



Agenda Item Introduction

Committee	CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Date	9 JANUARY 2024
Topic	PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY – FUTURE GOVERNANCE

1. Background

- 1.1 At Full Council in May 2023 Cllr Geoff Brodie put forward a motion that 'Full Council agrees to establish a politically proportionate 'Future Governance Working Group' to make recommendations to Full Council January 2024 regarding moving to a Committee system of governance (including the future Committee structure, decision-making powers, etc.). The intention being to recommend for approval a formal resolution to that meeting to bring about such a change in governance with effect on and from the Annual Council 2024.'
- 1.2 Full Council in July 2023 agreed to establish a politically proportionate 'Future Governance Working Group' to make recommendations to Full Council in January 2024, via the Audit and Governance Committee, regarding the motion.
- 1.3 The Future Governance Working Group should, amongst other things, consider how other local authorities have made a transition back to the Committee system of governance model and what lessons can be learnt from that experience, and should consider examples of best practice, to inform those recommendations.

2. Focus for Scrutiny

- 2.1 The role of the committee is not to act as a 'shadow Cabinet'. Its function is to ensure that the principles of decision making have been complied with:
 - taking into account all relevant considerations and ignoring those which are irrelevant
 - compliance with finance, contract and all other procedure rules
 - due consultation and proper advice is taken, and alternative options considered before decisions are reached
 - impartiality and an absence of bias or pre-determination
 - any interests are properly declared
 - decisions are properly recorded and published
 - decisions are proportionate to the desired outcome

- respect for human rights and equality impacts
- a presumption in favour of transparency and openness
- clarity of aims and desired outcomes
- due consideration of all available options
- reasons are given for decisions

3. Outcome(s)

- 3.1 Does the committee support the proposed recommendations, or wish to report any comment to Cabinet?

4. Approach

- 4.1 To consider a report from the Future Governance Working Group regarding the potential for the Isle of Wight Council to move to a Committee system of governance.

5. Document(s) Attached

- 5.1 Report from the Future Governance Working Group
5.2 Appendix 1 - Rules requiring review
5.3 Appendix 2 - Recommended structure notes

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Committee Report

ISLE OF WIGHT COUNCIL

Meeting	AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE
Date	11 DECEMBER 2023
Title	A CHANGED DECISION-MAKING STRUCTURE FOR A CHANGING CULTURE
Report of	CLLR GEOFF BRODIE, ON BEHALF OF THE FUTURE GOVERNANCE WORKING GROUP

INTRODUCTION

1. With a second 'no overall control' administration after the last three IW Council elections, it was becoming clear to some that one-party/group Cabinet decision-making does not reflect the wishes of the Island electorate who appear to want councillors to work together. Many councillors are of the view that this will be the position at future elections, at least in the short to medium term.
2. The current administration's Cabinet consists of 8 councillors from a 'ruling group' of 13, from a 39-member Council, propped up by just about enough members of other groups (and none) to hold the leadership when it matters.
3. This is hardly democratic or stable. It leads to significant cultural difficulties with more than half the Council excluded from the decision-making of the Council; something that could be avoided with a politically-proportionate Committee system.
4. To address this, at the July 2023 Full Council a Motion proposed by Cllr Geoff Brodie for the IW Council to consider moving to a Committee system of decision-making at its January 2024 meeting was agreed unanimously.
5. Consequently and in accordance with the agreed Motion a politically-proportionate working group was established which met fortnightly during September and October. The group consisted of 4 Conservatives, 3 Alliance (including 2 Independents and 1 Green), 1 Liberal Democrat, 1 Empowering Islander and 1 unaligned.

6. At its first meeting Cllr Brodie was elected as the group chair and its mandate from Full Council was agreed in summary as:
 - Make recommendations to Full Council (Jan 2024) regarding moving to a Committee system, including structure, decision-making powers, etc.
 - The intention being to recommend a Committee system for approval and to bring about change on and from 2024 Annual Council.
 - Consider how other Local Authorities have done this and what lessons were learnt.
 - Consider examples of best practice.
7. It was also agreed between Cllr Brodie and the Chair of the Audit & Governance Committee, Cllr Andrew Garratt that a Report from the Group should be submitted to his December Committee meeting for information only and then referred to January Full Council.

METHODOLOGY

8. At the first working group meeting the following study groups were established with a brief to feedback to the wider group regularly and definitively by the end of October. The study groups of 2/3 cross-party members looked at:
 - Changes to a Committee system elsewhere
 - Views of our senior officers/colleagues and elsewhere
 - Possible structures of a Committee system
 - Cabinet-based alternatives to Committees
9. We also had a media release inviting comments from Islanders, with encouragement to participate from Cllrs Brodie and Garratt.

FEEDBACK & CONSIDERATION

10. The study groups reported back to the parent group throughout September and October. This helped inform members in reaching their decision.
11. For example, everyone on the working group had the opportunity to research examples of changes – and decisions not to change - elsewhere. The Chief Executive offered some valuable input via Cllr Quirk, who also spoke to retired officers elsewhere. Cllr Lucioni provided feedback from some of our own officers and from the LGA. Cllrs Garratt and Churchman provided the framework for the recommended future structure of our Council. Cabinet-based alternatives were looked at but did not command majority support.

