

CPC Action Plan – Governance and Engagement Recommendations 2 and 6

There are a significant number of actions already taking place which will hopefully improve the position:

- The Constitution Review Working Group (CRWG) meets throughout the year to review the Council's constitution. Proposed changes are designed to make the Council operate in a more effective manner.
- Key decision threshold – the threshold for key decisions which have significant implications in terms of expenditure and savings is in the process of being reviewed at the Council to make sure that this is made fit for purpose, having not been reviewed for many years. Proposed changes will be reported to the CRWG before reporting on to Cabinet and Council for consideration.
- Officer decisions
 - Training has been delivered to CMT and some fourth-tier managers on the subject of officer decisions.
 - Officer decision training has been booked into the corporate training calendar which the Monitoring Officer will deliver.
- Committee Report template
 - The template was reviewed and updated in 2021 to streamline and simplify report writing processes. For the first time, report authors are required to link their proposals to the Council's strategic purposes.
 - The report writing guidance was produced at the same time to provide a helpful guide for report authors on how to write a report using the template. It also provides useful information such as guidance on the information in a report that can be exempt etc.
 - The Committee report template, guidance and officer decision forms can be accessed by staff from the home page of the Orb.
 - There is a sign off section at the bottom of the new report template. The aim was to provide senior officers with a chance to check whether their staff are following the proper process by consulting with the right people. This will be enforced.
- Report writing training – report writing training is being provided by an external trainer, following consultation with Democratic Services regarding the Council's report processes. Good feedback has been received from people who have attended this training.
- Late reports – The Interim S151 Officer and Monitoring Officer now hold meetings just prior to the statutory deadline for the receipt of Cabinet reports. They are rejecting any late reports received after the report deadline, unless considered urgent and / or there are reasonable grounds for late submission.
- The Council has introduced and tested meeting owls. The owls are much more efficient to use and easier to set up than the Council's polycom devices, with a better quality audio visual system. This enables staff, partners and members of the public who are unable to attend a meeting in person to participate remotely via Microsoft Teams in a hybrid arrangement. The tests have also successfully involved live streaming meetings, involving a member of staff logging onto Teams remotely. Subject to further discussion by CMT

and Members, further use of the owls and live streaming may assist the Council to improve the transparency of the local decision making process.

- Hybrid and remote meetings – whilst Members continue to be required to attend formal meetings in person, Council staff (with some exceptions), partners and members of the public can be offered the chance to attend Committee meetings remotely, via Microsoft Teams. Informal meetings, such as Chairmen’s briefings, are often held remotely. This builds on using skills developed during the pandemic and allows for greater flexibility as well as a reduction in carbon emissions associated with Committee meetings.
- Independent Person – Standards Regime – The Council is in the process of exploring the potential to join the Worcestershire Independent Persons pool. This will help to achieve efficiencies and enable the Council to involve a greater number of independent people with relevant expertise in standards investigations.
- Bromsgrove Audit Task Group investigation – Council officers facilitated the Audit Task Group’s investigations and insured that the findings were recorded and published in an open and transparent manner. The Council has considered the group’s findings and proposed actions are in the process of being implemented by Council Officers.
- Budget Setting – the budget setting process has improved considerably, from a democratic perspective, this year. The Finance and Budget Working Group have been regularly involved at every stage. The inclusion of different tranches of savings allows for Overview and Scrutiny Members to consult on different options with interested parties, should they wish to do so.
- Modern.gov Report Management – the Democratic Services team have been working closely with the Business Improvement Team (BIT) on the introduction of the report management system. This will take time to implement but should result in improving the efficiency of the democratic process, improvements in version control in respect of reports and encourage report authors to take greater ownership of their own reports, thereby supporting positive culture change.
- The Cabinet Work Programme (Forward Plan) is published on the Council’s website using the modern.gov system. In addition to giving notice of forthcoming key decisions in the work programme, the Council also gives notice of forthcoming non-key decisions in the work programme, to ensure that the authority is as transparent as possible in relation to forthcoming business.
- Reducing Committee paperwork
 - Members and senior Officers can use the modern.gov app, including the private modern.gov, to access and annotate Committee papers.
 - Joint Modern.gov app training was provided to Members on 25th May and one-to-one training has also been provided to individual Members where requested. Further training can be offered.
- Democratic Services team – two members of the team are currently in the process of undertaking the Association of Democratic Services (ADSO) Certificate in Democratic Knowledge. This will help those team members to learn about best practice for implementation in the workplace. The Principal and Senior Democratic Services Officers are both members of ADSO and monitor key developments in the sector based on information shared by this professional body.

