Executive Report
Report of Executive Head of Governance
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Date: 9 April 2015

Governance Review
Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group

Recommendation
The Executive is asked:

(1) to note the report of the Joint Scrutiny Committee’s Review of Governance Arrangements task and finish group (Appendix 1);

(2) to consider and comment on the Joint Scrutiny Committee’s own recommendations in respect of that report, following its meeting on 7 April 2015; and

(3) to submit its comments on the Joint Scrutiny Committee’s recommendations for consideration by Council at its meeting on 14 April 2015.

Reason for recommendation:
To enable the Council on 14 April 2015 to consider the Executive’s comments on the recommendations of the Joint Scrutiny Committee in respect of the review of governance arrangements recently conducted.

1. Purpose of report

1.1 The Council agreed the following motion on 7 October 2014:

“It was a Conservative and Liberal Democrat manifesto commitment in 2010 that led to the Localism Act 2011 giving local authorities the freedom to determine for themselves whether to operate an executive system, a committee system or other agreed governance arrangements.

This Council requests the Joint Scrutiny Committee to review all available decision making models and to make recommendations to scrutiny, Executive and full Council on improvements to the governance arrangements.”

1 Minute CO55, Council meeting, Guildford Borough Council, 7 October 2014.
1.2 At its meeting on 13 November 2014, the Joint Scrutiny Committee established a task and finish group to deliver the review of governance arrangements that Council requested it undertake. This task group was required to report its findings and recommendations within the 2014-15 municipal year. The group’s conclusions and recommendations are set out within its report, attached as Appendix 1.

1.3 The group’s report will be considered formally by the Joint Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 7 April 2015. The Joint Scrutiny Committee will agree its own recommendations, which will be circulated to Executive councillors prior to the special meeting. The Executive will be asked to consider and comment on those recommendations and submit its comments to the 14 April meeting of the Council.

2. Strategic priorities

2.1 The Council’s capacity to work effectively and to deliver all aspects of its Strategic Framework is conditioned by its ability to take informed and transparent decisions with openness and inclusivity. The Council’s choice of governance arrangements is fundamental to this. The decision-making structure of the Council should provide a framework of transparent accountability to users, stakeholders, and the wider community.

2.2 The importance of the Council’s chosen decision-making processes cannot be understated. These activities are central to its effectiveness and its ethos. For example, faith in a Council’s decision-making processes can affect relationships: between local people and their Council; between officers and councillors; and amongst councillors. However, if the decision-making process is good, people are more likely to accept the outcomes even if they do not agree with the decision.

3. Task and finish group’s evidence gathering

3.1 At the outset of its review, the group co-opted Mrs Maria Angel, an independent member of the Council’s Corporate Governance and Standards Committee. This decision was taken to help encourage objectivity and to ensure that the wider impacts and implications of the review were considered.

3.2 During the formative stage of its information gathering, the group obtained the advice of Mr Ed Hammond, Head of Programmes (Local Accountability), at the Centre for Public Scrutiny.

3.3 The task and finish group members sought views from stakeholders, that is to say, people, groups, and organisations that had an interest or concern in the governance arrangements of the Council. The task group gathered issues and information from internal stakeholders (councillors and officers) through engagement workshops and online questionnaires. The views of stakeholders external to the Council were collected from engagement workshops, online questionnaires, interviews, and written submissions.

3.4 The group used desk-based research to survey a number of other local authorities that had undertaken, or were committed to, changes in their governance system. In addition, information about governance arrangements was collected from Guildford Borough Council’s neighbouring councils.
Desk-based research was followed up with visits to selected councils. These visits formed a key part of the task group’s investigation and findings. The councils chosen had all reviewed, or were in the process of reviewing, their governance arrangements. For example, Canterbury City Council is preparing for a change to a committee system in May 2015; Tunbridge Wells Borough Council adopted a hybrid system with a leader and executive in 2012; and Mole Valley District Council moved in 2008 to a leader and executive system from a committee system. These visits were preceded by an interview with the former Chief Executive of Sevenoaks District Council, an authority that had adopted a hybrid system within a leader and executive model.2

The task group felt it was important to hear first-hand from the organisers of a petition calling for a referendum on governance change in Guildford. The task group judged it significant that while the petition-organisers (Local Democracy Limited) advocated a formal change to a committee system, they also indicated to the group that a hybrid-model approach might be an acceptable alternative if effective checks and balances were provided.

4. Task and finish group’s findings

4.1 Within their report (principally section 4), the task group identifies areas for improvement in the Council’s governance arrangements. For instance, the task group highlights the value of increased councillor involvement in decisions. The need for increased public awareness of both the Council’s governance arrangements and the role of councillors is also called for.

4.1 The task group is against a formal change from a leader and executive model. The task group argues that such a change is inadvisable (for example, see paragraph 4.3 of the task group report). Also, legislation locks-in a formal governance change for five years – or ten years if the change in governance form is implemented as a result of the referendum.

4.2 The task group recommends that the benefits of the existing leader and executive model of governance be retained in a hybrid model that incorporates two committees advising and making recommendations to the executive. These committees, termed Executive Advisory Boards (EABs) and chaired by a Lead Councillor, would be tasked with pre-decision involvement prior to a decision being taken by the Council’s Executive.

4.3 The task group proposes a profound change to the role of overview and scrutiny within the Council’s governance arrangements. The task group envisages EABs would perform pre-decision challenge and scrutiny of the issues prior to a report being presented to the Executive. Corporate Governance and Standards Committee would undertake scrutiny of financial matters. The number of formal overview and scrutiny committees would be reduced to one. This single overview and scrutiny committee would keep responsibility for call-in3 and for post-decision review of Executive decisions.

2 The legislative framework and the governance options available to local authorities are discussed within section 2 of the task and finish group’s report.
3 The call-in mechanism at Guildford Borough Council: implementation of almost all Executive decisions is delayed for a period of 5 days to provide an opportunity for overview and scrutiny councillors to call-in the decision for consideration by an overview and scrutiny committee.
4.4 While retaining responsibility for its own agenda, there is an expectation that the Council’s overview and scrutiny function will pursue a work programme with an overtly external focus than currently and continue to avoid duplicating other work. Similarly, the task group suggests that overview and scrutiny should seek to increase public engagement through its topic selection and mode of working.

4.5 The task group’s report features steps to improve the involvement of, and consultation with, local ward councillors. (These measures are detailed within paragraphs 4.19 and 4.20 of the task group’s report.)

