

Review of Democratic Structures Scrutiny Panel held on 26 November 2015 at 6.30pm

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9. Present

Councillors: T Lunnon (Acting Chair), R G Burgess, I T Irvine, K Sudan and K J Trussell

10. Apologies

Councillors Dr H S Bloom and B A Smith

11. Officers Present

Ann-Maria Brown (Head of Legal and Democratic Services)
Heather Girling (Democratic Services Officer)
Steve Lappage (Democratic Services Manager)

12. Appointment of Chair

With the absence of Councillor B A Smith, Councillor T Lunnon was appointed Acting Chair of the Panel.

13. Disclosure of Interest and Whipping Declarations

There were no disclosures of interest or whipping declarations made.

14. Notes

The notes of the meeting of the held on 13 October 2015 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Acting Chair.

15. Update on Committee System Operational Arrangements

The Democratic Services Manager provided a verbal update on how the process and operations had worked under the Committee structure for 1999-2000 (year prior to the introduction of the Leader/Cabinet system).

The Committee structure had encompassed 6 main committees together with Full Council. In addition there were 3 sub committees and 6 corporate working groups. Each main committee had a budget working group and several other working groups. The amount of meetings ranged from approximately 120-150 per municipal year, working in a 4-6 week cycle, compared to approximately 85 currently in a 8-9 week cycle.

The Mayor was an ex-officio Member and together with both the Chair and Vice Chair of the Policy and Resources committee attended all main committees (approximately 70 meetings a year).

Each committee received and approved many reports. Full Council received the minutes of each committee. However, many of the reports the committees received were mainly information items for Members to note, containing a lack of resolutions. The committees also received several reports from the Working Groups and were operational in nature. Furthermore, several items had to be presented to more than one committee or Corporate Working Group and also to the Policy and Resources Committee for recommendation or financial approval. Working Groups were established to investigate new policy and strategy (Local Plan Working Group, Public Art Working Group, and Economic Issues Working Group).

Panel Members commented that whilst they felt the Committee system allowed Members to specialise in particular areas, this also had the potential to create silo working. It was also acknowledged that the Committee system of governance was resource intensive for Democratic Services and the service areas that supported the process as many officers from different departments were present at the committees.

The Committee system had comparatively fewer delegations, with relatively small sums approved by each committee. It was recognised that a new Committee system of governance could be designed differently and investigation into other Councils would prove beneficial, particularly as Overview and Scrutiny did not feature in the Committee structure. Some authorities have amended their governance structure to accommodate Cabinet/Executive Advisory Boards and streamlined the Overview and Scrutiny function.

The Acting Chair thanked the Democratic Services Manager for attending and for the informative discussion that had ensued. **It was agreed the Democratic Services Manager would provide Panel Members with copies of the presentation.** This would assist in providing additional background information for the consultation interviews.

16. General Updates and Further Meetings

Members provided updates on the consultation interviews that had taken place with Members and CMT Members regarding governance arrangements. Queries were raised regarding the questions although it was also felt that the questions were purposely “open ended” so as to instigate some discussion including advantages and disadvantages to the current system. Both the *Rethinking Governance* (CfPS, 2014) and *Musical Chairs* (CfPS, 2012) Guidance documents have recommended commencing with the current systems first and any improvements to the current system of governance. Additionally any Members and Officers who have worked with both forms of governance may potentially compare the two during the discussions.

In summation, the completed interviews to date have noted the speed of decisions under the Leader/Cabinet model of governance. However, comments have also been noted regarding the potential opportunity for increased Member/officer engagement, Scrutiny involvement in larger projects to add value and enhanced ‘backbencher’ involvement. **It was agreed that the remaining consultation interviews would be finalised prior to Christmas (21 December) with the responses sent to the committee clerk.**

Member Panels enquired whether it would be beneficial for a representative to attend a future Panel meeting to provide advice or information. Further investigation could take place with the Centre for Public Scrutiny, ADSO or the LGA.

The potential for site visits was discussed in detail, both at an authority that had moved to a Committee system and also one that had completed a review but remained with the Leader/Cabinet model. Members thought that the authorities that had adopted Cabinet/Executive Advisory Boards and streamlined the Scrutiny function may be worthy of consideration. It would be beneficial to arrange meetings with officers who had conducted the reviews prior to any committee meetings. The Panel was invited to consider policy committees as these would operate differently to the Council's standard committees. It was agreed investigation would first take place with Brighton and Hove, Tunbridge Wells and Guildford, together with those councils that webcast meetings.

The date of next meeting was agreed as Monday 25 January 2016 at 6.30pm, however it was acknowledged that depending on site visits this may be subject to change.

17. Closure of Meeting

With the business of the Panel concluded, the Acting Chair declared the meeting closed at 7.30pm.

T Lunnon
Acting Chair