

Council

10 December 2020



Title	Changing to a Committee System
Purpose of the report	To make a decision
Report Author	The Committee System Working Group
Cabinet Member	Not applicable
Confidential	No
Corporate Priority	Not applicable
Recommendations	<p>It is recommended that:</p> <p>the proposed committee system structure (Appendix 1) be approved; and</p> <p>the content of the proposed public consultation questionnaire be approved</p>
Reason for Recommendation	To ensure that the Council can take forward the resolution for a change to the committee system model of governance.

1. Background

At the Council meeting on 30 July 2020, Members approved a motion as the first step of moving to a change in the governance arrangements of the Council.

A move to a committee system of governance has been proposed and (if adopted) this would mean that the decisions which are currently taken by the Cabinet would be taken by a number of Committees.

At the Council meeting of the 22 October 2020, Members agreed the clear objectives they want the new system of governance to achieve:

- Accountability – responsibilities and accountability about who does what should be clear, within the Council and to residents
- Credibility – governance should assist good decision making, which involves proper and early scrutiny of policies and proposals
- Transparency – the decision-making process should be open and transparent to councillors, officers and to the public
- Collaboration - decision making should be collaborative across parties and less combative
- Timeliness – decision making should be both quick and effective and, when necessary, allow for urgent decision-making

2. The Committee System Working Group

This working group consists of the leaders of all political groups who make up the Council being:

Councillor Ian Beardsmore

Councillor John Boughtflower

Councillor Jan Doerfel

Councillor Sandra Dunn

Councillor Joanne Sexton

Councillor Veena Siva

The working group have met on three occasions in the last few weeks so as to expedite progress with the design stage. The working group has worked collaboratively with the shared intention of improving the Council's model for decision-making and to promote the agreed objectives. Members have also consulted with their own group colleagues as they have moved forward. All working group members agreed the proposed structure and consultation approach and documents.

The working group is working at pace to ensure that the project moves forward so that the changes can be implemented at the Annual Council Meeting in May 2021.

3. Designing a new model

The proposed committee system structure is included as Appendix 1 and shows a model formed of Full Council, 5 main committees and 4 other quasi-judicial / administrative committees.

The role of Full Council (though not an exhaustive list) includes: -

- Approves/adopts the policy framework and the budget/Council Tax
- Appoints the Leader (must be done annually under committee system rather than for 4 years)
- Agrees the Terms of Reference for Committees
- Agrees the cycle of Council and Committee meetings
- Appoints members to Committees
- Adopts and agrees changes to the Constitution
- Considers and determines any matters referred by Council Committees (by exception)

The working group agreed that there should be 5 main committees (the blue boxes on the diagram) based on the key corporate strategic themes rather than the existing groupings of services and functions.

On the structure diagram at Appendix 1, each of the main committees has functions listed below them to give an indication of the purpose of that committee. The functions listed are illustrative only and are not exhaustive. As the working group makes progress on this project and works through the detail and terms of reference for each committee, the allocations of functions will be finalised for Council consideration and it should be noted that some of the listed functions may move to a

different committee. Indeed, even after the new system has been launched, it may be that experience of it working in practice will determine changes to the assignment of functions. It is within the remit of the Council to make any future changes to the terms of reference if required.

The Corporate Policy and Resources Committee will handle cross-cutting issues. It will include the chairs and vice-chairs of the other main committees as well as other councillors. That committee will be chaired by the Leader of the Council.

It was agreed by the working group that there should be 4 other decision-making committees to carry out regulatory/quasi-judicial and administrative functions (the green boxes on the diagram). These will include Planning, Licensing, Audit & Standards and Administrative. The Administrative Committee will cover a mix of other operational and regulatory areas of work as required such as health & safety, constitutional reviews and member support.

