

REVIEW OF CAMBRIDGESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S COMMITTEE SYSTEM

To: **Constitution and Ethics Committee**

Date: **3rd March 2015**

From: **LGSS Director Law, Property and Governance**

Electoral division(s): **All**

Purpose: **To consider the results of a review of the operation of the Council's Committee System with a view to the Constitution and Ethics Committee recommending to Council any changes to the detailed governance procedures.**

Recommendation: **The Committee is asked to recommend to Council the following:**

Revisions to be reflected in the Constitution

- (i) information reports to not be included on Committee agendas unless they are updating, at the specific request of the Committee, progress of decisions previously agreed by a Committee.**
- (ii) each Service Committee to consider and approve its own training plan at every meeting. The plan to include figures for attendance for each training session.**
- (iii) full Council to receive a short (two sides of A4) report at its annual meeting in May. The report to be prepared by the relevant Service and not open for discussion at the meeting.**
- (iv) to amend the budget setting process to remove the requirement to request the Leader to re-consider.**
- (v) to reduce the number of Member seats on General Purposes Committee and each Service Committee to thirteen.**
- (vi) to rename service committees to Policy and Service Committees to better reflect their role.**
- (vii) to hold an annual training day for Chairs, Vice-Chairs and Spokes with a focus on their roles and remits.**

- (viii) to hold recorded votes for Service Committee items which are not unanimous.

Other Proposals

- (ix) to investigate the possibility of creating a third committee covering the Economy, Transport and Environment Service.
- (x) to hold training at a future Members' Seminar covering the current role of GPC and how it relates to Service Committees.
- (xi) to ask the Constitution and Ethics Committee to conduct a mini review in a year's time in order to consider whether to recommend any changes to the detailed governance procedures to Council.

<i>Officer contact:</i>		<i>Member contact</i>	
Name:	Quentin Baker	Name:	Cllr S Kindersley
Post:	Director of Law, Property & Governance and Monitoring Officer	Portfolio:	Chairman, Constitution and Ethics Committee
Email:	quentin.baker@cambridgeshire.gov.uk	Email:	skindersley@hotmail.com
Tel:	01223 727961	Tel:	01767 651982

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 At its annual meeting in May 2014, following a resolution in 2013, Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) resolved to convert from a Leader Cabinet form of governance to a Committee System. The detailed form and procedures of the new system had been developed over the preceding nine months in a process coordinated by the Constitution and Ethics Committee under the auspices of its role in oversight and maintenance of the Council's Constitution.
- 1.2 In recognition of the fact that any newly designed system of governance may experience unforeseen issues in operation and in addition, potential improvements may emerge, the decision to implement included an express requirement to conduct a review of the operation in its first 12 months with a view to the Committee considering whether to recommend any changes to the detailed governance procedures.
- 1.3 A consultation exercise involving elected members and officers was conducted via an electronic questionnaire available from the end of November until 24 December 2014 (some flexibility was allowed for comments after this period given the importance of seeking as many views as possible). The questionnaire consisted of questions relating to specific aspects of the system and a section for general comments. It was seeking to confirm what was working well and to identify areas which would improve the operation of the system.
- 1.4 The Constitution and Ethics Committee held a workshop on 27 January 2015 to consider the responses to the survey. A report detailing the responses is attached at **Appendix 1** and a copy of the presentation to the workshop is attached at **Appendix 2**.

2. CONSTITUTION AND ETHICS COMMITTEE WORKSHOP

- 2.1 The Committee initially focussed on a section of questions on specific issues which had been raised over the recent months and were capable of yes or no answers. Following discussion, the Committee agreed the following:
 - a) that parent governors would not be included in the membership of the Children and Young People Committee (CYPC). The current diocesan representatives are statutory appointees with limited voting rights at CYPC. The Committee felt that Parent Governors were already represented on the Cambridgeshire Schools' Forum, which had responsibility for school finance.
 - b) that information reports would not be included on Committee agendas unless they were updating, at the specific request of the Committee, progress of decisions previously agreed by a Committee.
 - c) that reports intended solely to enhance Councillor understanding should not be taken to Committee but training should be provided separately instead. The Committee agreed that each Service Committee should consider and approve its own training plan at every meeting. The plan would include attendance figures for each training session.
 - d) that Local Members should continue to have five minutes to speak on an item rather than the three minutes given to members of the public. The Committee

felt that the role of a Local Member, in relation to their overall role of representing their Division, was very different to that of a member of the public.

- 2.2 The Committee then focussed on the following four topics: Topic 1 – Full Council; Topic 2 – The Role of General Purposes Committee; Topic 3 – Administration; and Topic 4 – Services Committees.

Topic 1 – Full Council

- 2.3 The Committee considered a number of proposals to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Full Council. Following discussion, the Committee agreed the following:
- a) that the full Council should receive a short (two sides of A4) report at its annual meeting in May. The report should be prepared by the relevant Service and should not be open for discussion at the meeting.
 - b) that oral question time should continue at full Council. However, the Committee highlighted the need for Members to bear in mind that the Committee Chairman/woman was not the Cabinet Portfolio Holder and could therefore not commit the Committee to actions without its agreement. It was important that Members used oral question time only after exhausting all avenues first.
 - c) to amend the budget setting process to remove the requirement to request the Leader to re-consider. The Committee felt that this no longer applied in a committee system.