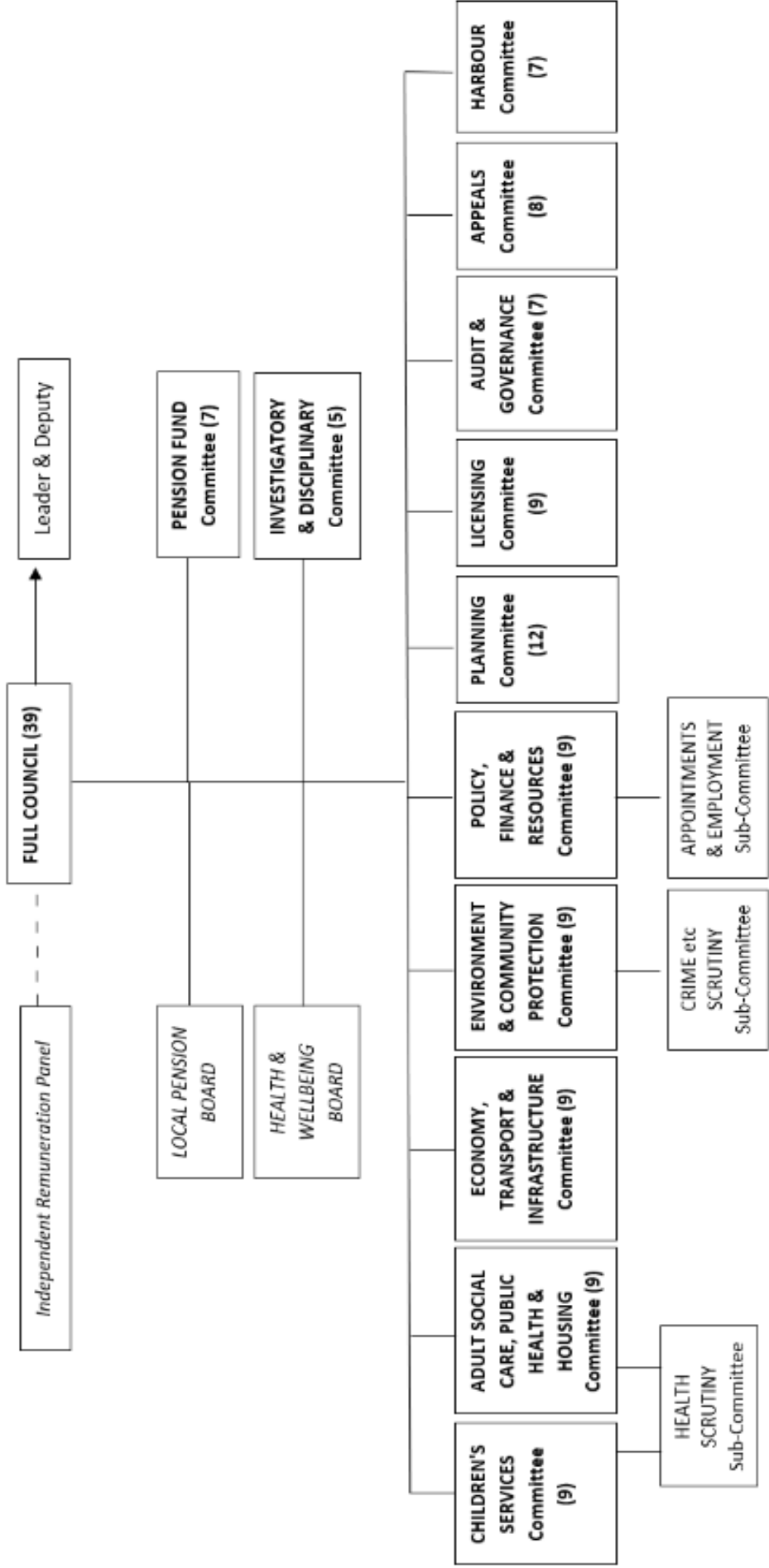
12. There was also some very limited feedback from islanders, which was almost entirely in support of change to a Committee system.

GROUP DECISION

13. After due consideration of the pros and cons of change, at a meeting in late October the group agreed unanimously (with one abstention) the following should inform the composition of this Report: *That the working party will recommend a move to a Committee system in principle from May 2024*
14. Cllr Brodie then drafted this Report, which was presented to group members for comment, criticism and editing in mid-November and then agreed at its final group meeting on 27 November.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO JANUARY 2024 FULL COUNCIL

15. That the Isle of Wight Council will move to a politically-proportionate Committee-system from its annual meeting on 15th May 2024.
16. That the existing politically-proportionate Future Governance Working Group should now work with the Monitoring Officer and other relevant senior officers to agree proposals for constitutional change to enable this transition. There should be a progress report to March 2024 Full Council.
17. Rule changes that need to be addressed are listed at Appendix 1.
18. That the preferred Committee-system structure should match or bear a close relationship to the following:



THANKS

19. My thanks to all the members of the working group. In particular Cllr Bacon and Cllr Quirk who were able to attend all the sessions and always posed important challenge. The others – Cllrs Churchman, Ellis, Garratt, Jarman, Lever, Lucioni, Mosdell and Ward – all made a valuable contribution. The Monitoring Officer, Mr Chris Potter also provided helpful information at the start of the process.
20. Also our thanks to all colleagues, staff (both internal and external) and members of the public who offered us their views and suggestions. Our public consultation did not set the Island on fire, but this consideration is by its very nature quite arcane.

APPENDICES

21. Appendix 1 - Rules requiring review
22. Appendix 2 - Recommended structure notes

Cllr Geoff Brodie, on behalf of the Future Governance Working Group