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Argyll and Bute Council
Comhairle Earra Ghaidheal agus Bhoid

Executive Director: Douglas Hendry



*Kilmory, Lochgilphead, PA31 8RT
Tel: 01546 602127 Fax: 01546 604435
DX 599700 LOCHGILPHEAD
15 December 2021*

NOTICE OF MEETING

A meeting of the **SHORT LIFE WORKING GROUP ON POLITICAL MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS** will be held via **MICROSOFT TEAMS** on **WEDNESDAY, 22 DECEMBER 2021** at **2:00 PM**, which you are requested to attend.

Douglas Hendry
Executive Director

BUSINESS

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3. MINUTES (Pages 3 - 4)

Minutes of the Shorty Life Working Group – Political Management Arrangements held on Tuesday 30 November 2021.

4. POLITICAL MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS - ENGAGEMENT (Pages 5 - 14)

Report by Executive Director with responsibility for Legal and Regulatory Support

5. NEXT STEPS

Discussion facilitated by the Executive Director with responsibility for Legal and Regulatory Support.

Short Life Working Group on Political Management Arrangements

Councillor Robin Currie (Chair)

Councillor George Freeman

Councillor Jim Lynch

Councillor Yvonne McNeilly (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Aileen Morton

Councillor Andrew Vennard

Councillor Audrey Forrest

Councillor Kieron Green

Councillor Liz McCabe

Councillor Sandy Taylor

Contact: Stuart McLean – Committee Manager 01436658717

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**MINUTES of MEETING of SHORT LIFE WORKING GROUP ON POLITICAL MANAGEMENT
ARRANGEMENTS held via MICROSOFT TEAMS
on TUESDAY, 30 NOVEMBER 2021**

Present: Councillor Robin Currie (Chair)

Councillor Audrey Forrest	Councillor Yvonne McNeilly
Councillor George Freeman	Councillor Aileen Morton
Councillor Kieron Green	Councillor Sandy Taylor
Councillor Jim Lynch	Councillor Andrew Vennard
Councillor Liz McCabe	

Attending: Douglas Hendry – Executive Director of Customer Services
Kirsty Flanagan – Executive Director of Development & Infrastructure Services
David Logan – Head of Legal and Regulatory Support
Tricia O’Neill – Governance Manager
Stuart McLean – Committee Manager

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of the Chief Executive.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest intimated.

3. SLWG - POLITICAL MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

The Short Life Working Group considered a report which outlined the proposed timetable and process for the review of Political Management Arrangements (PMAs).

Discussion focussed on the effectiveness of the current PMA and the general consensus was that it worked well and was a good balance but relies on Councillors participating fully in meetings in order to be effective. Other structures were discussed, there was general agreement that that whilst a cabinet structure may promote stability it may not promote inclusion as a large number of councillors would be excluded from the decision making process and unable to represent their constituents. Members raised a number of points for consideration and discussion at future meetings including:

- The SLWG is tasked with making a recommendation to the Council to pass to the new Council following the Local Government Elections in May 2022. While it is for the new Council to decide what PMA’s it wishes to have it would be prudent to establish options for consideration and to set out the key considerations for each, it was a matter of discussion and agreement that the current arrangements work well and are balanced. There is no clear justification or material reason to alter.
- Members recognised the council’s duty to initiate, facilitate and maintain community planning. However, the existing area structures, i.e. Area Community Planning Groups (CPGs), effectiveness in bringing about change through collaborative working with partners was questioned. Members gave some consideration to whether it would be beneficial to have an East/West split rather than meetings being broken down into the four administrative areas.

- The powers afforded to Area Committees was raised and whether Area CPG's might be incorporated within the remit for Area Committee's. While members noted that CPGs were not made up wholly of democratically elected members, unlike Area Committees it was agreed that this matter should be considered further as a potential option.
- Consideration was given to Ward Forums which were not committees but had previously served to facilitate greater participation by constituents in local issues. Members recalled that having a governance contact for their area was helpful, however the effectiveness of Ward Forums varied across the areas.
- Any change to the existing PMAs must maintain the balance between allowing officers to make decisions while ensuring Councillors' authority and accountability to the electorate is recognised.
- Future PMAs should have regard to what works well for the Council areas and should not be determined solely by resource implications.
- Any new structure should facilitate and encourage the key principles set out in the report and also ensure an overall cohesive approach between committees.

