

BOROUGH COUNCIL OF KING'S LYNN & WEST NORFOLK

GOVERNANCE TASK GROUP

**Minutes from the Meeting of the Governance Task Group held on Tuesday,
28th January, 2020 at 2.00 pm in the Meeting Room 2-1 - Second Floor,
King's Court, Chapel Street, King's Lynn**

PRESENT: Councillor I Devereux (Chair)
Councillors J Collop, I Devereux, A Kemp, B Long, G Middleton and J Moriarty

Officers present: D Gates, L Gore, T Huggins and S Winter

1 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: The minutes of the meeting held on 19 November 2019 were approved as a correct record.

2 MEMBERS PRESENT UNDER STANDING ORDER 34

None

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

4 OFFICERS REPORT

Terry Huggins presented his report and gave a re-cap of the situation to date and outlined the options available to the Council – ie Leader and Cabinet, Mayoral and Committee System.

A discussion ensued on the need to continue to explore the best option moving forward, the distinction between scrutiny and policy development and the request to see the detail of reports at an early stage.

Consultation Feedback

Parishes - The feedback received from the parishes was considered and as some of the comments appeared to concentrate on the lack of knowledge of the different structures rather than how the council interacted with the parish it was noted that dependent on the outcome of the review it may be advisable to run a briefing session for parishes to explain what changes are to be made.

Members – Feedback was received from KLACC and Cllrs Kemp, Joyce and Rust. It was pointed out that portions of Cllr Joyce's comments were not correct. It was pointed out that in a cabinet

system, the Council appointed the Leader and the Leader appointed their Cabinet, which may consist of the different parties if that was the Leader's choice.

The comments from KLACC centred on it wanting its terms of reference expanding and budgets allocated. It was noted that the KLACC was set up in order to give King's Lynn councillors the opportunity to comment on special expenses for King's Lynn. Concern was expressed that the Committee was expanding on its terms of reference and encroaching onto scrutiny panels ground. The referral of recommendations from KLACC to Cabinet was discussed. It was agreed, with the exception of Councillor Kemp, that the issue of the terms of reference to KLACC was not part of this specific review but could be re-visited once this review was complete.

The comments from the members workshop were:

- 1 that the experience and expertise of elected members was not taken advantage of, and some members felt they didn't see how cabinet heard their views.
- 2 the feedback was that there was no desire to go back to a cabinet scrutiny committee which didn't work as intended previously.
- 3 the culture of the ways of working was too adversarial.

Other issues outside of the remit of the group which were raised in the process which could potentially be picked up at a later date were:

- KLACC Terms of Reference
- Appointment of the Mayor
- Appointment to outside bodies
- The role of planning sifting.

A discussion was held on the difference over time of appointing members to sit on bodies and the level to which members wished to get involved. The issue of scrutiny and policy development operating within the same bodies was discussed and the point made that they should be separated which would also permit more members to be involved. It was felt the term scrutiny should be re-introduced in a title. With policy development it was stressed that Cabinet members should be involved in this role.

The question was raised as to whether there could be a cabinet and committees with delegated functions. It was noted that if a cabinet was in place there were clear cabinet responsibilities set out in legislation. It wasn't clear if those responsibilities could be onward delegated to committees.

A discussion was held on scrutiny and the development of the Board to review major projects.

The Group was reminded that it wasn't possible to use the exact copy of the old Committees structure from pre Cabinet days as many things

had changed since that time and the council was delivering services in different ways.

Mr Huggins commented that the points being made were indicating a wish to improve the current situation rather than spend time looking for new structures, to which it was noted that the Group wished for further information on a Committee Structure or a hybrid.

With the approval of the Corporate Business Plan following the rounds of consultation with the panels it was noted that a document would be brought to show how the high level corporate plan fitted into department and service plans etc.

Agreed: It was agreed to rule out the Mayoral system for future investigations.

In looking forward to the design principles, the table in the report was discussed and the following points raised:

Achievable/worthwhile - SO34 right of members to attend committees was considered important. Downside of committees was it was generally more officer led and less accountable to an individual.

The cabinet system gave the Leader too much power, all members should be able to bring their ideas into the mix.

Achievable within the time – within the time members are able to put in. Members should have the ability to know what is happening across the organisation.

Decisions made for the public good and timely - Committee system was less timely. Delegated powers for day to day operations, and consultation with the Chairs as appropriate. It was less open.

Why - Reasons for decision given at Cabinet, not always apparent at cttee.

Accountability – Cabinet accountability for cabinet and cabinet members. Cttee system less so. Cabinet members were able to help resolve issues directly.

Political make up of the council – scrutiny was more difficult when a larger majority.

Policy Development – Committees could have separate Task Groups.

Scrutiny – No scrutiny required in the Committee system.

Call in – It was considered that there were too many hurdles for call in. Previous CSC had the ability to call things in post decision to look at. It

was very confrontational. The call in criteria need to be clear. Potential to bring a less adversarial approach.

Scrutiny of partnerships - difficulty with a committee system

Role of the Group – the difference between Independents and a political group was discussed.

Cost Neutral – It was reminded that any change should be cost neutral.

The Next Steps

It was agreed to explore what other local authorities were doing. A hybrid example was requested, to which Kent County Council was the only one known, but it was far removed from this authority.

Newark and Sherwood, Gloucester were suggested. Where possible a desk top exercise would be undertaken if not potentially skype link.

It was suggested that the Leader and opposition leaders and officers could liaise if necessary.

Assistant Directors would have the consultation on their agenda for February.

Next meeting

Leave the meeting scheduled for 26 February in the diary- hold the date.

As the timescale had slipped due to the general election in December, it was agreed to cancel the all members seminar date booked for 24 March, but hold the date for a potential meeting (MR 2:1 now booked at 3.30pm if required).

The meeting closed at 4.15 pm