

Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

27 October 2022



Report of: Director – Legal and Democratic Services

Title: Bristol City Council Governance arrangements - update

Ward: Citywide

Recommendation

That the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

1. notes the update on the work of the Committee Model Working Group to develop the Committee model of governance;
2. provides any feedback on the work of the Committee Model Working Group for consideration by the Working Group;
3. notes that the Committee Model Working Group will report back to Full Council in December 2022.

Summary

This report provides an overview of the work of the Committee Model Working Group to develop the Committee model of governance.



Policy

1. This report provides an overview of the work of the cross-party working group that was established at the Extraordinary Full Council meeting on 24 May 2022 to develop the Committee model of.

Consultation

2. **Internal**
Committee Model Working Group.
3. **External**
Not applicable.

Background

4. At the Extraordinary Full Council meeting on 24 May 2022, Full Council noted the outcome of the referendum on how Bristol City Council is run and resolved to cease to operate a Directly Elected Mayor model of governance and start to operate a Committee model of governance with effect from 5 May 2024. Full Council also resolved to establish a cross-party working group to develop the Committee model of governance, which would report back to Full Council before the end of 2022.
5. The Working Group has met on a regular basis from July 2022. The Working Group has Terms of Reference details of which are set out in Appendix 1. The Working Group also has a Work Programme, with a particular emphasis on the period between July and December 2022 being used as a period of fact-finding and evidence gathering around the Committee model of governance, best practice and lessons learned from other Councils.
6. During August and September, the Working Group met with the Local Government Association, Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, Sheffield Council and Brighton and Hove Council. The areas of focus for the Working Group in those sessions were lessons learnt, public engagement, committee structures/decision-making and roles and responsibilities. The support from these organisations has been extremely valuable and further details of specific matters raised in those meetings are set out in this report.
7. In addition, the Working Group was keen to develop effective public engagement in the work that it is doing and various proposals for public engagement and consultation are set out in this report.
8. The intention is that the Working Group will report back to Full Council in December 2022 with details relating to the design principles for the structure of the Committee model. This report sets out the emerging thinking of the Working Group in terms of the design principles for the Committee model.

Public engagement and consultation

9. The Working Group is keen to carry out engagement with the public to share information about

the Committee model and to obtain views about the emerging design principles. It is anticipated that there will be a number of engagement points, full details of which are set out in the External Communications Strategy in Appendix 2.

10. Furthermore, a briefing was held for all Bristol City councillors on 12 October where details of the work of the Working Group was presented. Further briefings Member briefings will be carried out at appropriate points as the full detail of the governance arrangements under the Committee model are developed.

Support from the Local Government Association/Centre for Scrutiny and Governance

11. The Working Group has received initial advice and support on the Committee model from the Local Government Association and the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, both of which have supported a number of councils who have changed their governance arrangements. They were able to provide insight and guidance into some of the key considerations for the Working Group.
12. The key matters raised and discussed with the Local Government Association and the Centre for Scrutiny and Governance are set out below.
 - Support for members as part of the change of governance arrangements
 - Role of officers under the Committee model
 - How scrutiny might operate under the Committee model
 - Relationships with partners under the Committee model
 - A review of arrangements should be included 6-12 months after implementation of the new arrangements

Support from other Councils

13. The Working Group was keen to hear from other Councils that have made a transition to the Committee model and the lessons that they have learnt from their experience and what examples of best practice can be identified.
14. The Working Group has met with Sheffield Council and Brighton and Hove Council and gained valuable insight into the operation of the Committee model in those Councils. Members and senior officers from those Councils briefed the Working Group. These Councils offered differing perspectives of the Committee model. Sheffield Council has recently changed its governance arrangements to the Committee model whereas Brighton and Hove Council has had the Committee model in place for a number of years.
15. The key matters raised and discussed with those councils are set out below.
 - A provisional structure for committees should be developed
 - The role and responsibilities of a Policy and Resources Committee should be clearly defined
 - Emergency decision-making
 - Briefings, agenda setting with Chairs and support to political groups need to be clearly set out
 - Delegation of functions and budget responsibility to Area Committees
 - Protocols for where you have a Council with 'no overall control'
 - Public engagement in meetings

Support from Chief Executive

16. The Working Group was also keen to hear from the Council’s outgoing Chief Executive, Mike Jackson. The Working Group met with Mike Jackson and the following matters were raised in those discussions.
- It will be important to understand how the Council will engage with City Partners under the Committee model
 - In a situation of ‘no overall control’ members should try to reach consensus wherever possible
 - Members will need to decide if they want to develop a scrutiny function under the Committee model. However, if policy committees were working well, then formal scrutiny committees would not be required
 - Decisions currently taken by senior officers are done with political oversight and this could be done under the Committee model
 - The role of a Committee Chair under the Committee model would be similar to the role of a Cabinet member
 - All roles in the new arrangements should be clearly defined to enable the Independent Remuneration Panel to make recommendation to the Council on member’s allowances

Emerging themes

17. As a result of the fact-finding and evidence gathering over the last few months, the Working Group has identified the following themes that will form the basis for further discussions about the design principles for the Committee Model.
- Structure and number of committees
 - Potential role of scrutiny
 - Support for political groups
 - Roles and responsibilities of Chairs of Committees
 - Briefings and agenda setting procedures
 - Public engagement under the Committee model
 - Equality and Diversity
 - Local decision making (e.g. Area Committees)
 - 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

Report to Full Council

18. The matters highlighted in this report will form the basis for a report to Full Council in December 2022. The report to Full Council will also look ahead to the next phase of work that will need to be undertaken during 2023 to fully design the new governance arrangements. Full Council will be asked to endorse the direction of travel which will provide the basis for more detailed work during 2023 to fully design the new governance arrangements, which will include the consideration of the roles and responsibilities under the new model, the functions of Full Council, the Committee structure, the terms of reference of the Committees and the Officer Scheme of Delegation.

- 19.** In preparing the report to Full Council, the Working Group will take into consideration any feedback it receives from the Overview and Scrutiny management Board.

Legal and Resource Implications

Legal

As set out in the report.

Financial

(a) Revenue

Not applicable

(b) Capital

Not applicable

Land

Not applicable

Personnel

Not applicable

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Terms of Reference of the Committee Model Working Group

Appendix 2 – External Communications Strategy

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

Background Papers:

None