Members further discussed the benefits of the SLWG to have sight of the questions prior to them being circulated to all Councillors with the feedback to be reported to the next meeting of the SLWG.

Decision

The Short Life Working Group:

- a) noted the basic principles for the review of the Political Management Arrangements;
- b) agreed the attached timetable for the review and associated reporting arrangements, with a final report being submitted to the meeting of Council in April 2022;
- c) considered the Political Management Arrangements adopted by other Scottish Local Authorities; and
- d) agreed that officers engage with all 36 Elected Members seeking their views on how the current Political Management Arrangements are working, asking for suggestions in terms of any future amendments.

(Reference: Report by Executive Director with responsibility for Legal and Regulatory Support dated November 2021, submitted)

ARGYLL AND BUTE COUNCIL

Short Life Working Group on Political
Management Arrangements

LEGAL & REGULATORY SUPPORT

22 DECEMBER 2021

POLITICAL MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS – ENGAGEMENT

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 At its meeting on 30 September 2021, the Council endorsed a Best Practice review of current political management arrangement and the establishment of a Short Life Working Group (SLWG) to progress the review of the Political Management Arrangements. This SLWG is tasked with making a recommendation(s) to a new Council following the Local Government Elections in May 2022 regarding this matter.
- 1.2 The first meeting of the SLWG was held on 30 November 2021 (**Meeting Papers – [LINK](#)**) where members agreed to engage with all 36 Elected Members seeking their views on how the current Political Management Arrangements are working, asking for suggestions in terms of any future arrangements.
- 1.3 Members are asked to:-
- a) note and consider the feedback that was received from members regarding the current Political Management Arrangements and suggestions for future arrangements; and
 - b) agree the next steps to progress the review of the Political Management Arrangements.

ARGYLL AND BUTE COUNCIL

Short Life Working Group on Political
Management Arrangements

LEGAL & REGULATORY SUPPORT

22 DECEMBER 2021

POLITICAL MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS – ENGAGEMENT

2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 This report seeks to outline the feedback received from members on how the current Political Management Arrangements are working and suggestions in terms of future arrangements.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 Members are asked to:-

- a) note and consider the feedback that was received from members regarding the current Political Management Arrangements and suggestions for future arrangements; and
- b) agree the next steps to progress the review of the Political Management Arrangements.

4.0 DETAIL

4.1 At the meeting of the SLWG held on 30 November 2021, Members agreed to engage with all Elected Members. Members were subsequently invited to give their views on how the current Political Management Arrangements are working, specifically strategic and area committees, and were also asked to make suggestions in terms of any future arrangements. A summary of the responses are outlined below, all responses can be found at **Appendix 1**.

4.2 Strategic Committees

4.2.1 There was general agreement that the existing arrangements work well, with all Members offered opportunities to be involved in the democratic process, rather than Cabinet or Executive models which have more limited opportunities for involvement.

4.2.2 Members also suggested some improvements within the current political management arrangement for strategic committees. It was suggested that as a consequence of home working and less travel time strategic committees could meet more regularly with smaller agendas for in-depth discussion on topics that if properly discussed could result in better outcomes for constituents. One member suggested 'space' within strategic committees to consider evidence and to work up policy issues for development and addressing other issues of

concern. It was also suggested that the flow of information between some of the committees could be improved upon. It was noted that there are already provisions in the constitution enabling local Members who wish to contribute and vote on local matters at strategic meetings to do so.

4.3 Area Committees

- 4.3.1 Members were generally content with the existing arrangements for Area Committees, welcoming the opportunities for scrutiny at a local level, but that this would be enhanced by greater engagement and attendance of officers at these meetings.
- 4.3.2 Members also suggested some improvements within the current political management arrangement for area committees, specifically enhancements to area committees' responsibilities. One member raised the lack of influence over investment and spend of area committees.
- 4.3.3 Enhanced responsibilities for area committees, it was hoped, would facilitate greater decision making, scrutiny and accountability at local level and would also serve to acknowledge the diversity of the 4 administrative areas. There was also a suggestion that area committees should meet more regularly with smaller agendas with evening meetings to encourage greater engagement with constituents and community organisations. Members also suggested linking community planning groups to area committees.