All members of the working group strongly advocated that there should be a strong level of overview and scrutiny. It is acknowledged that this is fundamentally important to the successful functioning of local democracy. It must be made clear to residents that these changes are designed to increase overview and scrutiny. In the proposed new structure, there will not be a standalone Overview & Scrutiny Committee (as there is with the current Cabinet system). Instead, each of the 5 main committees will carry out the overview and scrutiny function for its own areas. Overview and scrutiny is often carried out in this way in a committee system as this check and balance is built into the individual committee. This is reflected in the remit for each committee on the diagram at Appendix 1. Any high-profile issues which are currently considered by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee (e.g. Heathrow expansion) will (under the new system) be standing items under the main committees or could be subject of individual Task Groups set up for that specified purpose. Alternatively, joint Task Groups could be set up to look at cross-cutting high-profile issues.

In a committee system a Council is only required to have a scrutiny function for health, flood prevention and crime and disorder. This requirement will be met by the appropriate main committee.

It is recommended that Council approve the proposed new committee structure as at Appendix 1.

4. Public Consultation

The working group agreed that the public consultation should not be on a detailed model but on the principles (the agreed objectives) of the system. This should identify how the residents feel the Council performs currently against the agreed design principles. This will help the working group ensure that the new system addresses any public concerns about how the Council currently operates.

The working group agreed that the public consultation would be in the form of a questionnaire supported by a publicity and information campaign.

The content of the questionnaire (included as Appendix 2) has been agreed by the working group and it is intended that the questionnaire will be launched on 14 December 2020 and will run to 15 January 2021.

The publicity and information campaign will include FAQs, social media content, a press release and an e-News item. Particular attention will be paid to residents who may not be digitally connected. There will be posters on Borough noticeboards and

other locations across the Borough and a Surrey Advertiser article. Residents' groups and other key stakeholders will be provided with information for direct dissemination. Paper copies of the questionnaire with an SAE will also be available for those who contact the Council to request them.

It is recommended that Council approve the proposed content of the questionnaire as at Appendix 2.

5. Timetable for implementation

It is an exceptionally tight timetable in terms of making the changes required to be ready for adoption at the Annual Council Meeting in May 2021. The working group and project team have made sound progress during the design stage.

- 1.1 There is extensive work to be undertaken to implement the new committee structure, install appropriate staffing to support it and make the required amendments to the Council's constitution.
- 1.2 The principal components of the new system need to be agreed prior to a new constitution being developed as the constitution will flow from that agreed structure. The draft constitution will need to set out the format of the new arrangements, any amendments to delegations to officers and the terms of reference for each committee. The terms of reference of each committee and their financial responsibilities are key decisions to make. Amendments to the rules of debate will need to take place. As per the requirements of the Constitution the amendments will be presented to the Members' Code of Conduct Committee for consideration on 17 March 2021.
- 1.3 The required recruitment to the Committee Services Team has been undertaken, with two additional committee managers joining the team in January who will be trained and ready to assist with any new governance system from adoption.
- 1.4 The following timetable sets out key dates:-

Date	Item
Thursday 10 December	Council Meeting: Update on progress. Seek approval of proposed new structure and public consultation content.
Monday 14 December	Public Consultation will start
Monday 14 December	Working Group Meeting: To discuss the constitutional changes and workplan (January – March)
Friday 15 January	Public Consultation will close
Monday 25 January	Working Group Meeting: To consider the results of Public Consultation and any revisions. Constitutional work.

Mondays 8, 15, 22 Feb (as required TBC)	Working Group Meeting
Thursday 25 February	Council Meeting – Update on progress
Monday 15 March	Working Group Meeting: Update in advance of ECM
Wednesday 17 March	Member Code of Conduct Meeting: To consider the proposed changes to the Constitution
Thursday 25 March	Extraordinary Council Meeting: Resolution to amend the Council's governance arrangements
Thursday 1 April	Publication requirements to be fulfilled
Thursday 8 April (AM)	Training for Officers
Thursday 8 April (PM)	Training for all Councillors

Background papers: There are none.

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Proposed new committee structure

Appendix 2 – Proposed content for public consultation questionnaire