4.6 The task group identified evidence from external stakeholders that they felt suggests a widespread lack of awareness amongst the public about the Council’s decision-making processes and the work undertaken by councillors. In addition, the task group discerns a lack of understanding amongst the public concerning the checks and balances within which the Council operates. To remedy the failing, the task group advises investigation of ways to increase public awareness and publishing individual councillors’ involvement with working groups, review groups, and task groups.

4.7 The task group recognises that the public want to be better involved in the Council’s decision-making process. The task group requests officers develop ways to engage the public and suggests the Leader and the Executive hold meetings with stakeholders such as parish councils and residents’ associations.

5. Conclusions

5.1 The task group is unconvinced by the case for formal governance change away from the leader and executive model. The task group judges such a change as not in the best interests of the Council or its residents. Rather the task group supports a mixed-model or hybrid approach that essentially combines the leader and executive system with two EABs and streamlines the overview and scrutiny function. The potential advantages of a mixed-model approach include achieving desired outcomes through a relatively quick route that also retains flexibility to introduce further change when needed (and leaves open the option of a formal change if desired).

5.2 If the task group had recommended a formal governance change at this time, it might be interpreted as largely symbolic because the earliest date such change can be introduced is May 2016. While some stakeholders might argue such action is advisable, indeed perhaps necessary to change the local political narrative and discourse, the task group’s investigations essentially support a trial of arrangements under a hybrid model as preferable to a jump to a system un-trialed in Guildford.4

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4 “Un-trialed” because while introducing a committee system of governance is often described by both supporters and opponents as “going back” or a “return,” such representations underplay the extent of change in local government since the 1990s. The committee system of the last century is arguably not a viable option in 2015.
6. **Financial implications**

6.1 If enacted the recommendations of the task and finish group can be expected to carry resource implications, principally financial. The full financial implications of the recommendations will become clearer as further detailed work is undertaken and measures identified.

6.2 The proposed structural changes to governance arrangements will almost inevitably result in increased expenditure. As the table below illustrates, the introduction of two EABs and the reduction to a single overview and scrutiny committee might be expected to increase the headline number of meetings supported from sixty-four to a possible seventy-nine each year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current number of scheduled meetings per annum</th>
<th>Possible number of meetings per annum with 2 EABs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Council</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer &amp; Community Scrutiny Committee</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint Scrutiny Committee</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning Committee</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Licensing Committee</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Governance &amp; Standards Committee</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAB 1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAB 2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Overview &amp; Scrutiny Committee</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL:</strong></td>
<td><strong>64</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.3 Evidence from the councils investigated by the task group suggests supporting EABs can be resource intensive (and demanding of senior officer time).

6.4 In addition, the changed nature and remit of the overview and scrutiny function proposed by the task group could reasonably be expected to require additional officer support and incur fees and expenses for external expert advice. Additional training costs for officers and councillors would seem not improbable.

6.5 Implementation of the recommendations may affect the Members’ Allowances Scheme, but the nature of this impact is difficult to ascertain at this time. It should be noted that a full review of the Members’ Allowances Scheme is to be undertaken in 2015 by Guildford’s Independent Remuneration Panel.

7. **Legal implications**

7.1 There are no legal implications arising directly from this report.
8. **Human Resource implications**

8.1 There will be human resource implications arising from recommendations in the task group’s report, if implemented by the Council, but these are not quantifiable at this stage.

9. **Background papers**

   - Report to Joint Scrutiny Committee, Review of the Council’s Governance Arrangements – a task and finish group approach, 13 November 2014
   - Notes of the Governance Review task and finish group meetings, November 2014 – March 2015.

10. **Appendices**

   Appendix 1 – Report of the Governance Review Task and Finish Group
Review of Governance Arrangements
Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group

Report to the Joint Scrutiny Committee

Guildford Borough Council

Dated: 7 April 2015
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Foreword

The term governance is defined as ‘the action, manner, or system of governing’ and is therefore crucial to the workings and perception of any council within their community. Governance is about how local government bodies ensure that they are doing the right things, in the right way, for the right people, in a timely, inclusive, open, honest and accountable manner. Guildford Borough Council currently operates a Leader and Executive (Cabinet) model, alongside two overview and scrutiny committees. The aim of any governance model is to make sure that decision-making is transparent, efficient and accountable.

The Task and Finish Group comprised a cross-party group of seven councillors, plus a co-opted independent member of the public, supported by officers. Our task was to be open-minded, looking at all options and studying the advantages and disadvantages of all systems.

We looked at what is important in governance, asking a broad group of stakeholders for their opinions, which we used as design principles to assess our current system against those used elsewhere. We looked at options for change to our current system, to reassess how we make and scrutinise decisions, how involved councillors feel in the process and how effectively all stakeholders, including residents, are engaged in the process.

The system chosen by any council will depend on many factors, both political and cultural and one system is not inherently better (or worse) than another. Our criteria from the outset were to be guided by principles, practice, and procedure, and to ignore politics and personalities. The group felt that the process we went through was thorough, positive and engaging and, overall, an excellent example of an in-depth, non-partisan overview and scrutiny investigation.

Following our visits and stakeholder engagement events, we appraised the merits of the feedback we had received. We found that, for some external stakeholders, there was not a clear understanding of:

- how the current system of governance, or other governance options, worked
- the checks and balances in the current system
- the level of opportunity for councillors to inform decision-making by their involvement in various working groups, task and finish and other groups
- the level of opportunity for residents/stakeholders to inform and influence decision-making

The feedback we received from all our stakeholders was both honest and constructive, and we thank them for their clarity.

Our aim in this report is to put forward a solution which addresses the priority issues raised through the review and results in a clearer decision making process which engages more widely in all areas.

As the chairman of the Task and Finish Group, I would like to thank the Task and Finish Group members, together with the various officers who have supported us, for their diligence and hard work in contributing to the review and the proposals we are making. I would also like to thank officers and councillors at other councils for their hospitality and for being honest and forthright in answering our questions.

Councillor Tony Rooth
Chairman, Review of Governance Arrangements Task and Finish Group

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1 Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework (Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE)/Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) 2007)

2 In common with many councils, Guildford Borough Council decided (in 2001) to use the term “Executive” rather than “Cabinet”. In this context the two terms are synonymous
1. **Introduction**

**Background**

1.1 The Task Group membership comprised:

Councillor Tony Rooth (chairman)
Councillor David Goodwin
Councillor Angela Gunning
Councillor Nikki Nelson-Smith
Councillor Jennifer Powell
Councillor Caroline Reeves
Councillor Pauline Searle
Mrs Maria Angel (co-opted independent person)

1.2 The following officers supported the group during its investigations:

Sue Sturgeon (Managing Director)
Satish Mistry (Executive Head of Governance)
John Armstrong (Democratic Services Manager)
Steve Benbough (Policy and Partnerships Officer)
Sophie Butcher (Committee Manager)
James Dearling (Committee Manager)
Carolyn Patterson (PR and Marketing Manager)
Ciara Swan (Democratic Services Assistant – Intern)

**Reasons for the Review**

1.3 We have sitting councillors who have worked with two of the systems of governance available to councils, namely the Leader and Executive system and the former committee system. For a number of reasons, some councillors from all political parties have felt that the current Leader and Executive system used by Guildford Borough Council was not fulfilling the needs of governance.

