

ANGUS COUNCIL

18 JUNE 2015

REVIEW OF COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

REPORT BY

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ABSTRACT

This report arises from the council's requirement that the Chief Executive and Head of Legal and Democratic Services undertake a review of the committee structure. This report summarises the steps taken to collect comments on the operation of the current structure and proposes possible changes for consideration by the council. If agreed implementation of any changes is proposed immediately after the 2015 summer recess. The Committee Structures MOG has met to consider this report and its recommendation and the views of the MOG will be reported verbally by the MOG chair and members at the meeting.

1. RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that the Council:

- (i) considers the information included in the report; and
- (ii) decides which changes as set out in section 5 of the report should be agreed for implementation after the 2015 summer recess.

2. ALIGNMENT TO THE ANGUS COMMUNITY PLAN/SINGLE OUTCOME AGREEMENT/COPORATE PLAN

Effective council governance contributes as a whole to the local outcomes contained within the Angus Community Plan and Single Outcome Agreement 2013-2016.

3. BACKGROUND

At its meeting in November 2013 Angus Council agreed the implementation of a revised committee structure now in operation. A member/officer working group (MOG) agreed to recommend to the council the adoption of a structure comprising 5 thematic committees –

- Children and Learning
- Communities
- Development and Enterprise
- Policy and Resources
- Social Work and Health

These proposals were agreed for implementation from January 2014. In agreeing the new arrangements the council agreed to require the Chief Executive and the Head of Legal and Democratic Services bring forward an evaluation report to enable the council to review the operation of the new system in June 2015.

The Scrutiny and Audit Committee had only recently been established as a successor to the previous sub-committee arrangement and was not considered within the MOG's review.

4. REVIEW PROCESS

During March and April 2015 a number of steps were taken to gather comments and observations on the current committee system. In particular meetings were held at which administration and non-administration members were invited to give their comments on the current system and to suggest possible improvements or changes. Written comments were also invited. Members of the Executive Management Team, the Council Management Team (Heads of Service) together with other relevant officers were also invited to provide any information they felt might be of use in the review process.

A number of comments and suggestions were received. These covered a wide range of possible developments or changes in the committee system. The propositions included in section 5 below have been arrived at following consideration of the comments received on the basis of apparent consensus of opinion across interested parties.

The Committee Structures MOG has been reconvened to consider the ideas arising from the review of the system established at the beginning of 2014 by the November 2013 council decision. Due to diary commitments it has not been possible to hold the MOG meeting in advance of the deadline for this report to be submitted. The MOG Chair and members will report their views on the proposals contained in this report as required at the meeting.

5. PROPOSALS

The following proposals are offered for members' consideration and decision.

Implementation

It is proposed that any agreed changes should be given effect as soon as possible after the 2015 summer recess. Ordinarily a review of Standing Orders and Financial Regulations is undertaken during the recess period by officers of the Legal and democratic Services team. Any required changes to give effect to proposals agreed on the basis of this paper will be included in the review process and be brought to the council for ratification at its first meeting after the recess.

Committee Cycle

A number of people made comments on the current six weekly cycle, some suggesting more frequent meetings of committees and council would be helpful. This possibility had previously been considered by the MOG in 2013. Others suggested that all committees might be held on a single day.

Proposal – no changes are proposed. It is considered that with the extended Schemes of Delegation that the normal or routine business of the council can be carried out without the need for more regular meetings and Standing Orders currently provide for the calling of additional meetings if urgent business is identified.

Management of Meetings

Comments were made on the need to encourage more debate at committee and council, the need to make committee and council processes less intimidating and formal to encourage greater public participation in local government (particularly by younger people), and the benefits of member briefings and member/officer working groups based on recent experience. The increased use of electronic meeting papers was also mentioned.

Proposal – that the council continues to make use of MOGs and member briefings as required and that the gradual development of electronic and digital services for elected members is pursued.

Development and Enterprise Committee

There was a clear consensus in favour of new arrangements for the management of business currently in the remit of the Development and Enterprise Committee. The principle issue

raised was over the need for a separate committee covering this territory. Options discussed included transferring its remit to either the Policy and Resources Committee or the Communities Committee and altering the membership of the committee to reflect that of the Development Standards Committee.

Proposal – that the Committee is ceased with its remit being transferred to the Policy and Resources Committee, the roles of Convener and Vice-Convener being maintained as “leading member” roles similar to those of the Convener and Vice-Convener for Finance.

Social Work and Health Committee

A number of comments about the future of the Social Work and health Committee were raised in view of new arrangements for the governance and operation of integrated health and social care services. In essence it was suggested that the need for the committee would cease with the formal transfer of decision making power to the Integrated Joint Board (IJB) in April 2016.

Proposals – that this committee is maintained in the council’s structure during the implementation and bedding in of the new integrated arrangements with a review being undertaken in 2017 after a full year of the IJB’s formal operation.

Police and Fire Sub-Committee

A number of comments were made in relation to the scrutiny of the national police and fire and rescue services. The need for a Police and Fire Sub-Committee was questioned. It was suggested that the scrutiny might best be performed by the Scrutiny and Audit Committee, or that police and fire business might go to the Policy and Resources Committee itself.

In a written response the Divisional Police commander indicated that his main priority would be to ensure reports to the council met the needs of elected members and achieved effective scrutiny without an overly bureaucratic or labour intensive approach. A verbal response was provided by the Senior Local Officer (SF&RS) essentially to the same effect. Both officers also indicated their willingness to make themselves available to elected members to discuss police/fire service matters at any time.

Proposal – that the Police and Fire Sub-Committee is ceased with scrutiny of police and fire service activity if delivered via the Scrutiny and Audit Committee.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations of this report. Some small savings may be possible from implementing changes to operating arrangements although it is difficult to put a value on this. The changes to the committee structure may have implications for the council’s current scheme of remuneration for councillors which will require review the light of any decisions made.

7. CONSULTATION (IF APPLICABLE)

The Executive Management Team and the Head of Corporate Improvement and Finance have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

NOTE: No background papers, as detailed by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to a material extent in preparing the above report.

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