- Constitution Review – External support has been secured for a review of the constitution.
- Improved Performance and Project Management in place with need for clearly agreed project plans. Project Management of key projects is included in the quarterly Monitoring Reports.
- At the Annual Council meeting in May 2023 a coalition Cabinet, comprising Conservative and Independent Councillors, was confirmed.
- A Labour Councillor has been appointed as chairman of the council for the 2023/24 municipal year.
- Councillors not representing political groups involved in the coalition on the Cabinet, have been appointed as Chairmen of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee and the Overview and Scrutiny Board respectively.
- The Council is exploring having member champions for issues such as homelessness.
- The Council has a Member Development Steering Group which co-ordinates member training and induction arrangements.
 - Meetings take place throughout the year and extra meetings can be convened where required.
 - The group can and do consider requests for additional training to take place during the year. For example, in 2022/23, an extra Code of Conduct training session was held in January 2023.
- The induction event that was due to take place on the evening of 10th May 2023 did not proceed in the form originally planned due to the significant changes arising following the local elections in May 2023. Officers are currently exploring potential dates on which to hold the postponed induction event, to which a representative of the LGA will be invited to attend.
- Joint training - at the request of the Member Development Steering Group, a lot of the training is taking place jointly this year with Redditch Borough Council. This helps to achieve efficiency savings and provides opportunities for Members to network with Councillors from another authority. However, where members did not feel joint training was appropriate, separate sessions are being held. (E.g. the Council's Overview and Scrutiny training session was delivered to Bromsgrove Members only).
- In person training - At the request of the Member Development Steering Group, a lot of the training in the first few months after the elections is being held in person, rather than remotely. Members felt that this would support new Councillors more effectively and would also be helpful in the first few weeks until new Councillors received their Council IT equipment. Since the elections, some Members have indicated that they might struggle with attending training in person. Therefore, it has been agreed with group leaders that the assumption will remain that training will be attended in person but where reasonable notice is provided, a link to the training will be provided to a Member, if possible, to enable remote participation.
- The following training is due to be or has already been provided to Members this year as part of the induction process:
 - Code of Conduct (covering the Member Code of Conduct and standards regime. Separate code of conduct training sessions are provided to Parish Councillors.)
 - Planning (including two planning refresher training sessions)

- Licensing (including training in respect of chairing Licensing Sub-Committees.)
- Chairing skills training – There is a training session due to take place on 5th July but one-to-one training has also been offered to new Chairmen prior to this to enable them to fulfil their roles (An LGA booklet on chairing meetings has also been included in the induction packs.)
- Data Protection
- Safeguarding
- Civility in Public Life including Social Media – this training is being delivered jointly to Councillors from all Councils in Worcestershire apart from Wyre Forest District Council (The LGA’s guide to Members’ use of social media was also included in the induction packs)
- Overview and Scrutiny
- Audit, governance and standards (covering audit functions and corporate governance)
- Carbon literacy
- IT training including cyber security training (For new Councillors. Cyber security training was provided to Members at both Councils in December 2022)
- Modern.gov app
- Civil leadership in emergencies
- LGA training
 - The LGA sessions designed for new Councillors have been included in the induction programme and promoted to new Councillors.
 - The political leadership sessions provided by the LGA are being promoted to group leaders and specific Members following the elections.
- Mandatory Training
 - Invitations are sent to Members in plenty of time and for the induction process the induction programme, detailing all forthcoming training, has been included in the induction packs so notice is being provided to all newly elected members on forthcoming training dates.
 - There is a long standing practice whereby Members are mandatorily required to attend planning and licensing training before they are permitted to serve on the Planning Committee and Licensing Sub-Committees.
- The Member Development Steering Group met on 14th June 2023. During this meeting, the group agreed that further mop up training should be delivered in the autumn. Officers will work to arrange follow up training and will communicate the dates of these sessions in due course to Members.
- Evaluation forms are being circulated after every session and the feedback will be reported to the Member Development Steering Group to provide them with an opportunity to consider amendments that could be made to improve the induction and training arrangements in future. The group have agreed that group leaders should consult with their Members about the outcomes of the training and report back their comments at the next meeting of the group due to take place in October 2023.
- Interactive training - At the request of the Member Development Steering Group, training is designed to be interactive wherever possible and trainers are always asked to avoid “death by PowerPoint”.

The main areas of concern as outlined in the CPC report were as follows. Included under each area are possible other actions / ideas to address:

These are the 5 things:

- **The effectiveness of overview and scrutiny and whether there is robust challenge within the organisation**

The Chairmen of both the Audit Committee and the O&S Committee have been offered places on LGA training / development sessions.

Specific training, including the detailing of the key legislative documents and the responsibilities of Statutory Officers, Auditors (Internal and External) and the Audit Committee has been delivered.

The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) is due to deliver an update to the Overview and Scrutiny Board in relation to the review of the committee system at a meeting on 10th July.

- **The visibility and role of front-line members in council business and whether they are adequately engaged**

All members have access to reports of the Cabinet and can attend meetings to observe discussions. There is also the opportunity for O&S to scrutinise any items.

More all member briefings will be arranged on key policy / strategic items / items of interest for members. Feedback from Group Leaders on areas to be covered is welcomed.

It has been agreed at Bromsgrove that Cabinet Members will do periodic, at least 6 weekly, update reports to members and hold face to face Q&A Sessions on the content of these reports and key decision items before decisions are made.

- **Officer accountabilities on delivery and how that is built into the performance management framework**

This is already being addressed through improved performance and project management and more rigour being applied to the quality and timeliness of reports. The Constitution is also being reviewed and where necessary the Member and Officer Codes of conduct will be reviewed. Any changes to the Performance Management Framework will be picked up as part of the Workforce Plan.

An updated report on project management and the effective “programme” management of the 60 plus projects being delivered at the Councils and their complex interrelationships including the prioritisation of resources will come to Cabinet in June.

- **The role of Cabinet in policy and strategy development and whether that is strong enough**

The Cabinet plays a strong role in Policy development with Portfolio Holders working closely with officers. This will be continued and reviewed where necessary and appropriate.

At Bromsgrove, with the significant changes in Cabinet, LGA training is being commissioned to ensure that the role of Cabinet Members is effectively discharged.

- **Improve joint working between Members and officers through clearly set out roles, responsibilities and demarcation lines – and improving communication and flow of information to Members.**

This will be picked up by a number of actions outlined above and those that are currently happening.