended to reflect this with the terms of reference for the Senior Staffing Appointments Sub Committee amended.
Central to improvements to any governance system is how information is presented to Councillors. There is a need for the Council to set out further training for officers to ensure that there are consistent, clear and concise reports being provided to Committees to support Members in their roles.	A Committee Co-ordination and Oversight Group has been created, chaired by the Head of Democratic & Member Services. The purpose of the Group is to offer support and advice to report authors and to QA reports before they are released to Committees. The report sign-off process has been refreshed in respect to key and non-key decisions. External validation was sought in respect to the new processes and a positive response was secured. Quarterly updates will be reported to the Senior Leadership Team.