
ARGYLL AND BUTE COUNCIL

COUNCIL

20 April 2017

**RECOMMENDATIONS FROM SHORT LIFE WORKING GROUP ON POLITICAL
MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS**

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Council agreed at the meeting held on 21 April 2016 to establish a Short Life Working Group (SLWG) which would review the current Political Management Arrangements and work to make recommendations on future arrangements which would be presented to the final meeting of Council and then given to the new Council for consideration. The decision of Council was as follows:-

“The Council agrees to set up a Short Life Working Group (SLWG) for the purpose of considering the future local democratic and governance arrangements of the Council, to consider also the detail in the proposed Performance and Scrutiny Review Handbook and how all of this will relate to future governance arrangements, and to bring forward a report to a future meeting of the Council in readiness for the new Council.”

- 1.2 This report provides an outline of the work undertaken by the Short Life Working Group, and highlights the areas which have been taken into consideration during the discussions. The report also provides draft timetables and protocols for consideration by Council.

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2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 This report provides Council with recommendations from the Short Life Working Group on Political Management Arrangements for consideration.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 Council agrees to refer the findings of the Short Life Working Group to the first meeting of the new Council for consideration.

4.0 DETAIL

4.1 The Council agreed at the meeting held on 21 April 2016 to establish a Short Life Working Group (SLWG) which would review the current Political Management Arrangements and work to make recommendations on future arrangements which would be presented to the final meeting of Council and then given to the new Council for consideration. The decision of Council was as follows:-

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4.2 Work of the Short Life Working Group

4.2.1 The SLWG has met on 5 occasions and has considered a wide variety of information. At the first meeting of the Group, Members determined the basic principles for the review as follows:-

- (a) Stability in political management arrangements
- (b) Clear strategic direction to deliver on Single Outcome Agreement
- (c) The development of clear and sustainable policies
- (d) An inclusive Council
- (e) Positive Culture
- (f) Constructive working relationships across all Elected Members
- (g) Members focus on addressing challenges and identifying opportunities
- (h) Good reputation

- (i) Leadership
- (j) Effective political scrutiny
- (k) Effective decision making
- (l) Focus on all our customers
- (m) Achieving our ambition
- (n) Future proofing

These basic principles informed the discussion on the different types of Committee model.

- 4.2.2 Following the first meeting of the SLWG, a consultation was undertaken across all 36 Elected Members asking them to provide feedback on the current Political Management Arrangements, to make suggestions as to what any future structure should look like and also to provide any comment on the Scrutiny Review Handbook which had been produced by the PRS Committee. A small number of responses were received with general comments and suggestions and these were discussed by the Working Group.
- 4.2.3 The Group identified that there were 3 options in terms of Committee models – Traditional, Cabinet and Executive. Officers were tasked with providing information on all 3 models, and were also asked to provide information on the structures which were in place across Scotland with particular interest being placed on Authorities with similar geography to Argyll and Bute. The position across Scotland varies, with it being noted that in those Authorities which most closely align with Argyll and Bute the majority operate a Traditional Committee model. Discussion also took place on the Area Committee arrangements, and officers provided information on the situation across Scotland.

4.3 Committee Structures

- 4.3.1 The three models identified are Traditional, Cabinet and Executive – a short description of each model is provided below:-

4.3.2 **Traditional Committee model**

This is the type of system currently in place within Argyll and Bute Council. The traditional system delegates authority to a number of Committees to make those decisions which are not reserved for the Council. The membership of these Committees is reflective of the political balance of the Council and can allow for a geographical balance to be maintained. It allows for a significant portion of Council business to be undertaken using the delegation to Committees.

4.3.3 **Cabinet model**

In this model, a small group of elected members from the administration and with Portfolio/Policy remits make all the day-to-day decisions within a policy framework set by the council as a whole. The Cabinet would meet on a regular basis, with those Members who are not part of the Cabinet being

involved in providing a robust scrutiny function. There would be no requirement for service Committees, there would be less Committees overall, but meetings of the Cabinet would be more frequent than current Committee schedules. This model would provide stability and strategic direction but would not provide political balance, nor would it involve all members in decision making.

4.3.4 **Executive model**

The Executive model is similar to the Cabinet model, but the Executive generally has membership from both administration and opposition councillors. The Executive would meet on a regular basis and there would again be a robust scrutiny process in place. In this model there would be no requirement for service Committees and there would be less Committees overall. This model can be seen as more efficient and can provide political balance whilst providing a greater opportunity for strategic direction. It may be seen as less democratic and as offering less involvement for all members in the business of the Council.