4.4 Future arrangements:-

- 4.4.1 In terms of future arrangements there was the suggestion of more dedicated committee support and for officers to attend area committees more often. One Member recognised the importance of Business days and suggested that all major decisions should come to business days for open discussion then to area committees before strategic committees.

5.0 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The Council has agreed that this is an appropriate time to conduct a review of the current Political Management Arrangements in advance of the Local Government Elections in May 2022. This report outlines feedback received from members concerning how the current Political Management Arrangements are working and suggestions for future arrangements.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Policy – none at this stage.
- 6.2 Financial - none at present, but may be financial implications dependent on the outcome of the review.
- 6.3 Legal – none at this stage.

- 6.4 HR – none at present, but may have HR implications dependent on the outcome of the review.
- 6.5 Fairer Scotland Duty – none.
 - 6.5.1 Equalities – protect characteristics – none.
 - 6.5.2 Socio-economic Duty – none.
 - 6.5.3 Islands – Addresses consideration of proposed introduction of island only wards.
- 6.6 Climate change – none.
- 6.7 Risk – none.
- 6.8 Customer Service – none.

Douglas Hendry
Executive Director with responsibility for Legal and Regulatory Support

December 2021

For further information contact: Patricia O'Neill, Governance Manager 01546 604384

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Feedback.



Short Life Working Group (SLWG)
Political Management Arrangements
Consultation Feedback

<p>1. Within the current political management arrangement for strategic committees what works well?</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The number of members seems adequate although invariably the contribution made by some is negligible if non-existent. 2. Big improvement in previous set up Leave as is. 3. From a democratic perspective the majority should be with the administration Group. 4. The different people over the different committees gives everyone a chance to have an input to decisions which is good for democracy. It is good that the committees have a remit and a line of feedback and recommendation to the full council. 5. Members are involved in the process. Opportunities to scrutinise proposals. Wide range of members involved. 6. At present works well. 7. OK, but focusses exclusively on required decisions. The Committees does not have 'space' to consider evidence and to work up policy issues for development by Officers.
<p>2. Within the current political management arrangement for strategic committees what could be improved?</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strategic committees could meet more regularly with smaller agendas. Given the time saved as a result of The pandemic, home working and less travel time provides more opportunity for in-depth discussion on topics that if properly discussed could result in better outcomes for constituents. 2. Reduction in the number of Papers marked to follow when agendas published. 3. Both administration and opposition group(s) should ensure the right people are in the right seats on the bus and that Group leaders should give feedback on the contribution/ attendance of the members they nominate to represent the communities of Argyll and Bute. 4. Better accountability and clearer flow of information between some of the committees.

5. Too lengthy in terms of agenda items can restrict time for discussion. # Can at times be just a process (papers to note etc.)
6. For members who wish to speak and vote not to be stopped by the chair to contribute and vote if it is within your own area.
7. No suggestions as work well at present.
8. Opportunities for Area Committee contribution to matters of policy under development.

3. Within the current political management arrangement for area committees what works well?

1. Smaller agendas and more regular meetings. Also increase public scrutiny opportunity and engagement and attendance of officers to respond. Connectivity with community groups important and consideration for evening meetings to aid this. Community councils in general meet in the evenings and we should increase our opportunity for more engagement with them and other community organisations. It is simply a timetabling activity.
2. The ability of committee assistants to chase up and forward responses to members issues raised at the meetings.
3. The chair should reflect the democratic process. ie be from the administration Group.
4. Public Question time on Local issues. Opportunities for questions and scrutiny.
5. Could community planning and area committee join to make one less meeting as brought up at the SLWG?
6. Officers attending the meeting.
7. The management works well.
8. Like to space for members of the public to address the Committee. Consideration of Education reports. Chance to hear from Partner organisations – although not worked lately.

4. Within the current political management arrangement for area committees what could be improved?

1. To improve local democracy we need to improve the area committees responsibilities and get things decided at a local level with local accountability. Too often local decisions in Bute and Cowal are overturned by folk in Oban or Helensburgh. Local decisions need to be supported and agreed by full council rather than overturned simply due to political strength. Diversity in our decisions on an area by area basis can be accommodated centrally but budgets need to be devolved. This, diversity, is indeed a strength in Argyll and Bute we should build on it.