1.4 This discontent has manifested itself by the tabling, on two separate occasions, of motions to Council seeking agreement to investigate possible changes to our current governance arrangements.

1.5 The first of these, tabled in 2012, noted that many councillors were unfamiliar with differences between the current executive system and the committee system. As a result, a seminar was held to assist councillors in making an informed decision with respect to considering any change, and improve councillors’ understanding of the differences between the two systems. Ed Hammond from the Centre for Public Scrutiny gave a presentation to councillors on this matter. At the time, the Council was also undertaking a separate review of its overview and scrutiny function and, in many respects, consideration of a possible change in governance was overtaken by the scrutiny review, as it was felt that the perceived weaknesses of scrutiny had been largely responsible for the discontent referred to above.

1.6 The second and most recent motion was tabled at the Council meeting on 7 October 2014, and was adopted by the Council as follows:

“It was a Conservative and Liberal Democrat manifesto commitment in 2010 that led to the Localism Act 2011 giving local authorities the freedom to
determine for themselves whether to operate an executive system, a committee system or other agreed governance arrangements.

This Council requests the Joint Scrutiny Committee to review all available decision-making models and to make recommendations to scrutiny, Executive and full Council on improvements to the governance arrangements”.

1.7 Against a background of concern over councillor involvement in the Council’s decisions and issues raised about the Draft Local Plan and its consultation process, a group of local residents started a petition in June 2014. The petition-organisers, Local Democracy Limited, are asking for a referendum on whether the Council should operate under a committee system. If a valid petition is received, a Borough-wide referendum would be held, which would cost in the region of £110,000. If there was an affirmative vote at the referendum, the Council would be obliged to introduce a committee system by no later than May 2016. The Council would then be unable to change its governance arrangements for a period of ten years, unless it held a further referendum.

1.8 Following the adoption of the motion referred to in paragraph 1.6 above, the Joint Scrutiny Committee met on 13 November 2014 and resolved to establish a task and finish group with a broad remit to do this work and to report its findings and recommendations to the Council within the 2014-15 municipal year.

2. Current situation

This section sets out the national legislative framework as well as the local setting.

National context

2.1 Until the passing of the Local Government Act 2000 (‘the 2000 Act’), local government in England operated under a committee system model of governance. The proposals for councils to adopt entirely different models of working began to gather pace in the late 1980s, and over the course of the 1990s, a large amount of research was carried out on preferred models of governance on behalf of the government. The Audit Commission was, in the 1980s and 1990s, particularly vocal about the perceived shortcomings of the committee system. They, and to an extent the former Department of the Environment (which was responsible for local government at that time) were concerned that decision making under the former committee system was:

- Unstrategic (i.e. councillors were involved in micro-management);
- Complicated (i.e. large numbers of committees);
- Slow (i.e. multiple sign-offs of key decisions, including sign-off at an overarching policy and resources (P&R) committee);
- Prone to exclusive control by the majority party (i.e. all the committee chairs, from the majority party, acting as a de facto Executive)

2.2 The 2000 Act (and followed up later by the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007) aimed to give local people a chance to have more say in how they are governed. Councils were required to replace their committee systems and develop separate executive and scrutiny functions. Councils were required to consult local stakeholders and propose one of three types of arrangements for future council governance:
- Directly elected mayor and an Executive appointed by the mayor
- Council leader appointed by the Executive with the Executive appointed either by the council or the leader
- Directly elected mayor and council manager (this model was later withdrawn in the 2007 Act, so is now no longer an option)

2.3 There was a ‘fourth option’ only open to district councils with populations of less than 85,000, which involved continuing with a committee system.

**Directly elected Mayor and Executive**

2.4 Initially, a directly elected mayor could only be established following an affirmative vote at a referendum. Since 2007, councils have been empowered to establish an elected mayor by resolution. The majority of referenda on creating elected mayors have resulted in ‘no’ votes. Currently, 15 councils out of a total of 326 in England have directly elected mayors. This figure does not include the Mayor of London and the Greater London Authority, which are covered by separate legislation and have quite different powers to other directly elected mayors. Councils with elected mayors do not have powers over and above those available to councils operating a Leader and Executive model. Proposals have also been made for ‘metro mayors’ or city-region mayors, covering geographical areas wider than single local authorities.

**Leader and Executive**

2.5 This is the governance system that most councils operate. In some councils, individual members of the Executive have decision-making powers; in others, decisions have to be made by the whole Executive. The Executive is led by a leader, who is elected by full council for a term determined by the council itself or on a four yearly basis (and will usually be the leader of the largest party on the council). These councils must have at least one overview and scrutiny committee. The Executive comprises a group of no more than ten councillors and is responsible for executive functions, with the remaining councillors responsible for setting the budget and policy framework within which the Executive must operate, supporting policy development, and scrutinising the performance of the Executive.

2.6 Following amendments to the 2000 legislation in 2007, the leader and executive model was modified with the introduction of the concept of a “strong leader”. Under this model, the leader elected by the Council appoints up to nine other councillors to the Executive (including a deputy leader) and determines their respective areas of responsibility. The new style leader became responsible for the discharge of all executive functions within the council and could choose how to discharge those functions.

**The Committee System**

2.7 Since the Localism Act 2011, this option is now available to all councils. As stated above, it was previously available only to district councils with populations under 85,000. Committee system councils make most decisions in committees, which are made up of a mix of councillors from all political parties. These councils may have one or more overview and scrutiny committees but are not required to.

2.8 It is worth noting that the committee systems being introduced by a number of councils under the powers now available in the Localism Act 2011 bear little resemblance to the committee systems operated by all councils prior to the
introduction of the 2000 Act. The pre-2000 committee systems were characterised by committees with specific, service-based responsibilities focusing on operational matters and with little delegation of powers to officers, which meant that a great deal of time at meetings of those committees dealt with mundane, operational matters. The modern, post Localism Act, committee systems have, to some extent, attempted to address some of the shortcomings with the introduction of committees with greater cross-cutting areas of responsibility and the retention of comprehensive schemes of delegation of powers to officers to deal with the operational management of services.

