

COUNCIL MEETING – 13TH DECEMBER 2023

REVIEW OF THE COMMITTEE SYSTEM AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY SAVING

RECOMMENDATION

That

- 1. Council note its agreed MTFS saving of £135,000 to reduce the costs of democracy;**
- 2. the Finance Sub-Committee be retained as a Sub-Committee of the Corporate Policy Committee;**
- 3. the three Place service committees be retained;**
- 4. the functions of the Scrutiny Committee be transferred to the Audit and Governance Committee;**
- 5. a further annual review of the committee system be undertaken and a report on its findings be presented to the first scheduled meeting held after the Council AGM in 2024; and**
- 6. the Monitoring Officer be authorised to make such consequential changes to the Council’s Constitution as he deems necessary to give effect to the decision(s) of Council.**

Extract from the Minutes of the Corporate Policy Committee meeting on 30th November 2023

53 REVIEW OF THE COMMITTEE SYSTEM AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY SAVING

The Committee considered a report on proposed changes to the committee system to achieve financial savings of £135,000 identified in the MTFS.

A previously deferred proposal to reduce the number of planning committees from three to two was due to be considered by Council on 13th December 2023.

The Committee was asked to consider a number of additional proposals:

- Reducing the number of Place service committees from three to two.
- Merging the functions of the Corporate Policy Committee and Finance Sub-Committee to create a Corporate Policy and Resources Committee.

- Incorporating the functions of the Scrutiny Committee into the relevant service committees.

Officers advised that the Council would need to remove two main committees from the committee structure to achieve the required savings. Reducing the number of meetings instead would not achieve the savings, and reducing the frequency of planning committee meetings would be problematic.

In general, there was no support among members for a reduction in the number of Place service committees.

There was also wide agreement that the Finance Sub-Committee should be retained, particularly in the present financial climate, given its pivotal role in overseeing the Council's budget.

With regard to the functions of the Scrutiny Committee, members felt that these might be better placed with the Audit and Governance Committee rather than a service committee. Officers saw no issue with this in principle but advised that future meetings of the Audit and Governance Committee would need to be structured in such a way as to enable scrutiny functions and audit-related functions to be dealt with at separate times during the meeting. It was also recognised that different skill-sets were required for audit and scrutiny functions.

In addition to the options identified in the report, members asked that consideration be given to incorporating the functions of the Licensing Committee into the Environment and Communities Committee or the Audit and Governance Committee. Officers advised that a distinction was usually drawn between regulatory committees and service committees. However, they undertook to consider the feasibility of the proposal.

Members also suggested that in future, visiting members, non-core officers and members of the public wishing to speak at committee meetings could be encouraged to attend meetings remotely rather than in person. Officers undertook to consider the implications of the suggestion.

Officers undertook to provide members with a briefing paper on the various options identified and suggestions made during the debate, in time for the Council meeting on 13th December.

RESOLVED

That the Committee recommends to Council that

1. Council note its agreed MTFS saving of £135,000 to reduce the costs of democracy;
2. the Finance Sub-Committee be retained as a Sub-Committee of the Corporate Policy Committee;

3. the three Place service committees be retained;
4. the functions of the Scrutiny Committee be transferred to the Audit and Governance Committee;
5. a further annual review of the committee system be undertaken and a report on its findings be presented to the first scheduled meeting held after the Council AGM in 2024; and
6. the Monitoring Officer be authorised to make such consequential changes to the Council's Constitution as he deems necessary to give effect to the decision(s) of Council.