Bristol City Council
Minutes of the Committee Model Working Group

27 January 2023 at 11.00 am

Members Present: Councillor Jenny Bartle (Chair), Councillor Marley Bennett, Councillor Nicola Beech, Councillor Richard Eddy, Councillor Lorraine Francis, Councillor Helen Holland, Councillor Gary Hopkins, Councillor Mohamed Makawi, Councillor Steve Pearce, Councillor Guy Poultney and Councillor Mark Weston (substituting for Councillor Geoff Gollop).

Officers in Attendance:
Lucy Fleming (Head of Democratic Engagement), Tim O'Gara (Director - Legal and Democratic Services), and Taylor Meagher (Member Development Officer).

1 Welcome, Introductions, and Safety Information

The Chair welcomed those present and introductions were made.

2 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillor Geoff Gollop with Councillor Mark Weston substituting.

3 Annual Business

The following matters were discussed:

- Members noted the Membership as set out in the Annual Business Report.
- The Working Group confirmed the dates for meetings, as detailed in the accompanying papers.
- Councillor Eddy moved that the Terms of Reference be approved, and this was seconded by Councillor Bartle.

- Councillor Eddy moved that Councillor Bartle be elected as Chair, and this was seconded by Councillor Beech. As there were no other nominations this was carried.
- Councillor Weston moved that Councillor Gollop be elected as Vice Chair and this was seconded by Councillor Pearce. As there were no other nominations this was carried.

RESOLVED:

- **That the Membership of the Group for 2022/23 be noted.**
- **That the meeting dates set out in the report be confirmed.**
- **That the Terms of Reference be approved.**
- **That Councillor Jenny Bartle be elected Chair of the Committee Model Working Group for the remainder of the 22/23 Municipal Year.**
- **That Councillor Geoff Gollop be elected Vice Chair of the Working Group for the remainder of the 22/23 Municipal Year.**

4   Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5   Public Forum

The following public forum business was received for the meeting.

No.	Name	Question
PQ01	Suzanne Audrey	As far as I am aware, four members of the working group voted against holding the governance referendum, two members wrote articles during the run-up to the referendum saying they opposed the committee model, and two members (including the Chair) currently serve in the Mayor's Cabinet, some members of which continue to make disparaging remarks about the committee system. What reassurance can you give to the public that those members of the working group who opposed the governance referendum and/or the committee model are now working positively to develop the new committee model of governance for the city? Answer: This is a question for individual Councillors and should be directed to them as appropriate, however anyone in attendance at the meeting may

		choose to respond.
PQ02	Suzanne Audrey	The Vice-chair of the governance working group appeared to suggest that only '12 nerds' across the city were interested in the early meetings of the committee model working group. I disagree, and the public engagement meeting I attended would suggest that there are plenty of people who are keen to understand and improve local democracy. However, it is not always easy for people to attend meetings or to get their voices heard. In what ways will the working group engage citizens in the development and understanding of the new committee model of governance? Answer: The Committee Model Working Group has prepared a Communications and Engagement Strategy which sets out Members' commitment to engaging with the public and the ways in which they will do this. In addition to the activities set out in the Strategy, meetings of the CMWG will now be held in public, which provides residents with the opportunity to submit statements and ask questions, even if they are not able to attend in person.
PQ03	Joanna Booth	How have they ensured that scrutiny will be done outside the committees themselves so that those performing executive functions do not also scrutinise their own actions? Answer: The Committee Model Working Group will be considering the approach to scrutiny at a future meeting.
PQ04	Joanna Booth	How is the committee ensuring that the system that will come into place in May 2024, will have sufficient resources (i.e., won't be affected by the Labour administration's cuts to Democratic Services) to perform its functions? Answer: Discussions about the resources required to support the committee system will take place when more details about the potential structure are available.
PQ05	Joanna Booth	At a recent public meeting, the chair, Cllr Helen Holland, implied the group was looking at how to create a 'strong leader' model. This is not what Bristol voted for. How is the committee planning to make sure we have a committee system, which the people voted for, and not a leader and cabinet system? Answer: The referendum on the Council's governance will result in a move to the Council being run by 'one or more Committees made up of elected Councillors.' Councillor Holland may wish to comment further on this question.

PQ01. Councillor Beech responded to advise that she was not aware that the Labour Group had criticised the decision to move to a Committee Model following the referendum and that Members were working together to deliver a system that reflected the needs of local residents.

Supplementary question from Suzanne Audrey: Do you agree that existing funding should be retained to support the Committee system?

Councillor Holland responded to confirm that she had effectively supported several governance structures during her time as an elected representative. She went on to state that once details of the Committee system were known the resources required to deliver it could then be identified.

Councillor Bartley and Councillor Eddy added that Members of the Group had been working together collaboratively and positively.

