

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

11TH SEPTEMBER 2023, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors P. M. McDonald (Chairman), S. T. Nock (Vice-Chairman), A. Bailes, R. Bailes, A. M. Dale, E. M. S. Gray, R. J. Hunter, B. Kumar, S. A. Robinson, J. D. Stanley and D. G. Stewart (substitute).

Observers: Councillor S. J. Baxter, Councillor S. R. Colella, and Councillor P. J. Whittaker.

Officers: Mr P. Carpenter, Mrs. C. Felton, Ms J. Willis, Mr M. Austin, Mrs. J. Bayley-Hill and Mr. M. Sliwinski

31/23

GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS TASK GROUP - FINAL REPORT

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board presented the Governance Systems Task Group final report for the consideration of Members. In doing so it was highlighted that the Governance Systems Task Group had been established as a result of a Motion agreed at a Full Council meeting held on 24th May 2023. The membership of the Task Group consisted of five Members from all parties across the Council. The timelines of the Task Group had been adhered to and the recommendations presented were to be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Board and by Cabinet at its meeting on 13th September 2023. There was then an opportunity for all members to consider the report and the recommendations at an Extraordinary meeting of the Council on 20th September 2023.

In considering the report some Members raised concerns regarding the length of time the proposed change in governance structure to a hybrid Leader and Cabinet model would be in place. Members felt that any changes should be in place for at least a four year period. Officers explained that a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) could be put in place as part of any agreed changes in respect of the hybrid Cabinet and Leader model as recommended within the report. The MoU would be introduced between all political group leaders to maintain these working arrangements for at least the next four years. This information would be included in the Task Group recommendations.

Councillor R. Hunter suggested that an additional recommendation be made in order for the Task Group to consider further evidence from a local authority within the West Midlands that currently operated a committee system. It was noted that there were at least two such Councils within Warwickshire of a similar size and geographical location to Bromsgrove District Council. Councillor Hunter stated that it would be useful to better understand how these Councils worked under the committee system and how successful this system had been. Furthermore, it was noted that as a result of the local elections held in May 2023 Bromsgrove District Council was currently under 'No Overall Control' and that this needed to be considered when looking at the governance structure of the Council for the future.

Some Members raised concerns regarding the costs involved in implementing a Committee System and whether this provided value for money for residents of the District.

Furthermore, it was noted by some Members that an additional recommendation could cause delays that would impact on any implementation measures that needed to be undertaken if any change of governance structure was agreed. This would particularly delay the large amount of work Officers needed to carry out in order to prepare for any change to the structure prior to implementation in May 2024.

It was noted that any further recommendation was not designed to disrupt the investigation but merely be an opportunity to look at all possible evidence. Members suggested that a monitoring system could potentially be put in place in order to understand the success of any future governance model once implemented.

During a detailed discussion, Members were reminded that a representative from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) had been present at all meetings of the Task Group in order to provide detailed information to Members in respect of all governance models for local authorities. It was stated that there was a large body of evidence to suggest that there was not a 'better' model for a Council to adopt. It was important that any structure implemented; Leader and Cabinet model, hybrid Leader and Cabinet model or Committee System worked best for that specific Council. Some Members reported that the current structure, following the local elections, had so far been successful and there had been greater engagement of all parties particularly with backbench members.

Following the discussion, and as outlined in the preamble above, Councillor R. Hunter proposed the following additional recommendation:

‘That the Task Group reconvene to consider the evidence from at least one second tier local authority that had a Committee System before finalising its recommendation.’

Councillor S. Robinson seconded the proposal.

On being put to the vote the recommendation was lost.

In concluding the consideration of the report, the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board thanked the Members of the Task Group and all Officers involved in the investigation. It was particularly noted that Ms C. Buckley, the CfGS representative at Task Group meetings, had provided invaluable assistance throughout the investigation. Members agreed that a letter of thanks be sent to Ms. Buckley in recognition of her support throughout the process.

RECOMMENDED that

Bromsgrove District Council should have a hybrid Leader and Cabinet governance model from May 2024 onwards. To achieve this model, the Council should do the following:

- a) Agree changes to the Council’s constitution during the 2023/24 municipal year, as detailed in the report.
- b) Introduce working protocols designed to embed more collegiate working in the Council’s governance culture.
- c) Introduce Cabinet Advisory Panels.
- d) Take action to improve communication with Members.
- e) Introduce a Memorandum of Understanding between all political group leaders to maintain these working arrangements for at least the next four years.

The meeting closed at 7.32 p.m.

Chairman