

Report to Governance Committee

26 July 2017

By the Governance Project Manager

DECISION REQUIRED

Not Exempt



**Horsham
District
Council**

Findings of the one-year review of the changes to governance arrangements introduced in 2016

Executive Summary

Full Council in April 2016 unanimously resolved a range of formal and informal changes to the governance arrangements operating at the Council in 2015/16. Council further resolved that a review of the effectiveness of those changes to the Council's governance arrangements in be undertaken in 2017, after one year of operation. The Governance Committee at its meeting in June 2017 resolved to undertake the review using an all-member questionnaire. This report provides the findings of that review and satisfies the resolution of Council.

Recommendations

The Committee is recommended:

- i) To endorse and support the findings of the governance review
- ii) In future, each Policy Development Advisory Group (PDAG) agenda item will be:
 - a) Described, in sufficient detail to make clear its purpose, on the agenda front sheet;
 - b) where appropriate a slide presentation will be given by officers, and the slides will be circulated to members of the PDAG thereafter; OR
 - c) where appropriate a paper explaining the topic and covering relevant issues will be circulated to PDAG members in advance of the meeting.

The decision on whether option b) or c) is appropriate will be for the Cabinet Member following discussion with the relevant senior officer(s).

- iii) A forward plan extract, listing all forthcoming key and non-key decisions within that cabinet members' portfolio of responsibilities, will be re-introduced as an agenda item to note at PDAG meetings
- iv) The frequency of meetings of the Community and Wellbeing, and Housing and Public Protection PDAGs be reduced from six to four per annum.

Reasons for Recommendations

- i) To satisfy council resolution CO/96 that the changes to the governance arrangements introduced in 2016, be reviewed.

Background Papers

None.

Wards affected: All Wards.

Contact: Ben Bix, Governance Project Manager

Background Information

1 Introduction and Background

- 1.1 The Governance Committee at its meeting in June 2017 resolved to conduct the one-year review of the governance changes made in 2016 using an all-member questionnaire.
- 1.2 A questionnaire approach was agreed to be broad enough to allow all members to participate and document their views. The Governance Committee would then receive and consider the findings.
- 1.3 The Council report of 27 April 2016 (CO/96 refers) described five desired effects of the changes to governance as follows:
 - **Member involvement:** Clear member advisory pathway at the earliest possible stage
 - **Efficiency:** Clearer key-decision making responsibilities
 - **Accountability:** Strong Scrutiny function. Clear line of cabinet member accountability
 - **Timely decision making:** Decisions, subject to advisory stage may be taken quickly
 - **Openness:** Published agendas, member attendance, and policy development advisory group conclusions, benefitting from 'thinking space meetings
- 1.4 The Governance Committee resolved that the achievement of the five effects described in 1.3 be tested by an all-member questionnaire from the Governance Committee.
- 1.5 The draft questionnaire was agreed by the Governance Committee at its June meeting and circulated to all members. The questionnaire was made available for completion from 19 June 2017 to 16 July 2017, and three reminders were sent.

2 Relevant Council policy

- 2.1 The Corporate Plan 2016/19 has a Council priority of 'Efficiency - Great value services' which has been better enabled by clear, well understood and supported governance arrangements over the past year.

3 Details

- 3.1 Almost two-thirds (64%) of members responded to the questionnaire. The responses therefore demonstrate a very good representation of the views of members. The *quantitative* findings that tested the five desired effects described in 1.3 are tabulated overleaf.

Desired effect	Findings
Member involvement	Eight out of ten (80%) of members feel better informed than in 2015
	Seven out of ten (73%) members said the advisory function is better now than in 2015, none said it was worse
	Over half (54%) of members said they participate more than in 2015
Efficiency	Almost all (96%) of members said that the visibility of key decision making is better (72%) than or as good as in 2015
Accountability	Eight out of ten (81%) of members said that the overview and scrutiny function was at least as good as in 2015, and almost half (46%) said it was better
	65% of members said that the accountability of decision makers is better than in 2015
	Almost all (96%) members said that the accountability of cabinet members to the overview and scrutiny committee was either better (57%) or the same as in 2015
Timely decision making	Three quarters (78%) of members feel that timely notification of decisions has improved from 2015
	Three quarters (75%) of members said the visibility of the forward plan, and of decision making is now better than in 2015
	60% of members said they understand 'key decisions' better than in 2015
Openness	Three quarters (75%) of members said the governance pages on the website were better than in 2015
	Nine out of ten (89%) of members said that having Audiominutes of meetings was either better or the same as in 2015 (when meetings were recorded but not published on the website). Three members felt that having Audiominutes was worse than in 2015
	Eight out of ten (85%) of members said that having the modern.gov app to access papers was better now than how they accessed papers in 2015. Four members said it was worse

3.2 *Qualitative* findings were summarised from 22 member comments (some of which were duplicated), and categorised as follows.

Categorisation of member comments received

Category	Summary	Consideration
Endorsement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Overall the running of the council has consistently improved in all areas'</i> • <i>'Comments made at PDAGs are minuted'</i> • <i>'More open and better structured'</i> • <i>'Advisory groups are constructive'</i> • <i>'Involved in policy decisions at a much earlier stage'</i> • <i>'No member can claim not to know what is going on at HDC'</i> • <i>'process and procedure much improved'</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addressed by recommendation 1
Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>'Not enough information in advance'</i> • <i>'Take a view based on better information in advance'</i> • <i>'Cabinet members need to prepare better and provide more information'</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addressed by recommendation 2
Attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>'All PDAGs are available for members to attend'</i> • <i>'Still poor attendance from some members'</i> • <i>'Consider later start times for meetings'</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members are responsible for their own attendance. • 18:30 start times were trialled but did not lead to better attendance
General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>'Too many PDAG meetings now'</i> • <i>'Not all key decisions are taken to PDAGs'</i> • <i>'Not easy to find information on website'</i> • <i>'Use Audiominutes at all public meetings'</i> • <i>'PDAGs are advisory, not decision making meetings'</i> • <i>'Overview and scrutiny will review the effectiveness of its own changes'</i> • <i>'Modern.gov app does not enable saving of documents to a desktop machine'</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addressed by recommendations 3 and 4 • All public meetings will use Audiominutes (subject to room and technology parameters) • Overview and scrutiny will review its own effectiveness • Members can work with officers on technology matters

4 Next Steps

- 4.1 Officers will discharge recommendations ii) to iv) for the next cycle of policy development advisory group meetings.

5 Views of the Policy Development Advisory Group and Outcome of Consultations

- 5.1 The Chairman of the Governance Committee was consulted on 17 July 2017, and noted the headline findings. The Senior Leadership Team was consulted on 17 July 2017 and consequently endorsed the recommendations in this report.

6 Other Courses of Action Considered but Rejected

- 6.1 A review was required to satisfy the resolution of council.

7 Resource Consequences

- 7.1 The review was undertaken within existing resources.

8 Legal Consequences

- 8.1 Full Council resolution CO/96 required this review to be undertaken. The improved constitution agreed by Council in 2016 created the Governance Committee, consequentially aligning the responsibility for this review to the committee. There are no legal consequences flowing from the recommendations set out in this report.

9 Risk Assessment

- 9.1 This review of the changes to governance introduced in 2016 mitigates risk. The risk of the review taking too long, not being focussed or not concluding was mitigated by the Chairman of the Committee with officer support.

10 Other Considerations

- 10.1 Due consideration has been given to Crime & Disorder; Human Rights; Equality & Diversity and Sustainability matters.