4.4 Other areas of consideration

4.4.1 **Area Committees**

The Group had lengthy discussion around the future arrangements for Area Committees. The general consensus was that Members wanted to retain the current 4 Area Committee arrangement, but it was recognised that there required to be a reduction in the number of meetings which were supported by Governance. They also considered the Area Committee Business Days, with there being a broad agreement that Business Day meetings could continue but that they would no longer be supported by Governance and it would be for Members in the 4 Administrative areas to organise these meetings – there would be no minute taken of the meeting, but it would give Members the opportunity to discuss local issues in a less formal environment. As a result of these discussions a protocol for Area Committee Business Days has been drafted, a copy of which is attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

4.4.2 **Audit and Scrutiny arrangements**

Consideration was given to the future arrangements in relation to the Audit and Scrutiny functions of the Council. There was discussion around whether the current arrangements in place should continue with a separate Audit Committee and a Committee dealing with Performance Review and Scrutiny. Feedback from Members on those Committees was that they should remain separate, but following discussion there was a general consensus that if a Traditional model was adopted then the 2 Committees should be reviewed. In both the Cabinet and Executive models, there would be a requirement for a robust system of Scrutiny which would necessitate a separate Audit Committee.

4.4.3 **Regulatory Committee arrangements**

The Members of the Group gave consideration to the current structure and there was general agreement that the Planning, Protective Services and Licensing Committee (PPSL) arrangements which are in place at the moment work extremely well. There was a consensus view that these arrangements should be replicated regardless of which type of structure is agreed.

4.4.4 **Reports for Noting**

One of the key drivers for making change to the Political Management Arrangements is to provide a more streamlined structure which in turn should provide a more effective basis for decision making. The Group highlighted their concern over the number of reports which are put forward to Committee for noting. It was recognised, however, that it can be important that information is shared through the formal Committee process, but that sometimes this doesn't require a decision to be made. To facilitate this, there was a consensus view that reports for noting should be tabled at meetings but that they could be taken at the end of an agenda, there would be no opportunity for discussion on these items and they would be noted in block. In order to assist with this a protocol has been drafted and this is attached as Appendix 2 to this report.

4.4.5 **Consultations**

The Group also gave consideration to the process for dealing with consultations, particularly those which are received by the Council which do not fall within a Committee cycle and are of a non-technical or policy nature. There was agreement that such consultations should be passed on to Members of the relevant Committee for comment and that a response would then be agreed by the Chair/Vice Chair and the relevant Executive Director. A protocol has been drafted which sets out how to deal with consultations of this type and this is attached as Appendix 3 to the report.

4.4.6 **Harbour Board**

The Harbour Board currently sits as Sub Committee of the Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee and meets 4 times per year. The Group were in agreement that the frequency of Harbour Board meetings is reduced and it moves to meet on a bi-annual basis with meetings being held directly following the EDI Committee (If a Traditional Model is agreed) or on a bi-annual basis as a stand-alone Committee (if an Executive/Cabinet Model is agreed). It is also suggested that the Membership of the Board could be reduced, retaining representation from the 4 administrative areas (2 Members from each administrative area) and the Chair/Vice Chair appointed from these 8 Members.

4.4.7 **Islands Task Force**

The Islands Task Force is a Short Life Working Group which was set up by Council at the meeting held on 23 January 2014, with the aim of being the

vehicle for the Council developing its own islands initiative including a position statement for the islands which outlines the key areas for support, including any increased resources and powers from the Scottish Government and UK Government. At the conclusion of the current Council all Short Life Working Groups will cease to exist, and as such there will no longer be an Islands Task Force. It is noted that there is a national intention that there will be an Islands Bill put through Parliament and the new Council should ensure that it has a Group or Committee which would be able to assist in the implementation of such a Bill.

4.4.8 Scrutiny Handbook

The Scrutiny Handbook developed by the PRS Committee was also subject to discussion by the Group, in line with the initial Council decision to set up the review. It was recognised that whichever model is adopted by the new Council there will be a need to have regard to developing procedures for scrutiny. It would therefore be appropriate for further consideration of the Handbook to be put on hold until the new Political Management Arrangements are agreed. This would allow for the handbook to be looked at in detail as the scrutiny function will vary depending on the model adopted.

