

**BEST PRACTICE REVIEW OF POLITICAL MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS**

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**1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 As the Council approaches the Local Government Elections in May 2022 it is invited to consider future local democratic and governance arrangements for the Council and whether it wishes to make any recommendations to a new Council in this regard.
- 1.2 The current Council considered its committee structures and associated political management arrangements at its first meeting in May 2017. While these have served the Council effectively with the most recent Best Value<sup>3</sup> Audit highlighting significant improvements in the Council's partnership working arrangements and approach to constructive and focused decision making it is recognised that the world has changed considerably in the last few years. Councils operate in a complex and challenging environment at the best of times however the Covid-19 pandemic has changed that environment on an unprecedented scale. Consequently it will be critical for a new Council to ensure that it has the governance and political management arrangements in place for effective scrutiny and decision-making to enable ongoing transformation and recovery.
- 1.3 While it will be for a new Council to determine their political management arrangements it is recommended as a matter of best practice to undertake a review of the current arrangements and identify key areas for consideration by a new Council in determining its governance and political management arrangements. Members are asked to endorse the review, determine the basic principles of the review and establish a Short Life Working Group to progress the review with a final report to the Council in April 2022 in readiness for a new Council.

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**2.0 INTRODUCTION**

2.1 As the Council approaches the Local Government Elections in May 2022 it is invited to consider future local democratic and governance arrangements for the Council and whether it wishes to make any recommendations to a new Council in this regard. This report sets out a proposed process for review and invites Council to endorse a Best Practice review, determine the basic principles for the review and agree a process for the review with a final report to the Council in April 2022 in readiness for a new Council.

**3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

3.1 Members are asked to:-

- (a) endorse a Best Practice review of current political management arrangements in order to make recommendations to a new Council following Local Government Elections in May 2022.
- (b) determine the basic principles for the review of the Political Management Arrangements;
- (c) agree to the establishment of a Short Life Working Group (SLWG) to progress the review with a final report being submitted to the Council in April 2022 in readiness for a new Council; and
- (d) in the event of agreement to the establishment of a SLWG to identify membership, including the Chair and Vice-Chair.

**4.0 DETAIL**

4.1 The Council last undertook a formal review of its Political Management Arrangements in 2016/17. It established a Short Life Working Group (SLWG) for the purpose of considering the future local democratic and governance arrangements of the Council, to consider detail in relation to Performance and Scrutiny Review Handbook and how all of this would relate to future governance arrangements, The recommendations from the SLWG established for that purpose were considered at the final meeting of the Council in April 2017 where it was agreed to refer the findings to the first meeting of the new Council for their

consideration. These findings were subsequently considered by the new Council at its first meeting and formed the basis for the current Committee Structures and Political Management Arrangements.

- 4.2 The current Committee Structures and Political Management Arrangements have served the Council effectively with the most recent Best Value<sup>3</sup> Audit highlighting significant improvements in the Council's partnership working arrangements and approach to constructive and focused decision making. However it is recognised that the world has changed considerably in the last few years and while Councils operate in a complex and challenging environment at the best of times the Covid-19 pandemic has changed that environment on an unprecedented scale. In respect of governance arrangements the Council moved quickly to establish arrangements for virtual meetings and emergency decision making arrangements and work is ongoing in this regard to harness the new technologies available to the committee to facilitate greater flexibilities in how it conducts its meetings in an open and transparent fashion. It will therefore be critical for a new Council to enable ongoing transformation and recovery and ensure that it has the governance and political management arrangements in place for effective scrutiny and decision-making. The Council is also awaiting the outcome of Boundaries Scotland Review of Electoral Arrangements for Argyll and Bute. Their report to Scottish Ministers proposes a reduction in Councillor numbers and the introduction of island-only wards which if accepted requires to be taken into account in any discussions on future political management arrangements.

### **4.3 Principles for Best Practice Review**

The knowledge and insight obtained in the life of this council in relation to governance and political management arrangements would contribute significantly to these considerations by a new council and therefore Members are invited to consider the fundamental principles they would wish to form the basis of a Best Practice review. A review would include looking at arrangements across a range of local authorities. In the previous review the following principles informed the discussion on different options and types of Committee models:

- 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

Members may wish to add to this list in light of developments in recent years in terms of community and partnership working, performance improvements, major investments such as the Rural Growth Deal and other strategic initiatives as well as the experience arising from the Covid-19 pandemic and our route to recovery. In addition, when considering these principles Members may wish to consider including reference to the current financial climate and to legislative factors such as the Community Empowerment Act and the Islands (Scotland) Act.

#### **4.4 Process for Review**

In order to progress the previous review relating to governance and Political Management Arrangements the Council established a Short Life Working Group comprised of 12 members, split between Administration and Opposition members taking into account the political composition of the Council. If members are minded to endorse a review the Council may wish to adopt a similar approach. The outputs of the Short Life Working Group considerations and any associated recommendations would then be incorporated into a final report for consideration by Council. In the event that Council seeks to establish a SLWG it is invited to identify membership including a Chair and Vice Chair.

### **5.0 CONCLUSION**

- 5.1 As the Council approaches the Local Government Elections in May 2022 it would be considered best practice to learn from the experience of the current Elected Members in relation to local democratic and governance arrangements for the Council and to consider whether it wishes to make any recommendations to a new Council in this regard. This report sets out a proposed approach and process for such a Best Practice Review in advance of the Local Government Elections next year.

### **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 - protected characteristics – None
- 6.5.2 Socio-economic Duty - None

6.5.3 Islands – Addresses consideration of proposed introduction of island only wards

6.6 Risk -

6.7 Customer Service - none

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**For further information contact:**