Supplementary question from Suzanne Audrey: Are there any plans to webcast meetings of the CMWG?

PQ02. The Head of Democratic Engagement stated that the Council was in the process of moving towards delivery of increased webcasting and hybrid meetings.

Following the formal public forum, the Chair allowed an additional contribution from a member of the public who was present at the meeting. Mary Page inquired about whether the Committee planned to engage with representatives of the groups that campaigned in relation to the outcome of the referendum. In response, Members advised that the Committee would shortly be finalising its Communications and Engagement Strategy, which would include liaison with a range of external partners.

6   Work Programme

Members approved the work programme.

RESOLVED: That the Work Programme be approved.

7   Decision-making under the current Mayor and Cabinet model of governance

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services provided a brief introduction to the report, following which the Head of the Executive Office provided a presentation and responded to questions from Members. The ensuing discussion was as follows:

- The current key decision pathway required the Council to publish forthcoming key decisions 28 days in advance. The threshold for a key decision was presently those resulting in expenditure or savings of £500k or over or being significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in two or more wards in the city. Members confirmed that the principles of political oversight and long-term planning needed to remain in place, therefore it was agreed that Policy Committees would publish Forward Plans, ideally at least 2-months in advance with final details to be confirmed at a later date. It was also suggested that ward Members be kept fully informed about Key Decisions affecting their wards.

- Decisions that cost between £100k and £499k (i.e., below the key decision threshold) were Officer Executive Decisions (OEDs) taken by senior officers. OEDs were made in consultation with the relevant Cabinet Members and details of the decision were then published. Members advised that they would like to consider how this arrangement would work in the committee model, with a view to determining if any changes should be made to improve transparency.

- Members noted the approach to emergency decision making, details of which were covered in the Council's Access to Information rules (see APR15 and 16), agreeing that a similar mechanism would need to be in place, with details to be agreed in due course.

- The Group discussed the principle about democratic decision making and all agreed that the current levels of political oversight must be retained, which included that all decisions currently made by Members must continue to be so.

- Members were advised that the Council could choose to have a Leader and Deputy Leader in the Committee Model. The benefits included having named individuals who could speak on behalf of the Council, although some Members were concerned about the potential for the Leader and Deputy Leader to have too many 'powers.' After discussion, Members agreed that Leader and Deputy Leader positions would be created, with both positions appointed by Full Council. It was noted that a fuller discussion about the roles and responsibilities of the Leader and Deputy Leader would take place at a future meeting, to include job roles from other Local Authorities.

- Members inquired about the various external bodies e.g., Boards which had Cabinet Member involvement and it was agreed that details would be provided following the meeting.

- Regarding Call In, Members agreed that once the Group had determined the number of Committees and their responsibilities this would be given further consideration, but there was consensus that this process should be retained.

- Members considered the approach to briefings, confirming that the Chairs and Vice Chairs of each policy Committee would be invited to attend, in a similar way to how Cabinet Member briefings operated currently. Agenda setting meetings should operate how they do now for some meetings (e.g., Development Control) so that all Lead Members (one from each political party) be invited, and draft reports should be available. Members agreed to discuss this further at a later meeting.

- The Group discussed the approach to setting the Budget and Policy Framework, deciding that this would be subject to further consideration after agreement was reached regarding the number of Committees as well as roles and responsibilities of all Members. It was noted that the Council's Corporate Strategy was in place until 2027.

- Discussion moved to the arrangements for Member Forum and Public Forum. All Members agreed that both should be retained in the new model and some suggested that the Forums needed to be expanded, although noted that time constraints were an important consideration.

The current principle of enabling Chairs to take a flexible approach to managing public forum should be maintained.

- Members noted that further discussion was required in relation to petitions, including the threshold for a debate and appropriate pathway for response.
- Consideration must be given by the Working Group to the approach to Scrutiny and there were several options for the Committee Model to consider at their meeting in March 23.

RESOLVED:

The following matters were agreed in relation to the Committee Model of governance:

- **That a Leader and Deputy Leader would be in place, appointed by Full Council. Roles and responsibilities to be confirmed at the 14th April 23 meeting.**
- **That Forward plan (s) would be in place, with more details to be considered.**
- **That Emergency Decision Making would be enabled with similar arrangements to those set out in APR 15 and 16.**
- **That the Chairs and Vice Chairs would be consulted on OEDs in advance, with other changes to the process to be considered in due course.**
- **That Member Forum/Public Forum, would be retained in the new model with full details to be confirmed.**
- **That agenda setting meetings take place before Policy Committees, with the Lead Members in attendance.**
- **That regular briefings be arranged for the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the Policy Committees.**
- **That the CMWG will take regular reports of recommendations for decision to Full Council, commencing in March 23.**

8   Community Engagement Feedback

This item was deferred to a later meeting.