Hybrid arrangements

2.9 There are variations for each of these models that can lead councils to adopt hybrid approaches; typically, this is a hybrid between Leader and Executive model and the committee system (with such an approach usually seen legally as being a modified version of the Leader and Executive system, and therefore not requiring a formal change under the Localism Act). Councils also have the option of suggesting an approach of their own to the Secretary of State. No detailed criteria have been set out for how the Secretary of State will come to a decision about whether or not to approve any option suggested under this part of the Act.

Local context

2.10 The ‘strong leader’ model was introduced in Guildford (and other non-metropolitan district councils) in May 2011. The Council also operates two overview and scrutiny committees whose responsibilities include holding the Executive to account, performance monitoring and policy development. The two committees meet occasionally as a Joint Scrutiny Committee to consider matters of mutual interest, including the Leader’s Annual Report. The Council’s current decision-making structure is set out in the organogram attached as Appendix 1.

2.11 The Leader appoints up to nine other councillors to the Executive who, in Guildford, are referred to as Lead Councillors.

3. Process and evidence

Approach of the Task and Finish group

3.1 This Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group was set up with cross party support, including a co-opted independent person, to consider:

(a) Key attributes of an effective governance structure (which will inform the task and finish group’s final recommendations as to which governance model would best meet such key attributes);

(b) Factors driving the calls for change; and

(c) Devising the best solution relevant to the Council’s needs

The Task and Finish Group needed to understand these first so that a suitable governance system could be designed and evaluated.

3.2 Throughout the review, the Task and Finish Group’s approach sought to be guided by principles, practice and procedure and to ignore politics and personalities.
3.3 The first meeting of the Task and Finish Group was held on 26 November 2014 and it met on a weekly basis to undertake its work in the timescale requested by the Council at its October meeting.

3.4 We agreed that we needed to achieve a shared baseline for what the principles of good governance are before designing a governance system that would best deliver these principles.

3.5 The design principles would also allow us to ensure we were working towards principles that applied to all and not just the Task and Finish Group, and would provide a mechanism to enable a monitoring and evaluation of the change once implemented (rather than measuring outputs such as speed of decision-making).

3.6 The potential high-level, core design principles we agreed to explore with stakeholders were six fold:

- Focusing on the purpose of the council and on outcomes for the community and creating and implementing a vision for the local area
- Councillors and officers working together to achieve a common purpose with clearly defined functions and roles
- Promoting the values of the council and demonstrating the values of good governance through upholding high standards of conduct and behaviour
- Taking informed and transparent decisions which are subject to effective scrutiny and managing risk
- Developing the capacity and capability of councillors and officers to be effective
- Communicating and engaging with local people and other stakeholders to ensure robust public accountability

These principles reflected those referred to by SOLACE/CIPFA in their Good governance in Local Government framework (2007). The Task and Finish Group recognised that, in the context of the Council’s governance arrangements, many of these principles were matters affecting the culture of the organisation rather than its structure.

3.7 We felt that an analysis of other councils who had made changes to their governance system would give a wide-ranging view of the issues and challenges experienced by them and the solutions they introduced or considered.

3.8 We resolved to engage in the widest possible way with all those who may be working in or affected by decisions made by the Council.

Formulating design principles for the Council’s decision making process

3.9 It was agreed that we would invite various stakeholders to present to us their thoughts on governance, to visit other authorities who had looked at the issues around governance change, to engage councillors, council officers and stakeholders in consultation meetings and anonymous questionnaires and anonymous surveys, and to hold a public consultation through an online anonymous survey. Extensive desktop research underpinned and informed this approach.

3.10 We also reviewed a number of documents relating to good governance framework, including:
- Good governance in Local Government framework (SOLACE/CIPFA - 2007)
- Changing governance arrangements- Policy Briefing 4 (Centre for Public Scrutiny – December 2010)
- Musical chairs - Practical issues for local authorities in moving to a committee system (Centre for Public Scrutiny – April 2012)
- Rethinking governance - Practical steps for councils considering changes to their governance arrangements (Local Government Association – January 2014)

Stakeholders’ views

3.11 Our review reveals a significant level of agreement between internal stakeholders (that is to say, councillors and officers) about the strengths and weaknesses of the current arrangements. The evidence we used to draw this conclusion was from information gathered at separate engagement events. Unsurprisingly, we found that external stakeholders might not possess as high an understanding of the current system as internal stakeholders. (Although we did note that the awareness and knowledge of internal stakeholders about the decision-making process was not uniformly high.)

3.12 We discovered broad understanding and agreement for the range of key, high-level design principles. This support was embedded in an appreciation of good governance that was common to all groups. While differences among stakeholders concerning specific, detailed objectives can be distinguished, it is clear to us that there is much unanimity concerning the route forward. For example, the Council must convey more clearly the opportunities for involvement in the decision-making process available to all councillors and stakeholders, and the measures taken to ensure that decisions are taken in accordance with the law and the Council’s Constitution.

Workshops

3.13 To help collect the views of councillors, the corporate management team, senior officers, and external stakeholders we ran separate engagement workshops. The theme for each was *What is good governance?* The format for each was tailored according to the circumstances and the participants (as detailed in Appendix 2). For instance, external stakeholders were asked to identify and prioritise key design features for any new governance arrangements for the Council, whilst internal stakeholders, who would be more familiar with the existing system, were asked to identify and rank the strengths and weaknesses of our current arrangements as well as identifying and prioritising key design principles. The results of these workshops were supplemented by separate, online questionnaires for councillors, all officers, and members of the public. The responses to the questionnaires are summarised in Appendix 3.

3.14 All the workshops included a whole group session to help identify the qualities and characteristics of good governance desired for Guildford Borough Council. The results of each workshop are considered below:

The councillors’ workshop was attended by twenty-seven councillors, including the Leader of the Council and five lead councillors. It prioritised the following governance principles:
• Timely decision-making
• Greater involvement of ward councillors
• Accountable decision-making
• Scheduling of scrutiny business to provide an early opportunity to influence policy formulation
• Engagement of all councillors
• Public trust and knowledge

Councillors who were unable to attend the workshop were able to contribute their ideas and opinions through an anonymous, online survey.

