

Full Council

13 December 2022



Report of:	Committee Model Working Group
Title:	Committee Model Working Group – Update
Ward:	Citywide
Member Presenting Report:	Councillor Helen Holland Chair of the Committee Model Working Group

Recommendation

That Full Council

1. notes the update from the Committee Model Working Group regarding the work to develop the arrangements for the Committee model of governance.

Summary

This report provides Full Council with an update on the work that has been undertaken by the Committee Model Working Group to develop the arrangements for the Committee Model of governance.



Policy

1. At an Extraordinary Full Council meeting on 24 May 2022, Full Council noted the outcome of the governance referendum held on 5 May 2022 which will see 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. At the meeting on 24 May 2022, Full Council agreed to establish a Working Group to develop the Committee Model of governance.

Consultation

2. **Internal**
This report has been prepared with input from the Committee Model Working Group and the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board.
3. **External**
Public engagement has taken place details of which are reflected in this report.

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 was asked to report back to Full Council in December 2022 with details relating to the design principles for the structure of the Committee Model.
6. This report sets out the emerging thinking of the Working Group in terms of the design principles for the Committee Model.
7. Further details relating to the work of the Working Group were reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board on 27 October 2022.

Emerging design principles for the Committee Model

8. 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.
 - 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 (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

Further detail about each of these emerging principles is set out in the following paragraphs.

Leadership, functions, roles and structure of Committees

9. The structure and number of Committees for the Committee Model of governance has been a key part of the fact finding and evidence gathering by the Working Group and Members have reviewed examples from several other Councils. However, it is recognised that Bristol City Council will need to design its own structure. Consideration has been given to structures that mirror the current Cabinet Member portfolios, the themes in the Corporate Strategy and the Directorates within the Council but the recommended option is yet to be agreed.
10. The role and responsibility of a chair of a Committee under the Committee Model has been explored by the Working Group, in particular through the discussions with other Councils. Further work is required to fully scope out the roles and responsibilities of Chairs of Committees and this will inform the work of the Independent Remuneration Panel which will make recommendations to the Council in due course about the appropriate levels of remuneration for all basic and special responsibility allowances under the Committee Model.

Potential role of scrutiny

11. The role of scrutiny under the Committee Model has been explored by the Working Group, including via an evidence session with the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, and it is clear that there are a number of different options available. It is acknowledged that there are certain scrutiny functions (e.g., health scrutiny) which will need to be explicitly built into the new governance arrangements. However, whether the new Model will include a wider scrutiny role, similar to the current form, will need to be the subject of further consideration by the Working Group.

Officer support and structure

12. The support that is provided to political groups by officers in the Council will need to be reviewed as part of the change in governance arrangements.

Briefings and agenda setting procedures

13. The work that is done to support Members outside of formal Committee meetings in terms of informal briefings and agenda setting is an important function under any model of governance. Briefings for Councillors are likely to be carried out by a wider range of officers at different levels of seniority. Ensuring that all officers in the Council are familiar with the new governance arrangements and their responsibilities within those arrangements will be essential. Further work will be required to scope out these arrangements once the detail of the structure of

Committees and the roles and responsibilities of Chairs of Committees are known.

Public engagement under the Committee Model

14. A key consideration for the Working Group has been how to build on the current arrangements that the Council has in place for public participation in meetings. The Working Group has developed a strategy for public engagement as the new arrangements are developed and the first events took place in mid-November. A webpage and dedicated email address for the Committee Model Working Group have also been established. Further public engagement is planned for 2023 and this will include holding public meetings which will give the public the opportunity to engage directly with the Working Group as it develops the detail of the new arrangements.

Equality, diversity and accessibility

15. The Working Group has emphasised the need for equality and diversity as a design principle and the aspiration is that the new arrangements will be designed in such a way that will attract a diverse range of candidates to stand as Councillors. Improving equality of access to the Council's democratic processes will remain a key objective.

Local decision-making (e.g., Area Committees)

16. The Working Group are interested in how local-decision making will be structured under the Committee Model, building on the arrangements that are currently in place for Area Committees. The Working Group will also explore options for local ward level decision-making.