4.4.9 Localism

Members discussed Localism and received a report submitted by the Community Planning Manager. It was noted that guidance is still awaited from the Scottish Government and will be taken forward at an appropriate time. The issue of localism will be dealt with separately and does not have an impact on the decision relating to the review of Political Management Arrangements.

4.4.10 Area Community Planning

Members were in agreement that the current structure for the Area Community Planning Groups works well. It was recognised that due to a reduction in resource available to support these groups there would require to be a subsequent reduction in the number of meetings. It is proposed that the Area CPG meetings continue in their current format, with meetings 3 times per year.

4.4.11 Service Choices

The current round of Service Choices reductions were also a consideration in looking forward and in the building of any future Committee model. The Governance service has implemented a 38% reduction in budget which has reduced the number of staff available to provide support to meetings from 14.9 FTE to 9.3 FTE. Any model which is adopted would need to be resourced by this reduced number of staff.

4.4.12 Programme of Meetings 2017/2018

In line with the discussions at the previous meetings and taking into account all of the considerations outlined above, officers have prepared draft timetables for

meetings in 2017/2018 following on from the Local Government Elections (Appendices 4 and 5). Schedules have been produced which give an indication on meetings for both the Traditional Committee model, for the Cabinet model and for the Executive model. The Traditional Committee model has the same structure as is currently in place but in line with the discussions at the Group, the number of meetings of Council and Policy and Resources Committee have been reduced. It would be proposed that an update to the delegations for Service Committees would be undertaken to allow for more streamlined decision making which would make the move to fewer meetings of Policy and Resources Committee achievable. The Cabinet and Executive models incorporate meetings of the Council 4 times per year plus a budget meeting with meetings of the Cabinet or Executive and the Scrutiny Committee on a 6 weekly basis. The timetables which have been produced for consideration can be supported using the available resource within Governance.

5.0 CONCLUSION

5.1 This report provides Council with an overview of the work of the Short Life Working Group on Political Management Arrangements. It outlines the discussions which have taken place and the information which has been taken into consideration. The Working Group provides the information contained in this report to allow the new Council to make a reasoned decision in terms of the future Political Management Arrangements, and provides a draft schedule of meetings which could be implemented by officers as soon as it is agreed.

5.2 In summary, the Short Life Working Group have come to the following conclusions:-

- There are 3 models which could be adopted, but it will be for the new Council to consider which model is their preferred option
- Area Committees should be retained, but with a reduced frequency of meetings
- Business Day meetings at area level should be Member only meetings with no support from Governance and no minute taken
- Audit and Scrutiny functions should be reviewed dependent on which model is adopted
- The new Council in agreeing any scrutiny function should have regard to developing procedures for undertaking effective scrutiny
- The PPSL Committee should be retained regardless of the model adopted
- A protocol for dealing with Reports for Noting should be agreed to streamline meetings
- A process for dealing with consultations should be agreed which would enable responses to be given outwith the normal Committee cycle
- The Harbour Board should move to be a bi-annual meeting, but has to be included in any future structure
- The new Council should have regard to a mechanism for dealing with any proposed Islands Bill
- Area Community Planning is working well, and should continue but with a slightly reduced frequency of meetings
- Any model which is agreed will have to be deliverable using the reduced

- resources available within the Governance team
- The Localism agenda will be picked up at an appropriate time once guidance is received from the Scottish Government

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Policy – none at this stage.

6.2 Financial – meeting schedules outlined in this report can be supported using existing financial resources.

6.3 Legal – none at this stage.

6.4 HR – none at present, but may have HR implications dependent on the agreement made by the new Council.

6.5 Equalities - none

6.6 Risk - none

6.7 Customer Service - none

Councillor Dick Walsh
Councillor Ellen Morton
Councillor Aileen Morton
Councillor Rory Colville
Councillor Elaine Robertson
Councillor Roddy McCuish

Councillor Robin Currie
Councillor Sandy Taylor
Councillor Richard Trail
Councillor Ann Horn
Councillor James Robb

Members of the Short Life Working Group on Political Management Arrangements

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Draft Protocol for Area Committee Business Day meetings

Appendix 2 – Draft Protocol for dealing with Reports for Noting

Appendix 3 – Draft Protocol for Consultations

Appendix 4 – Draft timetable of meetings (Traditional Model)

Appendix 5 – Draft timetable of meetings (Cabinet or Executive Model)