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Perhaps a linkage to area CPGs and discussions at Business days. Once they go live encouragement to public participation at question time 3. Such committees are at the core of local democracy: we may wish to consider that the vice chair should not be from the administration Group. 4. I think they work well. 5. More frequent meetings. Area Committee input on the agenda items. More local decision making. Public Question time on Local issues. Opportunities for questions and scrutiny. 6. I think someone for Roads & Amenities should be available who can answer our questions as there are many items going round in a circle, and not just a representative there to take notes of the questions. No disrespect to those who do however it would be beneficial to have questions answered. 7. More items for decision making, there are many reports simply to update but not decide. Also the frequency of Area committees should be increased as suggested by Audit Scotland a number of years ago. 8. It works well. 9. Reducing power. No influence over investment and spend Don't meet often enough. Inadequate accountability for local performance from Officers – not just PI reports.
<p>5. Are there any additional comments you would like to make in terms of existing political management arrangements on what works well?</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No 2. Virtual meetings have worked well, hybrid meeting will need to be monitored to prevent a them and us scenario. 3. Reports from management are very helpful. 4. I receive support and it works well. 5. I like SLW Groups as a means to develop things on a cross-party basis. Not used often enough.
<p>6. Are there any additional comments you would like to make in terms of existing political management arrangements on what could be improved</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No 2. Need to await the outcome of BV review of scrutiny. 3. I think the current system gives more people a proper role in decision making rather than the Cabinet or Executive models which exclude a lot of people and make it harder for Councillors to represent their constituents as they are removed from most of the decision making process.

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. I think online meetings and recording has generally been a good thing. 5. Local decisions devolved to local members. 6. My very simplistic view is that there should be no room for politics. We are representing our constituents.....end of story.....however, I feel that these arrangements are as well organised as can be within the council. 7. Feel strongly that area committees have to be strengthened, at present most of the time is spent noting, there is a lack of considered decision making at area committee level, see following remarks. 8. I am concerned that the focus on decision-making alone denies the opportunity to consider wider issues of interest in our communities. I wonder if we had a more diverse approach to Committees rather than ED&I and Community Services, or established SLWGs to facilitate police development, if we would be better addressing other issues of concern. A case in point; the Environment – we consider when we have to when challenged by the community to do so, but we could have done more to develop the Council role as a Community Leader, An example of somethings which have been sheltered from oversight and development ... Community Safety, inc. Violence to Women, Autism Services, Community Engagement
<p>7. Do you wish to provide suggestions in terms of any future arrangements?</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dedicated executive director/ head of service for each area, allocated fifteen minute slot Business days 2. I would like to see the system we have at present continued. 3. As above more decision making powers to Area Committees. 4. Reverting back to face-to-face when permitted. Used to have committee support at local level which is missed. 5. Return to meaningful role(s) for Area Committees, perhaps in Community Planning, or specifically, in community engagement.
<p>8. Are there any other comments you would like to make?</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It is regularly acknowledged that we live in a diverse area of Scotland Oban and Dunoon have different dynamics to Tobermory and Helensburgh. Although this as as acknowledged those areas of diversity are not permitted to flourish due to a one fit all centralist agenda operated by the administration. 2. It is absolutely vital that as far as possible groups ensure the right people have the right people on the right seats on the bus and that group leaders address poor attendance or performance of their members. 3. Some people who join by phone seem to have no problems, however there are others who join and leave the meeting several times.

4. I don't feel I have been here long enough to answer some of the questions yet as I am learning from every meeting I attend. My only comment would be that some members seem not to read their papers and ask questions which we already have the answer to!
5. Strengthening democratic input from local councillors at area committee level.
6. Business days are exceptionally important when discussing local matters of importance to the area. All major decisions should come to business days for open discussion then to area committees before strategic committees.
7. Councillors want to work with officers to make the best decisions.
8. Imperative chair and vice-chair aware of any impeding motions and/or amendments prior to meetings taking place to allow the chair to be prepared.

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