We invited parish councils, residents’ associations and local amenity groups to a workshop for external stakeholders. Thirty-five representatives of these organisations attended the workshop (see Appendix 4). While there was general agreement across all the stakeholders as to the essential points of good governance, the following were identified as key design principles for any redesigned arrangements:

• Agree and deliver objectives
• Value for money
• Accountability (to community)
• Communication (two-way, clear, concise)
• Evidence-based decisions
• Simplicity and accessibility
• Honesty, integrity, trustworthiness and transparency
• Less politics/more consensual decision-making
• Define the “community”
• Policy visibility
• Inclusiveness and meaningful engagement (stakeholders)

Members of the Task and Finish Group who observed the event felt that in some instances the issues raised suggested a lack of public knowledge about the work and role of councillors. We therefore recommend the value of more transparency and an increased profile for councillors’ current involvement in the decision-making process: for example, at the beginning of the decision-making process as members of working and review groups, panels, and other task and finish groups.

3.14.3 Corporate Management Team (CMT) Engagement – 2 February 2015
We held a group interview with the members of the CMT to seek the views of the Managing Director and Executive Heads of Service on our future governance arrangements, and to seek their views on the principles of good governance, the strengths of our current arrangements and areas for further development and improvement. The CMT recognised the strong element of accountability in the current governance arrangements and the historical weaknesses in overview and scrutiny and the improvement in overview and scrutiny that had been achieved over the past two years. We heard that at the time of the 2000 Act, there had been awareness within local government that the executive function would inevitably develop sooner than both the overview and scrutiny function and councillor engagement. CMT questioned whether a formal change of arrangements was the best way to achieve increased councillor engagement.
3.14.4 Senior Officer Engagement – 4 February 2015

Twenty-three senior officers engaged in a similar workshop to that held for the councillors. In essence, this group felt that the strong leader system ensured speedier decision-making and accountability. Another key finding from the event was a desire for the involvement of councillors in policy formulation and strategic decisions but not in operational matters. Officers emphasised the advantages of making effective operational decisions independently of councillors.

The view was expressed that the size of Lead Councillors’ portfolios could be too large and might be more manageable. In addition, officers felt that Lead Councillors taking more individual executive decisions would be beneficial. While we understand that the Leader of the Council decides the responsibilities of Lead Councillors, we consider this an area for further development. It is also apparent to us that some officers need greater awareness about the role of councillors and the advantages of involving councillors in matters relating to their respective wards. More effective use of the induction programme for new staff was one method of addressing this matter.

3.14.5 Online Questionnaires

As mentioned above, councillors, officers, and the public were invited to share their views on governance through anonymous online questionnaires. While the format was tailored to the target audience, we sought views on the six potential high-level principles referred to in paragraph 3.6 above. The sentiments of these principles were broadly endorsed by all stakeholder groups.

Although we encouraged engagement with the public in relation to the review, the actual level of response was very low. Those who did respond generally supported the key design principles referred to above. A number of responses also referred to the importance of focussing on care and protection for the community, preventing undue influence and ensuring all councillors could comment on decisions.


As the key external stakeholders interested in changing the governance arrangements of the Council we felt it important to meet the petition organisers (Local Democracy Limited) and hear their concerns and views first-hand. Three representatives of Local Democracy Limited attended a meeting with us. In summary, the petition organisers did not feel that the Strong Leader and Executive system represented all residents and indicated that it was inherently undemocratic on the basis that too much power was concentrated into too few hands. We feel it is significant that although the aim of the petition is a formal change to a committee system, the petition organisers did indicate that a hybrid system could be an acceptable alternative to the current arrangements, subject to the provision of effective checks and balances. It was also noted that moving to a hybrid system could be achieved unilaterally with immediate effect and its effectiveness monitored, whereas a formal change in system could not occur before May 2016 at the earliest and would be binding for five years (or ten years following a referendum).

3.14.7 Engagement with Local Media – 11 February 2015

We invited key local media to meet with us. Representatives who attended expressed the view that Governance as a topic was not very engaging for the public, and would only be of interest to anyone with issues over decisions that had been made. In terms of newsworthiness, the topic was not viable, but the comments by those who had an opinion about it would be newsworthy – and inevitably they would be negative in nature.
Visits to and consideration of governance arrangements and change elsewhere

External advice – Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS)

3.15 We sought the advice and guidance of Ed Hammond of the CfPS at the beginning of this process. The CfPS is a charity whose principal focus is on scrutiny, accountability and good governance, both in the public sector and amongst those people and organisations who deliver publicly funded services.

3.16 Mr Hammond advised that the governance change options available to councils are best viewed as a spectrum rather than specific models. Governance change can often be viewed (incorrectly) as a panacea for all the Council’s perceived political ills. Identical systems will operate differently in different councils due to variables such as the size of the majority party, the culture of the leadership, and the perceived public engagement in decision-making. Changing a council’s governance structure does not, in itself, make the organisation more open to engagement.

3.17 Mr Hammond explained the background to the reviews undertaken by Fylde Borough Council and Canterbury City Council. Fylde held a referendum based on a fractious relationship, due to a number of issues, between the Council leadership and the petition organisers (Civic Awareness Group). Canterbury City Council voted for a change from an Executive model to a committee system when faced with a petition calling for a referendum on the change. The petition was organised by a protest group, supported by a small group of backbenchers from the majority party, who were unhappy with decisions made on the Council’s Local Plan.

Paper-based evidence

3.18 With guidance from Mr Hammond, we surveyed a number of other authorities, which had investigated and implemented changes to their governance system, or were in the process of implementing such changes. The authorities selected were:

- Brighton & Hove City Council
- Canterbury City Council
- Fylde Borough Council
- London Borough of Sutton
- Mole Valley District Council
- Reading Borough Council
- Sevenoaks District Council
- Stroud District Council
- Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

3.19 Officers compiled a table showing, for each council, the drivers for change, the principal elements of its governance structure, details of any review carried out of the effectiveness of the structure, details of the cost of implementing changes and the extent to which the public and other stakeholders were engaged in the change process. A copy of this evidence paper is attached as Appendix 5.

3.20 We also gathered information from Guildford’s neighbouring councils on whether they had undertaken, or were contemplating, a review of their governance structure and what works well (and not so well) with their current governance structure. This information is attached as Appendix 6.
Visits

3.21 As a Task and Finish Group, we agreed to visit a number of other councils (or invite them to visit us) who had looked at the issues around changing the system of governance, how they arrived at the decisions they took, whom they consulted and how the changes would be implemented and reviewed. It became very clear from the people we met that each council had its own character and that there would not be a ‘one size fits all’ solution. Any council has a context, culture and style of its own, and governance has to be created to fit their specific dynamic.

