



STANDARDS AND CONSTITUTIONAL OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

Thursday, 10 September 2020

REPORT TITLE:	COMMITTEE SYSTEM WORKPLAN UPDATE
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF LAW AND GOVERNANCE

REPORT SUMMARY

The report details the wider work that has been undertaken to support the significant change in governance from Leader and Cabinet system of governance to a committee system. This has been managed through a project team to ensure the appropriate member and officer preparations have taken place in readiness for the adoption of the new governance arrangements at Annual Council on 28 September 2020.

RECOMMENDATION/S

The Committee is asked to note and consider the steps taken to prepare the Authority's Members and officers for the change in Constitutional arrangements from Annual Council on 28th September 2020.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 To update the Standards and Constitutional Oversight Committee and to allow discussion on the steps taken in readiness for the adoption of the new governance arrangements at Annual Council on 28th September 2020.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 As part of the development of new government arrangements, a range of options have been reviewed by a cross-party, Members Governance Working Group (MGWG). Training and implementation options have been discussed and the arrangements set out in the constitution have been developed iteratively to ensure cross-party support.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 At Annual Council 14 May 2019, it was agreed that Standards and Constitutional Oversight Committee conduct a review of the governance arrangements of the Council, with the objective to produce a report on the options available and a preferred way forward. The Standards Committee established the MGWG to take forward this review. A report was presented to full Council 14 October 2019, at which it was agreed to move to a Committee System in the following municipal year on the basis that it provides a governance model which will best serve the Council and the borough.
- 3.2 The MGWG continued to meet, acting as a reference group alongside an officer Project Team working under direction of the Director of Law and Governance. The project was initiated in October 2019 and continued into the New Year towards the scheduled AGM at the start of the municipal year. The Covid 19 emergency led to the cancellation of local elections and normal Council business as emergency management arrangements were introduced to manage business through the lockdown period. As a result of this, the project timeline was reviewed and reconfigured to meet the revised Annual Meeting date of 28 September.
- 3.4 A project plan was developed around three core themes and is included as an appendix to this report. The table below summarises the work areas that have been completed within these themes during the last 10 months:

Theme	Workstream
Political Agreement and Decision Making	Governance Model Design
	Draft New Constitution
	Political Group Preparations
	Review Members Allowance Scheme
Training, Development & Resources	Members Training
	Officers Training
	Resources
Governance and Administration	Service Re-design
	Committee Work Planning

- 3.5 **Governance Model Design:** October 2019 - February 2020. This phase of the project involved regular engagement with the MGWG to ensure a collaborative approach towards a preferred committee system model. By March 2020, there was broad agreement on the form of the Committee System to be implemented including the number and names of committees.
- 3.6 **Draft New Constitution:** October 2019 - August 2020. This work has involved research of other committee system models and a complete re-write of most sections of the current constitution. The MGWG has been convened to review new sections as they have been drafted. External input has been secured through the LGA to quality assure the overall coherence and legality of the final document.
- 3.7 **Political Group Preparations:** June - August 2020. In June 2020, weekly Group Leader meetings were established to ensure individual group requirements were taken into consideration. These meetings also provided the forum for discussion and agreement in relation to Committee Chair allocations and political proportionality arrangements.
- 3.8 **Review Members Allowance Scheme:** November 2019 - June 2020. This review was a requirement regardless of the move to new governance arrangements but needed alignment with the overall timetable. An independent panel was recruited to oversee this review and comparisons drawn with other authorities. The findings of the review will be presented as a separate report to Annual Council on 28 September.
- 3.9 **Member Training:** November 2019 - Present. Planning of the approach and design of the sessions commenced early in the project with support engaged from the Centre for Public Scrutiny. Initial Member workshops were undertaken in February/March with a more detailed programme of Member development and training sessions being delivered during summer and scheduled beyond implementation of the new arrangements in September.
- 3.10 **Officer Training:** June - Present. A programme of officer training has been delivered through the summer in relation to Council decision-making, report writing and working within a committee system. Officer training and development sessions are scheduled to continue into October/November.
- 3.11 **Resources:** July - September. This workstream has included a review of committee agenda and report templates as well as the reconfiguration of the Council's committee and reports management system. It has also included the development of the new Members portal for raising issues in response to requests by constituents. The portal is currently being pilot and will be rolled out during September.
- 3.12 **Service Redesign:** November 2019 - August 2020. To ensure staffing structures are optimal in support of the new committee system once it is up and running, Member and Democratic Services has been re-designed, and a new structure implemented. This involves the creation of a 'team around the committee' model to provide the necessary support to members and officers. Consultation with trade Unions and staff has been included as part of this process.

- 3.13 **Committee Work Planning:** May - August 2020. This work stream has involved the committee services teams working with Council directorates to review all forward plan items and scheduled scrutiny committee reviews and work programmes. This has been to ensure they are brought forward into the decision pathways and work programmes for the newly established committees. Draft agendas and new briefing arrangements for committee chairs and party spokespersons have also been developed.
- 3.14 The project has been successfully implemented and all preparations have been completed to enable adoption of the new constitution at Annual Council on 28 September. There will be a period of embedding the new arrangements and the project team will continue to operate until this phase is complete. Group Leader meetings will continue and provide a forum for review of the new arrangements to ensure they are effective and continuously improved to best serve Wirral residents.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no further financial implications arising as a result of this report.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Localism Act 2011 specifies that governance arrangements changed by a Council resolution will be locked in for five years. This means that approval at Annual Council on 28 September will mean the new governance arrangements will remain in place until 28 September 2025 as a minimum.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 6.1 The project to implement the new governance arrangements involved a workstream to implement a new staffing structure for the Members and Democratic Services Team. The re-structure delivers a 'team around the committee' model and has been implemented with engagement of the Trade Unions and full staff consultation.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1 The implementation of new governance arrangements is included in the Corporate Risk Register and is highlighted as a significant governance issue in the Council's Annual Governance Statement (AGS). A project organisation approach has been employed to maintain effective control and deliver to key milestones to meet the tight deadlines involved. The new governance arrangements should remain a priority in the corporate risk register and AGS until fully embedded and reviewed to be fully effective.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

- 8.1 A cross-party Members Governance Working Group, set up by Standards Committee has been in operation since autumn 2019 to review options and bring forward proposals. The Working Group has provided the means to ensure members from all groups have been briefed on progress and have had the opportunity to input into the emerging proposals. An all Member workshop was delivered on 26 February and a series of all Member training sessions were held on 11 March 2020. Further training

sessions have been held with both Members and officers, facilitated internally, by the LGA/CfPS and external consultants.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The development of the new constitution does not have any direct implications for protected groups under the Equality Duty 2010. The design of the governance arrangements are intended to provide a more collaborative and cross-party approach to governance which is considered to best serve all Wirral residents.

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The new constitution has been written to ensure consideration of the climate emergency is designed into the new governance arrangements. The Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee has specific remit for overseeing matters linked to the climate emergency. However, all committee reports will require consideration of environment and climate implications as part of their standard template and presentation.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – New Committee System Project Plan

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Notes of Members Governance Working Group
Notes of Group Leaders' Meetings (Committee System) outcomes
Project update dashboards

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Annual Council	14 May 2019
Standards & Constitutional Oversight Committee	26 September 2019
Council	14 October 2019
Standards & Constitutional Oversight Committee	25 February 2019