Meeting ended at Time Not Specified

CHAIR _____

Committee Model Working Group – Terms of Reference 22/23

Context

1. On 5 May 2022 a governance referendum was held to determine whether Bristol City Council should be run by a Mayor who is elected by voters or by one or more committees made up of elected Councillors.

2. The outcome of the governance referendum will lead to a change in the way that the Council is run from the current Directly Elected Mayor model of governance to a committee model of governance, with effect from the third day after the date of local elections in 2024.

3. At an extraordinary meeting of the Full Council on 24th May 22, Members agreed to establish a Cross-Party Working Group to develop the committee model of governance.

4. The Cross Party Working Group will have monthly meetings in public with effect from January 2023.

Purpose

5. The Working Group will be responsible for developing the design principles for the structure of the committee model and making recommendations to Full Council, which will include details of proposed changes to the Constitution This will include consideration of the following themes:

- Leadership, functions, roles and structure of Committees
- Potential role of scrutiny
- Officer support and structure
- Briefings and agenda setting procedures
- Public engagement under the Committee Model
- Equality, Diversity and Accessibility
- Local decision making
- Delegations to officers
- Working under the Committee Model in a Council with 'no overall control'
- Engagement with external partners
- New governance arrangements to be kept under review

6. Enabling public engagement is a key objective of the Working Group. This will include seeking views during the design phase (for example through public events), as well as ensuring that the committee model will support democratic decision making. A number of events have taken place in 2022, with additional activities planned for 2023/24.

Membership

7. Membership of the Working Group will be 12 with the following proportionality:

   - Labour Group – 4 seats
   - Green Group – 4 seats
   - Conservative Group – 2 seats
   - Liberal Democrat Group – 1 seat
   - Knowle Community Party Group – 1 seat

8. The Members sitting on the Working Group during 22/23 will be as follows:

   - Councillor Jenny Bartle
   - Councillor Nicola Beech
   - Councillor Marley Bennett
   - Councillor Richard Eddy
   - Councillor Lorraine Francis
   - Councillor Geoff Gollop
   - Councillor Helen Holland
   - Councillor Gary Hopkins
   - Councillor Tim Kent
   - Councillor Mo Makawi
   - Councillor Steve Pearce
   - Councillor Guy Poultney

9. The Chair and Vice Chair for 22/23 will be as follows:

   - Chair – to be confirmed
   - Vice Chair – to be confirmed

Procedure Rules

The Committee Model Working Group will operate in accordance with the Council's Committee Procedure Rules.

Public Forum
Committee Model Working Group
27th January 2023

Questions	
Number	**Name**
PQ 01	Suzanne Audrey
PQ02	
PQ 03	Joanna Booth
PQ04	
PQ05	

Suzanne Audrey

Q1. As far as I am aware, four members of the working group voted against holding the governance referendum, two members wrote articles during the run-up to the referendum saying they opposed the committee model, and two members (including the Chair) currently serve in the Mayor's Cabinet, some members of which continue to make disparaging remarks about the committee system. What reassurance can you give to the public that those members of the working group who opposed the governance referendum and/or the committee model are now working positively to develop the new committee model of governance for the city?

A1. This is a question for individual Councillors and should be directed to them as appropriate, however anyone in attendance at the meeting may choose to respond.

Q2. The Vice-chair of the governance working group appeared to suggest that only '12 nerds' across the city were interested in the early meetings of the committee model working group. I disagree, and the public engagement meeting I attended would suggest that there are plenty of people who are keen to understand and improve local democracy. However, it is not always easy for people to attend meetings or to get their voices heard. In what ways will the working group engage citizens in the development and understanding of the new committee model of governance?

A2. The Committee Model Working Group has prepared a Communications and Engagement Strategy which sets out Members' commitment to engaging with the public and the ways in which they will do this. In addition to the activities set out in the Strategy, meetings of the CMWG will now be held in public, which provides residents with the opportunity to submit statements and ask questions, even if they are not able to attend in person.

Joanna Booth

Q3. How have they ensured that scrutiny will be done outside the committees themselves so that those performing executive functions do not also scrutinise their own actions?

A3. The Committee Model Working Group will be considering the approach to scrutiny at a future meeting.

Q4. How is the committee ensuring that the system that will come into place in May 2024, will have sufficient resources (i.e. won't be affected by the Labour administration's cuts to Democratic Services) to perform its functions?

A4. Discussions about the resources required to support the committee system will take place when more details about the potential structure are available.

Q5. At a recent public meeting, the chair, Cllr Helen Holland, implied the group was looking at how to create a 'strong leader' model. This is not what Bristol voted for. How is the committee planning to make sure we have a committee system, which the people voted for, and not a leader and cabinet system?

A5. The referendum on the Council's governance will result in a move to the Council being run by 'one or more Committees made up of elected Councillors.'   Councillor Holland may wish to comment further on this question.