Delegations to officers

17. The Council needs to have arrangements in place to ensure the effective day-to-day management of the Council and this is achieved through delegations to officers. The Working Group generally accepts that the current levels of delegation are appropriate. However, further consideration is needed to ensure political oversight of delegations to officers and also to ensure that robust arrangements are in place for emergency decision-making.

Working under the Committee Model in a Council with 'no overall control'

18. The Working Group has seen how other Councils have put in place arrangements where there is a situation of no overall control, i.e., there is no party with a majority on the Council. Given the current political balance of the Council, the Working Group will need to reflect further on how the Council will function if it is in a situation of no overall control following the May 2024 elections.

Engagement with external partners

19. The Working Group recognises that the Council needs to maintain effective structures to engage with external partners within the City and beyond. Further work will be carried out during 2023 to consider what arrangements will be required under the Committee Model and how relationships with external partners will be maintained.

New governance arrangements to be kept under review

20. Advice from other Councils as well as the LGA and Centre for Governance and Scrutiny is that a review of the new governance arrangements should be built in within 6-12 months of the start of the new arrangements. This provides an opportunity to see how well the new arrangements have embedded and whether any changes are required.

Next steps

21. The next phase of work for the Working Group will be to build on the design principles and work on the detail of the new governance arrangements. During the next phase of work, details relating to a number of matters referenced in this report will be developed in more detail, including the structure of Committees, roles and responsibilities, terms of reference of Committees, delegations to officers and emergency decision-making.
22. Work will also need to focus on the practical and resourcing arrangements that need to be put in place to support the Committee Model, for example staff support and revenue funding to resource the new arrangements. Further advice and support from other Councils that operate the Committee Model, the LGA, Centre for Governance and Scrutiny and the Independent Remuneration Panel will also be required.
23. It is also proposed that in this next phase of work the Working Group holds public meetings as it develops the detail of the arrangements for the Committee Model. It is anticipated that public meetings will take place on a monthly basis. Engagement with Scrutiny/Audit may also be required and an update to Full Council will be provided in the summer of 2023.

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 A – Extract draft minute from a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board on 27th October 22.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

Background Papers:

None

APPENDIX A**Extract draft minute from a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board on 27th October 22.****1. Bristol City Council governance arrangements update: Committee Model Working Group.**

Councillors Holland and Bartle presented the report on the progress of the Committee Model Working Group in developing proposals for a Committee model of governance for Bristol City Council. Terms of Reference for the Group were provided.

The emphasis on partnership working as outlined in the previous item on the One City approach was welcomed.

Thanks were given to those who had participated in the Working Group as well as those who attended the Member Briefing held on 12th October 2022.

Work undertaken included learning sessions with the Local Government Association, and a session with the outgoing Chief Executive (Mike Jackson). These sessions had proved useful.

Members were invited to discuss the report. The Chair noted that proposals for Scrutiny mechanisms would be of particular interest. Councillor Holland emphasised that the Working Group had not yet agreed on specific proposals as the work undertaken had focused on learning lessons and information gathering. The next planned meeting of the Working Group intended to look at decision principles more closely. Call-in was noted as a mechanism that would need careful consideration under a Committee model.

The Working Group had met with Sheffield Council to advise on a move to a Committee Model which had proved very useful. However, key differences between the two authorities were noted. This included that Sheffield had invested significant sums in making the transition and in Bristol the starting position was that the new model must be 'cost neutral.' Sheffield was also able to trial a new system before implementation but in Bristol the options for this were far more limited due to the legal parameters relating to the Mayoral model.

The decision not to make the minutes of the Working Group public was queried. Representatives of the Working Group confirmed they had considered and voted on this matter at their first meeting and agreed not to publish the minutes in order to allow for wide ranging discussions. While this was considered appropriate for the early stages, the Group was amenable to reconsidering this as work moved forward.

A Member queried whether the Communications Strategy for public engagement would be sufficiently supported and was advised that whilst officer time needed to be met from existing resources, plans were progressing well. The Board noted that a range of activities were underway,

including some 'focus group' style community events in November. A webpage and email address for the Committee Model Working had also been established.

The Working Group representatives were thanked for the report.

Resolved; That the OSMB noted the progress of the Committee Model Working Group.