3.22 We decided to visit Canterbury City Council (as it was in the process of changing to a committee system in May 2015), Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (as it had adopted a ‘hybrid’ leader and executive structure in 2012) and Mole Valley (as it had changed from a committee system to a leader and executive structure in 2008). These visits were preceded by a visit to us from Robin Hales, former Chief Executive of Sevenoaks District Council, which had adopted a ‘hybrid’ leader and executive arrangement.

3.22.1 Sevenoaks District Council – 3 December 2014
Mr Hales indicated that Sevenoaks had struggled with the scrutiny process with non-executive councillors feeling disengaged from decision-making and at the “back-end of the conveyor belt acting as a quality control mechanism rather than having any meaningful input”. At the time of change to the ‘hybrid’ structure, Sevenoaks had a majority group of 48 councillors out of 54 with a five member Executive. The main drivers for change were members of the majority group. The Executive was perceived as being too remote and non-inclusive with no apparent succession planning for the development of non-executive councillors.

The Executive is now wholly advised by five Cabinet Advisory Committees\(^3\) (CACs), each of which has an area of responsibility covered by a lead councillor from the Executive, who chairs the committee, although the CACs are free to elect a chairman of their choice. CACs have a degree of autonomy to decide what goes to Executive, including initiating their own research and reviews and instructing officers in that regard. The benefit of CACs has been more councillors having a greater level of knowledge and expertise on the specific areas of responsibility.

The new structure was reviewed after 12 months’ operation. This found that councillors are now generally more engaged in, and have more influence over, decision-making. There had been concerns that a more elaborate process would slow down speed of decision-making. The Executive still meets monthly and the CACs all meet before the Executive meets in the cycle so that they can influence Executive decision-making.

Although councillors are more engaged under the ‘hybrid’ structure, it has proved to be more resource hungry particularly at senior officer level and for Committee Services.

3.22.2 Canterbury City Council – 28 January 2015
The Task and Finish Group was advised that the City Council reconsidered the governance options in light of:

\(^3\) Sevenoaks refers to its Executive as “Cabinet”, hence the use of the term “Cabinet Advisory Committees”
• a petition for a referendum on changing governance to a committee system organised by the Campaign for Democracy in the Canterbury District (CDCD), which was an umbrella organisation for several campaign and pressure groups in the area, many of which had been dissatisfied with past Council decisions.

• a boundary review conducted in 2013 (the outcome of which reduced the number of councillors from 50 to 39) and

• a light touch governance review by the Council’s Political Management Members Panel (PMMP).

Among its findings, the PMMP concluded that committee systems were often identified as collegiate and inclusive, while the Leader and Executive model was seen as promoting strategic oversight.

The Council’s Executive became a focal point for dissatisfaction with decisions, notably the Local Plan; CDCD campaigners did not accept that a committee system would not necessarily result in different outcomes. The CDCD campaign for governance change also fed into political issues within the majority party at Canterbury City Council, that is to say, pushes for governance change in 2014 were both external and internal to the Council.

The CDCD referendum petition was halted in July 2014 by the decision by the City Council to change to a committee system of governance – a decision binding for five years from the date of resolution. The new system will be implemented in May 2015.

After the July 2014 Council resolution, the PMMP acted as a Commission to develop the details of the committee system structure. Although the Commission undertook a consultation exercise which sought responses to particular propositions to be taken into account in the design of the committee system, there was no wide-ranging public consultation due to time constraints with the need to implement the new structure by May 2015, and a lack of interest by the wider public. Four specific design principles were identified by the Commission to provide a framework for Canterbury City Council’s committee system structure: engagement, economy, efficiency, and effectiveness. The potential advantages of a hybrid model, possibly adopting a piloted or stepped approach to governance change, were not considered by the Council. The chosen structure was similar to the pre-2002 committee structure of Canterbury City Council.

Three service committees would be aligned to functions rather than officer structures:

• Policy and Resources Committee
• Regeneration and Property Committee
• Community Committee

The Policy and Resources Committee will provide strategic oversight and have greater financial and policy-making powers than the other service committees – “a first amongst equals.” The Council has decided not to include overview and scrutiny in its new structure, but it does have a Decision Review Committee, which has the power to review decisions of the three service committees.

3.22.3 Tunbridge Wells Borough Council - 18 February 2015
The Task and Finish Group was advised that a primary reason for change to a ‘hybrid’ leader and executive system was a lack of councillor engagement in
decision-making at the Council, with those outside the Executive not feeling involved. The Executive had been seen as not listening to the recommendations and views of overview and scrutiny, call-ins of Executive decisions were frequent, and the then Leader’s leadership style was a factor supporting change.

In 2010, a motion of no confidence in the Council’s Leader within a meeting of the majority group and his consequent standing down as Leader was a catalyst for governance change. The change in governance arrangements enacted in 2012 was in part a reaction against the Council’s previous political leadership, which had been characterised as lacking transparency. The Task and Finish Group was informed that the main driver for change came from backbenchers from the majority group wanting to improve the decision-making process.

The ‘hybrid’ system established by Tunbridge Wells involved three Cabinet Advisory Boards\(^4\) (CABs) to consider all the items on the Council’s Forward Plan prior to final decisions by Executive, with a provision for taking urgent items. The CABs are chaired by a cabinet member, as it was felt that this encourages lead councillors to take greater responsibility for decisions. The CABs afforded an opportunity for non-cabinet members to scrutinise and shape matters before formal consideration by Executive.

Tunbridge Wells has one Overview and Scrutiny committee, chaired by a councillor from the majority group, which scrutinises issues raised by councillors, often related to the wider borough.

Backbenchers felt more informed and engaged with the new system. They benefited from a programme of member information sessions, which deliver 1-2 briefings each month on topical or key projects. Officers are expected to advise relevant ward councillors in advance of events in their localities and keep them informed. Communication and transparency with residents was seen to improve, aided by regular meetings with key stakeholders such as the chairmen of parish councils and the Town Forum\(^5\) to notify them about the Council’s business and receive feedback.

### 3.22.4 Mole Valley District Council – 18 February 2015

The Task and Finish Group noted that Mole Valley had, for some time, been under no overall control politically with occasional periods of control by a majority party; elections are conducted by thirds (i.e. elections for a third of the seats are held every year for three years). In addition, many of its services have been externalised, thereby reducing some of the need for meetings with councillor involvement. There has been little consensus among Mole Valley councillors about a preferred system of governance; views on the merits of the committee system and the Leader and Executive system tended to vary between political groups.

