

**Committee System of Governance
28 September 2022**

Report of the Committee System Working Group

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To update Council on the Work of the Committee System Working Group.

This report is public.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) That the report be noted.**
- (2) That no further work be carried out by the Working Group during the 2022/23 municipal year.**
- (3) That the facts and information gathered by the Working Group be held by Democratic Services to assist the Council should this issue be raised again following the Council's May 2023 elections.**

1.0 Introduction

1.1 On 13 November 2019, Council passed the following motion:

1.2 *This council believes that it might make better use of the skills of all its councillors and improve the democratic accountability of decision making by ceasing the current leader and cabinet model of governance and implementing a committee system. Council will establish a Working Group, with membership in balance, to investigate the best way to introduce a committee system of governance, taking into account the experiences of other councils. The investigation will lead to a detailed, legally and constitutionally sound proposal to be presented to full Council for consideration on or before its meeting in September 2020. That proposal will set out a future programme for implementation of any change to the system of governance.*

1.3 On 18 December 2019, Council established a nine Member Committee System Working Group (CSWG) to carry out that investigative work.

2.0 Working Group meetings

2.1 The CSWG first met on 20 January 2020. At that point the timescale of reporting to Council in September 2020 was manageable. It could feasibly have led, if Council were so-minded, to a new system of Governance being implemented before the next elections in May 2023. However, the work of the CSWG was postponed for almost two years whilst the Council responded to the COVID 19 pandemic. The group did not meet

again until 22 November 2021, which meant that the timescale no longer fitted with the original intention of the motion.

- 2.2 As a result of the first meeting, information about the Committee system at Barrow Borough Council was sourced. That was circulated to the Working Group after its next meeting on 22 November 2021, when Members and officers agreed to research other authorities' committee systems and experiences of the change.
- 2.3 The Committee met again on 31 January 2022 when members were provided with an overview of various councils in England with committee systems, including Kingston upon Thames London Borough and Worcester City Council. Information had also been received from Nottinghamshire County Council and Pendle District Council. It was decided that a session from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny would be worthwhile since they had a great deal of experience assisting local authorities through their governance changes.
- 2.4 On 5 April 2022, Ian Parry from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny came to speak to all Councillors about the pros and cons of the two systems and to talk generally about changing and improving governance systems. The session was extremely well attended by Councillors and included a long session of questions and answers. The powerpoint presentation was made available to all Councillors following the meeting. Key points from his presentation were that; the form of governance was not so significant as the culture of making decisions on behalf of residents, a change to a committee system could not be reversed for five years, there was a risk with the committee system of giving more power to officers to achieve timely decisions on urgent matters. A number of members, including group leaders, contributed their views on the appropriateness of a change in governance. Three issues featured; the cost of achieving the transition to a committee system, the possible alternatives to such a major change in governance, including having a shadow cabinet and publishing minutes of all committee minutes with Council papers.
- 2.5 The CSWG met again on 21 April 2022 and discussed the next steps. A proposal setting out a draft structure for a committee system was rejected. Members were concerned about the overall cost of changing to a committee system that would involve redrafting of much of the Council's constitution. Officers made it clear that current staffing was insufficient to provide the resource necessary for proceeding with change. However, it was agreed that officers should source an estimate for putting together a proposal for Council in line with the original motion. It was further agreed to invite all Councillors to the next meeting to discuss which committees Councillors would like to see in a potential committee structure for Lancaster City Council.
- 2.6 At the meeting on 15 June 2022 it was reported by the Monitoring Officer, following discussion with a firm within the North West Legal Consortium, that the cost would be between £3,800 and £4,400 but that no budget had been identified for this expenditure. Despite all members of Council being invited, there were only four Councillors present at this meeting from the Working Group (one of whom was a substitute) and a small number of other Councillors. There was however a useful discussion of possible committees and principles that should guide the design of a committee system (these are included in Appendix 14).
- 2.7 At what was to be the final meeting of the Working Group on 25 July 2022 it was proposed that the Group be wound up and this report be prepared for Full Council.

3.0 Summary

3.1 The Working Group met on six occasions over two and a half years and during that time the membership changed as the political balance in the Council had varied. The Covid-19 pandemic had interrupted the normal work of the Council and by 2022 the feeling of the Group was that:

- across the Council there was insufficient enthusiasm for a change of governance to be achieved before the new Council was elected in May 2023
- there were insufficient resources identified to bring a workable proposal to full council
- it would be inappropriate for an outgoing group of Councillors to determine a new governance system for an incoming Council so late in the cycle.

3.2 For these reasons the Working Group does not feel able to present the 'detailed, legally and constitutionally sound proposal' to Council required by the original council decision that set up the Group. However, the Working Group does feel that the information gathered by Democratic Services officers is valuable and should be made available to the incoming Council if it wishes to consider moving to a committee system. This report, together with its Appendix, is intended to provide that resource.

4.0 Conclusion

4.1 Council is asked to note this report and that the findings from the research will be kept on file in Democratic Services for use after the May elections to be reviewed should Council show an interest in changing governance systems.

**CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT
(including Health & Safety, Equality & Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing):**

None identified as a result of this update report.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

None identified as a result of this update report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None identified as a result of this update report.

OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS, such as Human Resources, Information Services, Property, Open Spaces

None identified as a result of this update report.

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Section 151 Officer has been consulted and has no comments.

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no comments.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Information gathered by and for the Working Group (see appendix) is kept electronically by Democratic Services

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Appendix – links are shown to the resources below where available online. Other documents listed are kept electronically by Democratic Services in the Committee System Working Group folder for future reference.

Musical Chairs – CPfS 2012 no longer available online

Rethinking Governance - Local Government Association 2014 <https://www.cfgs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Rethinking-Governance.pdf>

Rethinking Council Governance for the 20s <https://www.cfgs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/CfGS-Rethinking-council-governance-SINGLE-PAGES.pdf>

Barrow in Furness

Information on their Committee framework from their Constitution
<https://www.barrowbc.gov.uk/the-council/barrow-council/council-constitution/>

CfGS Support - 31st January 2022

Democratic Services Briefing note - 18th January 2022

Kingston Upon Thames Committee System Presentation - January 2022

Brighton & Hove Council

Council report 26 April 2012 <https://democracy.brighton-hove.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=117&MId=3925&Ver=4>.

Cheshire East Council

Our move to a Committee System

<https://moderngov.cheshireeast.gov.uk/ecminutes/documents/s80977/Appendix%20F%20-%20Our%20Move%20to%20a%20Committee%20System%20Final.pdf>

Interim Review of the Committee System November 2021

<https://moderngov.cheshireeast.gov.uk/ecminutes/mgAi.aspx?ID=57389>

Constitutional update to implement the Committee System April 2021

<https://moderngov.cheshireeast.gov.uk/ecminutes/mgAi.aspx?ID=55478>

Councils that have changed governance systems

<https://moderngov.cheshireeast.gov.uk/ecminutes/documents/s68901/Appendix%20C.pdf>

Nottinghamshire County Council

CE's blog <https://leadership.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/posts/governance-transition/>

Change to governance arrangements report

<https://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/DMS/Document.ashx?czJKcaeAi5tUFL1DTL2UE4zNRBcoShgo=3Lr3cGSbl7wJS4RhP3JSp7MZ7M5yJD%2fwoYZcUolcExy26Y86MlrZ2g%3d%3d&rUzwRPf%2bZ3zd4E7lkn8Lyw%3d%3d=pwRE6AGJFLDNih225F5QMaQWcPHwdhUfCZ%2fLUQzqA2uL5jNRG4jdQ%3d%3d&mCTIbCubSFfXsDGW9IXnlq%3d%3d=hFflUdN3100%3d&kCx1AnS9%2fpWZQ40DXFvdEw%3d%3d=hFflUdN3100%3d&uJovDxwdjMPoYv%2bAJvYtyA%3d%3d=ctNJFf55vVA%3d&FgPIIEJYlotS%2bYGoBi5oIA%3d%3d=NHdURQburHA%3d&d9Qjj0ag1Pd993jsyOJqFvmyB7X0CSQK=ctNJFf55vVA%3d&WGewmoAfeNR9xqBuxOr1Q8Za60lavYmz=ctNJFf55vVA%3d&WGewmoAfeNQ16B2MHuCpMRKZMwaG1PaO=ctNJFf55vVA%3d>

Reading Council

Report on Governance Arrangements

<https://democracy.reading.gov.uk/Data/Council/201305221830/Agenda/fAAyADUAMgA5ADYAfAB8AFQAcqB1AGUAFAB8ADAAfAA1.pdf>

Sheffield City Council

Governance referendum

<https://democracy.sheffield.gov.uk/documents/b23822/Sheffield%20City%20Council%20Governance%20Referendum%20Wednesday%2019-May-2021%2012.00%20Council.pdf?T=9>

About the Committee system of governance <https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/your-city-council/about-committee-system-local-area-committees>

About the Governance Committee

<https://democracy.sheffield.gov.uk/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=632>

Transition to a Committee System

<https://democracy.sheffield.gov.uk/documents/s45125/Transition%20to%20a%20Committee%20System%20-%20Council%20Report%20June%202021.pdf>

A Modern Committee System for Sheffield

<https://democracy.sheffield.gov.uk/documents/s48725/8.%20Transition%20to%20a%20Committee%20System%20Inquiry%20Session%201%20-%20Appendix%207.pdf>

Worcester <http://committee.worcester.gov.uk/mgListCommittees.aspx?bcr=1>

Council Report February 2017

<http://committee.worcester.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=111&MID=3865#A119313>

Review of Committee system in 2018

<http://committee.worcester.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=111&MID=4249#A121540>

'Governance Option for Lancaster City Council' – powerpoint presentation by Ian Parry, CfGS 5th April 2022

Proposal for committee system considered by Working Group on 21st April 2022