

REPORT TO GOVERNANCE TASK GROUP

Date of Meeting : 24th March,2020

UPDATE ON ACTIONS SINCE LAST MEETING AND CONSIDERATION OF CONSULTATION WITH OTHER LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Summary

This report will

1. Give feedback from the consultation with the Assistant Directors' Group and enable discussion on this.
2. Report progress on planned consultation with three local authorities
3. Consider and agree key questions and who and how the consultations will occur

Recommendations

The Task Group is recommended to

1. consider the feedback from the Assistant Directors group and how this impacts on the choice of governance model.
2. decide who is to attend consultation video conferences with other local authorities
3. agree the questions and key lines of enquiry which they wish too explore

Reason for Decisions

To enable the recommendations of the Task Group to be better informed and evidence based.

1. Introduction

1.1 The last meeting commenced consideration of the benefits of the alternative governance models when compared with the BC KLWN design

principles previously agreed. The decision was made to exclude the Elected Mayor governance model and to continue with evaluation of the other two options. It was acknowledged that modifications could be made to improve the existing Leader and Executive model which may result in something preferable to the Committee model. This remains the unresolved issue.

1.2 To aid resolution and in order to enable a recommendation to be agreed by the Task Group two further steps were agreed. Firstly a consultation with staff using the Assistant Directors group for this purpose. Secondly the opportunity to speak with and seek information from other local authorities who may have experience from which BC KLWN would benefit.

2. Consultation with Assistant Directors

2.1 Together with the Demographic Services Manager I met with the Assistant Directors Group on 18th February, 2020. I used similar material and questions to those used with the all Member consultation.

2.2 A summary of the feedback from this session is attached to this report as appendix 1. I can expand upon this at the meeting.

2.3 The Working Party will want to consider if and if so how this feedback influences either their design principles or the choice of governance model.

3. Evidence Gathering from other Local Authorities.

3.1 Approach has been made to three other local authorities.

i Newark and Sherwood District Council. This is a District Council with an excellent reputation for being well run and which changed to the Committee System of governance. The chief executive has subsequently informed me that they are reviewing this decision and contemplating a return to the Leader and Executive model. They have set up a members commission with a similar brief to the Task Group and the proposal is to have a video conference with them. The Demographic Services Officer is working with their officer to identify a suitable date and time for this. It is hoped this will be known by the date of the Task Group Meeting.

2. South Gloucestershire Council. A District Council which changed to the committee system. They have recently changed back to the Leader and Executive model. They are willing to share their experiences and have suggested a video conference with their Leader and Chief

Executive followed by a short break and then a second session with opposition Leaders. Again the Democratic Services Officer is seeking to set this up and it is hoped this will be known by the date of the Task Group Meeting. South Gloucestershire have offered to send copies of their relevant reports and I will report at the meeting on content which will be helpful to the Task Group.

3. North Kesteven District Council. This was identified as a District Council where the overview and scrutiny function was working well and from which we may gain ideas for improving this. I will report further at the meeting.

3.2 Members of the task group need to agree the approach to be taken to the video conferences with other local authorities. Do all members want to participate in all sessions or selected representatives to report back to the Working Party.

3.3 Having regard to the previously agreed design principles and the discussion at the last meeting the Working Party should identify key questions and issues they wish to explore with the local authorities. I will bring some suggestions to the meeting.

4. Corporate Priorities

Not Applicable

5. Policy Implications

None to this report

6. Financial Implications

The workplan is within budget. The workplan provides for the financial implications of the recommendation to be assessed.

7. Personnel Implications

None to this report

8. Statutory Considerations

It is proposed to seek the Monitoring Officers view as proposals are agreed

9. Equal Opportunities Considerations

Will be considered in the Task Groups final report

10. Risk Management Implications

None to this report

11. Recommendations

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2. decide who is to attend consultation video conferences with other local authorities
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12. Declarations of Interest/Dispensations Granted

None

13. Background Papers

None

Appendix 1

**BC KLWN
Governance Task Group
Feedback from AD's meeting 18th February,2020**

Positive

The team began with a summary of the positive. They value the importance of working for an organisation which is agile in its decision making. The current system allows for decisions to be made in a timely and business like way.

Context

Recognition that

the political environment has changed with the controlling group having a smaller majority

a perception that presently some members feel marginalised and remote from key decisions, unable to make a meaningful contribution to the governance of the authority BUT it must also be understood that this is not universal and other members are satisfied with their role and are not seeking further commitments

the Cabinet appear more willing to listen to and acknowledge ideas from opposition members e.g. questions at Cabinet meetings

training to assist members to become more effective is important but attendance at training is often low. The ADs consider that there are tools for more active participation and scrutiny which are not utilised and possibly understood.

Areas for improvement

Most time was spent on considering how the governance system could be improved.

The ADs considered a recent example where a decision was made which the officers considered to be a poor one... what were the lessons to be learnt?

Members who influence decisions may base their views on limited interaction with service users

Sometimes these key influencers chose not to disclose the full reasons for their decisions

Decisions can get approved by being “buried” within bigger reports without any evaluation of the options, risk analysis and not being evidence based.

The example was a Council decision and contradicts the view that suggests if Council was to make all decisions they would be better

The new ADs would benefit from a better understanding of the world from a members perspective and how all views political and professional lead to better decisions for the community of KLWN

The interaction of ADs, portfolio holders, Cabinet, scrutiny, opposition members etc would benefit from a greater understanding and openness of how this works.

Scrutiny has lost its way and needs redefining

Scrutiny is aided by having sufficient time for pre scrutiny before a decision is made. Reductions in staff resources leads to a “last minute” culture which doesn’t allow for this time. A complete and high quality forward plan similarly aids pre scrutiny and could be improved.

Questions at cabinet good but is not a substitute for scrutiny

Consider opposition chair of scrutiny but not a return to old system of post scrutiny which was unproductive and ineffective

Reduction in staff resource impacts on the ability to support, encourage and develop the scrutiny process.

Sometimes the absence of having information (the full picture) is the reason for disquiet between Cabinet and opposition groups. Could better use be made of informal briefings of group leaders / all members?

Executive members have important roles in the working of the Council and when new need to be helped to be effective quickly. Training and development for cabinet members needs priority.