

DRAFT



Item

REVIEW OF GOVERNANCE

To:

Civic Affairs Committee 20/09/2023

Report by:

Tom Lewis Head of Legal Practice and Monitoring Officer

Email: tom.lewis@cambridge.gov.uk

Wards affected:

All

1. Introduction

This report provides the starting point for noting the work of a Member Governance Reference Group (GRG) which will report to the Civic Affairs Committee when decisions are required.

2. Recommendations

- To agree the Terms of Reference of the Governance Reference Group (paragraph 4)
- To note the work programme and high level timeline (paragraph 5).

3. Background

GRG has been established to review the Council's current mode of Governance. This follows a review by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (appendix A) commissioned by the Chief Executive with the support of Group Leaders.

The membership of the GRG is:

- Councillor Smart (Deputy Leader and Executive lead on the Governance Review)
- Councillors Bennett, Bick, Gawthrope Wood, Healy, McPherson, Robertson, S. Smith and Young.

GRG has met on two occasions 3 August and 11 September and aims to meet monthly until April 2024

The background documents informing the work so far has been the review by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, the recommendations by the Independent Remuneration Panel and a background briefing paper recommending the established of the GRG. (all attached).

4. Proposed Terms of Reference

To make recommendations to the Civic Affairs Committee on five broad themes concerning Governance:

- 1) The effectiveness and value for money of the current 'hybrid' hybrid model of Council governance (as described by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny) in relation to Cabinet and Committee systems with any alternative decision-making model including the function of Full Council adhering to the Principles included in the Article 1.3 of the Constitution copied here:

1.3 Purpose of the Constitution

1.3.1 The purpose of the Constitution is to:

1. enable the Council to provide clear leadership to the community in partnership with the citizens of Cambridge of every kind;
2. support the active involvement of citizens in the process of local authority decision-making;
3. help councillors represent their constituents effectively;

4. enable decisions to be taken efficiently and effectively, to ensure that councillors' time is used most efficiently and effectively and focused on the most important issues;
5. create a powerful and effective means of holding decision-makers to public account;
6. ensure that no one shall review or scrutinise a decision in which they were directly involved;
7. ensure that those responsible for decision making are clearly identifiable to local people and that they explain the reasons for decisions; and
8. provide a means of improving the delivery of services to the community.

2) Area Committees and any future approach to community engagement

3) A revised and user-friendly Constitution

4) The city council electoral cycle

5) Any other aspects of Governance which the Governance Reference Group identifies or are asked to review by the Civic Affairs Committee.

5. Work programme

5.1 The GRG will, in the first instance, meet monthly until April 2024-it has met twice (3 August and 11 September). It will investigate each of its themes in the Terms of Reference and will report to the Civic Affairs Committee 7 February 2024 with progress. It may be possible to secure some improvements in process or practice before then.

5.2 Given the time available between this meeting and that February meeting, the Governance Reference Group has recognized that it may not be possible to consider all of the themes in its Terms of Reference in sufficient detail to arrive at a conclusion / recommendation by February 2024.

5.3 The aim is to recommend any changes to the decision-making framework for implementation in May 2024. After which, consideration of electoral

cycles, a comprehensive consideration of effective community engagement, and any other business will be undertaken.

5.4 The duration of the Governance Review Group may therefore need to extend into the 2024/25 Municipal Year.

5.5 In the first instance, the Group has agreed its work programme in the coming eight meetings, between summer 2023 and Spring 2024 will cover, subject to any issues arising (and subject to dates being confirmed), the following:

- 11 Sept – area committees and community engagement
- 9 Oct – quick wins to simplify procedures and shorten meetings
- 6 Nov – Officer input + Guest speaker on pros/cons of Cabinet v Committee v hybrid
- 4 Dec – Discussion, debate and reflections
- 8 Jan – Governance (3 of 3) – to come to a view on preferred model
- 1 Feb – Elections (1 of 2) – Officer/Expert input, comparative costs and benefits of all-out vs election by thirds; process and timescales
- 11 Mar – Elections (2 of 2) – discussion & debate, agreement on way forward
- 15 Apr – Updating the constitution; potential extension to schedule of dates and agenda items for GRG

5.6 The project will be supported by the Transformation Team and external advisors and contributors identified by the GRG and officers. Evidence from other Councils will be reviewed.

5.7 There will be a budget of £40,000 to fund this project and ensure any Councillor decisions are implemented.

6. Implications

The outcomes of this project may have resource and wider implications which will require consideration by the appropriate committee and or Executive before adoption.

7. Consultation and communication considerations

The Chief Executive and Assistant Chief Executive have contributed to this report.

8. Appendices

Appendix A – Report by the Centre for Governance & Scrutiny

Appendix B – Note proposing establishment of GRG

9. Contact

Gary.clift@cambridge.gov.uk, Democratic Services Manager.