

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

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Council, at the meeting held on 30 September 2021, endorsed a Best Practice review of current Political Management Arrangements and agreed to establish of a Short Life Working Group (SLWG) which would review the current arrangements and work to make recommendation(s) to a new Council following the Local Government Elections in May 2022 regarding this matter.
- 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.

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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, at the meeting held on 30 September 2021, endorsed a Best Practice review of current Political Management Arrangements and agreed to establish of a Short Life Working Group (SLWG) which would review the current arrangements and work to make recommendation(s) to a new Council following the Local Government Elections in May 2022 regarding this matter.

4.2 Work of the Short Life Working Group

- 4.2.1 The SLWG met on * occasions and considered a wide variety of information. At the first meeting of the Group, Members reflected on the fundamental principles determined by the Council in September 2021, which informed discussion on different options and types of Committee models, specifically:-

- 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 models.

4.3 Consultation

4.3.1 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 and to make suggestions as to what any future structure should look like. A number of responses were received with general comments and suggestions which were subsequently discussed by the Working Group. Some of the key messages from the consultation are as follows:

- 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.
- 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.
- Members were generally content with the existing arrangements for Area Committees, with some suggesting enhancements to Area Committees' responsibilities.

4.4 Committee Structures

4.4.1 The Group also considered other Committee models, specifically Traditional, Cabinet and Executive. Officers provided information on these models, including which models were in place across Scotland with particular interest being placed on Authorities with similar geography to Argyll and Bute. It was noted that the position across Scotland varies and that in those Authorities which most closely align with Argyll and Bute the majority operate a Traditional Committee model. A short description of each model is provided below:-

4.4.2 **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 also allows for a significant portion of Council business to be undertaken using the delegation to Committees.

4.4.3 **Cabinet model**

In this model, a small group of elected members from the Administration and with Portfolio/Policy remits make 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.

4.4.4 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.

4.5 Other areas of consideration

4.5.1 Strategic Committees & Audit and Scrutiny arrangements

There was general consensus that the number of and general responsibilities' of Strategic Committers should continue, but that consideration should be given to their remits and meeting frequency. Specifically the scale / remit of the Community Services Committee and whether:

- a separate Education Committee would be appropriate; and
- the Audit and Scrutiny Committee should take responsibility for the scrutiny of Police Scotland, Scottish Fire and Rescue and the Argyll and Bute Health and Social Care Partnership (Integrated Joint Board) and a request for more detailed scrutiny related presentations to Council.

4.5.2 Area Committees & Area Community Planning

Members were in agreement that consideration should be given to possible synergies between Area Committees and other groups, such as Area Community Planning Groups and Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) Locality Planning Groups while recognising the statutory nature of these Groups.

The general consensus was that Members wanted to retain the current Area Committee arrangements but with opportunities for increased local scrutiny and enhanced responsibilities. There was also a suggestion that a review be undertaken with regards to the management of issues arising from public questions at Area Committees.

They also considered Area Committee Business Days, with there being broad agreement that while these meetings do not involve decision making they are useful. The SLWG were of the view that these should continue with consideration being given to members of the Executive Leadership Team providing scheduled updates at Area Committee Business Days.

4.5.3 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 well. There was a consensus view that these arrangements should continue.

4.5.4 Reports for Noting

The Reports for Noting section on committee agendas was introduced following the last review of the Political Management Arrangements and has helped to provide a more streamlined structure which in turn provided a more effective, open and transparent basis for decision making. While there was some concern regarding the lack of opportunity for discussion on these reports, it was acknowledged that these issues could be raised through normal processes at the next meeting of the committee. The group also acknowledged that this approach allowed for valuable information to be made available to members and the public.

4.5.5 Rural Economy

SLWG acknowledged the unique nature of Argyll and Bute, specifically the importance of the rural economy and its economic development. While the Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee has responsibility for these areas it was felt that there would be value in developing enhanced arrangements to consider more rural issues.

4.5.6 Participation of Elected Members

The SLWG acknowledged that increased participation from all members enriches policy discussion. Encouraging attendance of non-committee Councillors is to be included within the Members induction programme following Local Government Elections scheduled for May 2022. This will also make specific reference to how decisions are made and how non-committee Councilors' can influence policy.

4.5.7 Programme of Meetings 2022/2023

Officers have prepared a draft timetable for meetings in 2022/2023 following on from the Local Government Elections (Appendix 1), which follows the existing Traditional Committee model. The timetable which has 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 information contained in this report to allow the new Council to make a reasoned decision in terms of 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 for Committee Structures which could be adopted, and while it will be for the new Council to consider which model, the existing Traditional Model is considered to be the most inclusive and has served the Council effectively.
- There was general consensus that the number of and general responsibilities' of Strategic Committers should continue, but that consideration should be given to their remits and meeting frequency.
- The Planning, Protective Services and Licensing Committee (PPSL) arrangements which are in place at the moment work well and would commend these to a new Council for incorporation in their preferred model of Political Management Arrangements.
- Area Committees should be retained with future consideration being given to increased local scrutiny arrangements and enhanced responsibilities.
- Further consideration should be given to possible synergies between Area Committees and other groups, such as Area Community Planning Groups and Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) Locality Planning Groups while recognising the statutory nature of these Groups.
- Enhancing key areas of the rural economy such as agriculture and fishing within specified committee remits.
- Support for all Elected Members, irrespective of Committee membership, to participate in discussion and influence policy direction, is key to driving change and improvement.

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 Fairer Scotland Duty – none

6.5.1 Equalities – protect characteristics – none

6.5.2 Socio-economic Duty – none

6.5.3 Islands – none

6.6 Climate change – none

6.7 Risk - none

6.8 Customer Service - none

Members of the Short Life Working Group on Political Management Arrangements

Councillor Robin Currie (Chair)

Councillor Audrey Forrest

Councillor George Freeman

Councillor Kieron Green

Councillor Jim Lynch

Councillor Liz McCabe

Councillor Yvonne McNeilly (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Aileen Morton

Councillor Sandy Taylor

Councillor Andrew Vennard

Douglas Hendry

Executive Director with responsibility for Legal and Regulatory Support

**** January 2022**

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Draft timetable of meetings