

FULL COUNCIL

6 JANUARY 2021

GOVERNANCE WORKING GROUP – PROGRESS UPDATE

Reason for the report: To update Council on Governance Working Group progress.

In line with the Working Group's report to Full Council on 28 October 2020 two information gathering exercises have been completed. An external event, with a panel chaired by one of the LGA advisers, was held on 23 November 2020. There were 5 attendees from the public: a recording of the event is on the MDDC web site and a transcript is available if requested. In addition, 4 people provided written input for consideration. An internal event was held on 1 December 2020 with a workshop chaired by the LGA. Some 25 Members attended with candid opinions given. The Working Group subsequently met on 10 December 2020 and reviewed the outcome of the 2 events plus the internal web-based consultation held in September 2020.

This report seeks Full Council's ratification of the Working Group's conclusions from these consultations before committing to further work. These are as follows:

1. Change is needed to improve the Council's governance in line with modern, current best practice. Focus is around attitude, behaviour, and approach rather than the fundamental structure of governance.
2. Implementation of Scrutiny (as a function) needs to be adapted to make engagement more active, potentially to provide earlier engagement in the decision-making process and when required to be an effective post-decision check.
3. Policy Development (as a function) needs to become more influential in the Council's business, taking a greater role in developing new ideas and challenge.
4. Combining the above 2 functions in specific committees should be considered.
5. Engagement by Members needs to be improved to make the Council's operation not only more effective but to be seen to be more effective.
6. Engagement with the residents and businesses needs to be improved through encouragement, better access (eg social media and other platforms) and communication (eg different focus / less jargon).
7. A systematic process approach should recognise the need for timely decision making, setting out clearly which parties are Responsible, Accountable, Consulted and Informed.

In summary, there is a lot that the Council does well. The emphasis is on evolutionary improvement, in some cases with positive system change, but equally better to use existing systems where appropriate.

Subject to Full Council's agreement, the Working Group will work with Officers and the LGA to formulate more detailed proposals based on the conclusions stated above, recognising experience of other relevant local authorities. The aim remains to bring a recommendation to an Extraordinary Full Council meeting in March 2021. The Working Group expects to meet again to review progress in late January 2021 and probably again in February 2021. A further report will be provided to Full Council on 24 February 2021.