In 2007, during a period of one party control, a consultation was undertaken with residents about changing the Council’s structure and a move from a committee system to a Leader and Executive model was approved and implemented in 2008. Mole Valley as a council with a population of less than 85,000 could have retained a committee system.

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\(^4\) Tunbridge Wells also name their Executive as “Cabinet”

\(^5\) The Town Forum is a partnership between Residents’ Representatives and ward Councillors in the unparished area of Tunbridge Wells town and its purpose is to address local issues.
The drivers for a change to an executive model had been:

(i) Belief that an executive model would deliver improved public accountability with clearly identified responsibilities;
(ii) Streamlined decision-making, delivering greater efficiency and effectiveness;
(iii) Closer working between councillors and officers to develop the Council’s strategic vision; and
(iv) More democratic working due to the clear split between the roles of the executive and scrutiny.

In 2013, a working group had reconsidered the question of whether to change governance system. The Council voted to retain the Executive model. The Leader gave an undertaking that decisions with “significant” implications for the district would be submitted to the Council before consideration by the Executive. Furthermore, if Council made a specific recommendation then the Executive would not go against this. (The Executive’s decision to formally oppose Gatwick’s expansion is an example of this understanding in action.) The Task and Finish Group was advised that there was no definition of “significant” as such matters, it was suggested, would be obvious. This undertaking in respect of decisions with significant implications is informal, and could change if the Leader changed, as there was no specific provision for it in the Council’s Constitution.

4. Conclusions

Governance Review - Proposals

4.1 As set out in previous sections of this report, the Task and Finish Group has undertaken extensive research and consultation on the principles of good governance and potential decision-making structures. There will be tensions between achieving some of the objectives identified. For example, increased engagement by councillors may come at the expense of speed of decision-making or the number of meetings needed. The proposals set out in this section of the report seek to balance some of these competing priorities, whilst always seeking to retain a focus on high quality decision-making.

Proposed Governance Model

4.2 The Task and Finish Group is clear that any form of governance model has strengths and weaknesses. Indeed, the Local Government Act 2000 was introduced in response to increasing concerns about the then local government committee system. Perceived disadvantages of the committee system included:

- re-enforcing a silo mentality, which meant cross-cutting issues could be difficult to identify and address;
- more difficult to deliver broad corporate priorities;
- widely considered to be inefficient, slow in decision-making and overly focused on operational matters rather than policy and results;
- whilst open on the surface, decisions in reality were taken by a ruling group (or a small number of committee chairmen from the ruling group) behind closed doors;
- hard to know who is responsible for decisions (accountability questioned);
- committees could avoid taking responsibility for difficult decisions; and
- a perception of high level of political influence in all decisions where the ruling party has a big majority.
4.3 The introduction of executive forms of governance helped to address some of these issues in terms of improving the timeliness of decision-making, clear accountability for decisions and dealing with cross-cutting strategic issues. Scrutiny committees also brought new opportunities for councillors to take part in the development of policy, challenge and review areas of concern and engage external partners and the public, and the potential for a wider engagement by councillors when scrutiny is well planned and chaired. The Task and Finish Group is clear in its view that it would not be in the best interests of the Council or its residents to lose these benefits through a committee system form of governance. In short, a formal binding jump to a committee system would be injudicious at this time.

4.4 However, the Task and Finish Group recognises that there are areas for improvement in our existing executive arrangements, some of which have been identified through this review process. For example:

- councillors not on the executive can feel disengaged with the decision-making process;
- non-executive councillors may feel that they have less contact with officers and access to information;
- responsibility can be seen to be placed in the hands of a few.

4.5 Whilst formally maintaining the benefits of an executive form of governance, the Task and Finish Group has developed its proposals with a view to:

- making all councillors feel involved in part of the process of running the Council (especially backbench councillors from all political groups);
- drawing on all the talents and interests of councillors;
- enabling experienced councillors to develop near-professional knowledge and competence, whilst allowing new councillors to learn quickly; and
- increasing engagement with stakeholders and the public.

4.6 The Task and Finish Group felt that an elected mayor would work against these objectives by further concentrating powers in the hands of an individual. It would, therefore, not support the adoption of this form of executive governance model. The comments received from stakeholders and the public as part of this review, which tended to support more inclusivity in decision-making would also be difficult to reconcile with an elected mayor model.

4.7 The Task and Finish Group believes that the benefits of the existing Leader and executive arrangements can be retained, whilst taking measures to improve decision-making processes and inclusiveness, through the adoption of a hybrid model combining elements of both the Leader and Executive model and the committee system.

4.8 An added advantage with this is that whilst a decision for a complete change in governance structure (that is to say, from the current Leader and Executive model to a committee system or directly elected mayor) would tie the Council down for an extended period, moving to a hybrid model retains the flexibility to continually adapt and improve the model in the light of experience.

4.9 The Task and Finish Group recommends that the Council’s decision-making culture should continue to promote the following:

- Accountability
Executive Advisory Boards

4.10 It is recommended that, in order to secure greater involvement of all councillors in policy and significant decisions, the Council should establish two politically balanced executive advisory boards. The boards would consider and make recommendations on relevant matters prior to their formal consideration by the Executive. Their terms of reference, which would be reviewed annually by the Council, would be aligned to the themes of our Corporate Plan. This would emphasise their role in driving our corporate priorities and give councillors more scope to serve on the boards that best suit their skills and experience.

4.11 Executive advisory boards would have a degree of autonomy to decide what matters they should refer to the Executive and to initiate their own research and reviews, including instructing officers in this regard. They could also set up their own panels or working groups to look at specific issues as and when required.

4.12 Each board would meet in advance of the relevant scheduled meeting of the Executive and would be chaired by an appropriate Lead Councillor. This link with a Lead Councillor would provide strong representation of the views of the board at subsequent Executive meetings. Other Lead Councillors would be expected to attend board meetings as and when required, but in a non-voting capacity. All other voting members of the board would be non-Executive councillors.

4.13 Whilst the detail of how the executive advisory boards would operate, including their composition, would be a matter for the new Council to determine, we envisage that, in essence, their role would be pre-scrutinising Executive matters, thereby informing decisions taken by the Executive. Dependent on the matter, this may involve consideration of a discussion paper at a very early stage in respect of a major issue and/or a draft report prior to its formal consideration by the Executive. We would also envisage the executive advisory boards playing a vital role in budget preparation.

Overview and Scrutiny

4.14 The Task and Finish Group is very clear that effective scrutiny remains a vital part of the Council’s wider system of checks and balances. Under the new proposed governance system, it is recommended that one overview and scrutiny committee should be retained. The loss of one scrutiny committee should not in any way be taken as a sign of any reduction in the importance of scrutiny within the Council, especially when taken together with proposed introduction of the two new Executive Advisory Boards.