Topic 2 – The Role of General Purposes Committee (GPC)

- 2.4 The Committee considered a number of proposals to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of General Purposes Committee. It did not really come to a view as to how it could give the role of GPC greater clarity, which had been an issue raised in the survey. Some Members were still concerned that GPC should not be given any more decision making powers over and above the few it had. It was not really established how the relationship between GPC and the Service Committees could be clarified. It is acknowledged that there is confusion surrounding the current role of GPC. However, this might be best addressed by specific training at a Members' Seminar.
- 2.5 Members discussed GPC acting as a 'clearing house' between Service Committees but noted that in practice, protocols and informal discussions between Chairs were being used to determine which Committee an item should be presented to. There was an acknowledgement that the Business Planning process needed to start earlier. It is important to note that officers involved in this process have learnt from the experience of compiling the Business Plan 2015/16 and are implementing any changes accordingly.
- 2.6 The Committee commented that it was not happy that GPC could potentially veto another Committee's decision i.e. where a Committee agreed to site the Archives Service was dependent on GPC agreeing a property acquisition. This reinforced the need for training on the current terms of reference for GPC to ensure all Members were aware of where responsibility for certain functions lay.

Topic 3 - Administration

- 2.7 The Committee considered a number of proposals to improve administration of the committee system.
- 2.8 Members discussed the strong support for individual Members to be allowed to write and present reports to Committee. However, they could not support this proposal as there was no way of preventing bias, ensuring all the facts were presented and that the committees remained strategic. It was felt that Members could request reports on specific issues through the Spokes system.
- 2.9 The Committee considered the need for officer reports to be more succinct and contain executive summaries. However, it did not feel that reports were too lengthy and felt that Executive Summaries would just deter Members from reading the whole report.
- 2.10 Members considered the need to clarify the timetable for committees. It was noted that most Committees were aiming to meet bi-monthly, but having to meet monthly; this was partly due to the Business Planning process but also because of workload and urgent items. Members discussed the possibility of creating a third committee covering the Economy, Transport and Environment Service area to help relieve the workload pressure on Economy and Environment and Highways and Community Infrastructure Committees. It was agreed that this proposal should be investigated.
- 2.11 The need for more accessible training and briefings for members in relation to services within their committee remits and decisions being made was discussed. It was acknowledged that if Committees were responsible for their own Committee Training Plan, they could arrange training at the convenience of their own committee members and ensure that they received copies of PowerPoint presentations.

Topic 4 – Service Committees

- 2.12 The Committee considered a number of proposals to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Service Committees.
- 2.13 57% of respondents had agreed that the number of seats on committees should be reviewed. The current number of seats (17) had been agreed on the basis of each political group on the Council having an automatic right to a place on each Service Committee, and to ensure that every member of the Council had a place on a Service Committee. The Independent Group Leader had proposed, at the workshop, that his group might be content to not have a place on every Service Committee. However, this was subject to him having discussions with his group.

- 2.14 Officers have recalculated proportionality on the basis of each service committee having thirteen seats. This figure would ensure that nearly every member would have a place on a Service Committee. An **example only** of a breakdown is detailed in the table below.

Committees	C	LD	L	UKIP	Ind	
General Purposes Committee	6	3	1	2	1	13
Adults and Wellbeing	6	3	1	2	1	13
Children and Young People	6	3	2	2	0	13
Economy and Environment	6	3	2	2	0	13
Health	6	2	1	3	1	13
Highways and Community Infrastructure	7	2	1	2	1	13

- 2.15 Attention was drawn to feedback from the survey that committees encourage a silo mentality. It was felt that this argument was unfounded. The Committee was of the view that it was up Members to engage with other committees and that committees were not just looking after their own interests. The General Purposes Committee had a cross-cutting role detailed in the Constitution which needed to be brought to the attention of all Members as part of any training process.
- 2.16 The Committee considered concerns identified in the survey regarding the lack of engagement of all committee members by Chairs/Vice-Chairs and Spokes. It was felt that some Spokes did not fully understand the need to feedback to their groups. Members acknowledged the importance of some form of self-scrutiny.
- 2.17 Members considered a request from a member of the public for recorded votes at all Committee meetings. It was felt that this was inevitable to improve transparency.
- 2.18 Following further discussion, the Committee agreed the following:
- a) to rename service committees to Policy and Service Committees to better reflect their role.
 - b) to hold an annual training day for Chairs, Vice-Chairs and Spokes with a focus on their roles and remits.
 - c) to hold recorded votes for Service Committee items which were not unanimous.

3. CONTINUAL REVIEW

- 3.1 There is a need to review any newly designed system of governance on a regular basis in order to implement any potential improvements which may emerge. It is therefore proposed that the Constitution and Ethics Committee should conduct a mini review in a year's time in order to consider whether to recommend any changes to the detailed governance procedures to Council.

Source Documents	Location
Reports and minutes of County Council May 2013 – May 2014	http://www2.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/CommitteeMinutes/Committees/Committee.aspx?committeeID=12
Reports and minutes of Constitution and Ethics Committee	http://www2.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/CommitteeMinutes/Committees/Committee.aspx?committeeID=59