4.15 It is not envisaged that the new overview and scrutiny committee would undertake the business currently being overseen by our existing two committees. In any event, much of that business would transfer to the new executive advisory boards. The new committee would be responsible for setting its own agenda, but it is envisaged that innovative ways would be found to scrutinise matters of concern outside the formal committee process. This could include the commissioning of reports and task and finish groups, the creation of specialist sub-committees for particular issues (e.g.
Freedom Leisure and G Live contract monitoring) or holding select committee or public hearings. Through its topic selection and mode of working, the committee could also seek to use scrutiny as a forum for public engagement in matters of local concern. The committee would retain responsibility for call-in and post-Executive decision review.

4.16 Subject to Council approval, this could be reviewed in a year’s time and if there is too much work to be scheduled within one scrutiny committee, this matter could be revisited.

4.17 We recommend that the chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should be a councillor appointed by the Committee who is preferably not from the majority political group or a chairman of any other committee.

Corporate Governance and Standards Committee

4.18 The Corporate Governance and Standards Committee undertakes, as part of its terms of reference, significant monitoring and reviewing of the Council’s corporate governance and audit and accounts activities. The Task and Finish Group recognises the importance of this committee to the Council, particularly in the way in which it supports the overview and scrutiny function through ongoing scrutiny of financial matters, including its proposed expanded remit on the treasury management function and budget monitoring.

Local Ward Councillors

4.19 A common frustration heard during the review was that local councillors were not sufficiently aware of or consulted on matters impacting on their wards. Officers accepted that improvements could be made in this area and changes have already been made to some internal communications channels.

4.20 Amongst other things to improve communications with councillors and officers’ understanding of the councillor’s role, the Task and Finish Group recommends that:

(a) report authors routinely inform and/or consult with and record the comments of local ward councillors, where appropriate, in reports and amend report templates to include provision for this;

(b) provision is made in the procedures for the development of capital bids to routinely inform and/or consult with and record the comments of relevant ward councillors, where appropriate;

(c) powers delegated to officers be reviewed to require consultation with, or notification to, local ward councillors in appropriate cases;

(d) in the email sent to all councillors notifying them of the publication of an agenda, officers set out the list of items on the agenda (this has already been implemented)

(e) new staff induction training includes an element on the role of councillors.

Public Communication and Engagement
4.21 It became clear through the review process that there was widespread lack of awareness amongst the public about decision-making processes and the work undertaken by councillors. We feel that the public do not know that many councillors are involved in policy development and decision-making through working groups, task and finish groups, briefings and seminars adds to the perception that power is concentrated within the Executive. There is also a lack of understanding of the tight checks and balances and ethical codes within which the Council operates.

4.22 The Task and Finish Group recognises that governance issues do not readily grab the public’s attention, but recommends that the officers investigate (and report back on) ways that we can improve public awareness about:

(a) the decision-making processes, roles and opportunities for engagement by councillors (i.e. what councillors do);

(b) the involvement of individual councillors by a public record on the website, listing all working groups, review groups, task & finish and other groups that councillors are involved with; and

(c) the various internal and external checks and balances within which the Council operates.

A list of working groups, review groups, task and finish and other groups that councillors have been involved in over the past 12 months is attached, for information, as Appendix 7.

4.23 The Task and Finish Group also noted that the introduction of webcasting of Council meetings had been welcomed by members of the public and the local media. Whilst very dependent on the subject under discussion, there is an appetite from the public to be informed and involved in decisions of particular interest to them.

4.24 The Task and Finish Group recommends that the officers explore (and report back on) ways to better engage the public in decision-making processes.

5. Recommendations

(1) That the Council’s decision-making culture should continue to promote the following:
   - Accountability
   - Transparency
   - High ethical standards
   - Involvement and engagement

(2) That, in order to secure greater involvement of councillors in policy/significant decisions prior to formal consideration by the Executive, the Council should establish two politically balanced executive advisory boards.

(3) That the terms of reference of the executive advisory boards be aligned to themes in the Corporate Plan and be reviewed at the Council’s Selection meeting each year.

(4) That each executive advisory board be chaired by a lead councillor.
(5) That meetings of the executive advisory boards be held before each relevant scheduled meeting of the Executive.

(6) That the existing scrutiny committees be dissolved and replaced by one overview and scrutiny committee, which shall be responsible primarily for post decision review of Executive decisions and wider external scrutiny, including the commissioning of task and finish groups.

(7) That the chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should be a councillor appointed by the Committee who is preferably not from the majority political group or a chairman of any other committee.

(8) That the importance of the Corporate Governance and Standards Committee to the Council be recognised, particularly in the way in which it supports the overview and scrutiny function through ongoing scrutiny of financial matters, including its proposed expanded remit on the treasury management function and budget monitoring.

(9) That, in order to improve consultation with/information for ward councillors, officers be asked to ensure that:

   (a) report authors routinely inform and/or consult with and record the comments of local ward councillors, where appropriate, in reports and amend report templates to include provision for this;

   (b) provision is made in the procedures for the development of capital bids to routinely inform and/or consult with and record the comments of relevant ward councillors, where appropriate;

   (c) a review of powers delegated to officers be undertaken to require consultation with, or notification to, local ward councillors in appropriate cases; and

   (d) new staff induction training includes an element on the role of councillors.

(10) That officers be asked to investigate (and report back on) ways in which the Council could improve public awareness about:

   (a) the decision-making processes, roles and opportunities for engagement by councillors (that is to say, what councillors do);

   (b) the involvement of individual councillors by a public record on the website, listing all working groups, review groups, task & finish and other groups that councillors are involved with; and

   (c) the various internal and external checks and balances within which the Council operates.

(11) That the officers be asked to explore (and report back on) ways to better engage the public in the Council’s decision-making processes, including the possible holding of meetings by the Leader of the Council and the Executive to establish dialogue with stakeholders including, but not limited to, parish councils and residents’ associations.
Appendices

Appendix 1: The Council’s current decision-making structure
Appendix 2: Format of workshops with internal and external stakeholders
Appendix 3: Results of online questionnaires
Appendix 4: List of organisations attending the External Stakeholder Engagement event on 27 January 2015
Appendix 5: Information on councils that had changed or were in the process of changing governance
Appendix 6: Information on any change in governance contemplated by neighbouring councils
Appendix 7: List of working groups, review groups, task and finish and other groups that councillors have been involved in over the past 12 months.