



**West Devon
Borough
Council**

Effective Local Government in West Devon

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Purpose



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- To demonstrate to the Local Government Boundary Commission that we have thought through our submission on numbers
 - NOT to bounce Members into any decision on alternative arrangements
 - Can conclude that none of the options set out in this presentation will materially affect the number of Councillors needed
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- Commission will form its view on size by considering:
 - Governance Arrangements – How we take decisions
 - Scrutiny – of our own decisions and outside bodies
 - Regulatory role
 - Representational role – community engagement, casework and representing Council with local partner organisations
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An opportunity to “think the unthinkable”

or

Build off basic “principles for the future”

or

Adjust

or

Do Nothing



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Given

1. The Electoral Review
2. The O&S review pending; to report December 2013
3. The deferred item from Annual Council to redress balance in workload between Resources and Community Services Committees

The Do Nothing option should be discounted

The “Adjust” Option



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Could lead to rebalancing of workload between 2
Committees plus changes to the operation of Overview
& Scrutiny

BUT

Informal discussions led by Chief Executive have indicated a clear appetite amongst Members for a more significant review which, whilst not amounting to thinking the unthinkable, suggests a need to re-think from basic principles of governance

Some old thinking that needs to be jettisoned



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- Every Member has to have a committee role
 - O&S role bars Members from other roles
 - Committees and positions on them are (more or less) formally fixed over the four year term of the Council
 - Continual Professional Development (CPD) is the exclusive province of officers
 - Likewise annual appraisal
 - Members' time is not negotiable
 - Individual Members should expect/be expected to know/decide everything
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Rethinking from Basic Principles



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As we move forward we need to be aware that:

- the pace of change is accelerating
 - Members and governance arrangements have largely escaped unscathed whilst officer functions and structures have radically altered
 - whatever is put in place needs to be affordable given the state of WDBC finances
 - simplicity and flexibility will need to be key watch words
 - political role is different from managerial role
 - Members need to “know enough” to represent WDBC well externally
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Some strengths to build on



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- Task and Finish Groups work well and suit Members where they play to skills, experience and interests of individuals AND the groups are clearly focused; working to a plan; keeping other Members informed
 - Members bring individual expertise, experience and strengths which we could make more use of
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Representational Role



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- Casework, local community and representational role forms the essential job description of all Elected Members
- Minimum requirement is for all Members to fulfil this role to the best of their ability AND attend full Council on a regular basis AND take personal responsibility for their own development as a Councillor
- All other roles over and above should be subject to a “recruitment process” where Members can indicate interest in positions and demonstrate aptitude, availability and commitment against a role specification

The Council



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- Is THE sovereign body
 - Could be where the key issues are formally debated and decided
 - Should agree on an annual basis what debates/decisions it wants to reserve to itself and what to delegate down
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Regulatory Role



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- P&L is our shop window. WDBC reputation enhanced or damaged depending how well Elected Members perform this function
- Member training and development needs to be continually refreshed. Not just an induction issue
- Could introduce a basic competency test before Members sit in judgement of planning applications
- Political proportionality, geographical spread and individual Member competence should all be determinants of membership of P&L
- Numbers on P&L and level of delegation to officers feels about right

Scrutiny – A discretionary activity



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Four broad functions:

1. Call In of executive decisions - rarely used
2. Planned scrutiny of key policies/decisions of Council and outside bodies to assess impact. Constructively critical. Select Committee approach. Task and Finish programme established
3. Reactive scrutiny of critical incidents
4. Planned scrutiny of performance

“Scrutiny hub” of interested Members to manage the scrutiny programme, calling on wider group of Members on a task and finish basis, according to their personal interests

Leadership/Decision making structure



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Member discussions have thrown up three alternatives:

1. Rebalance two committee structure
or
2. Single Committee or Policy Hub
or
3. Executive made up of members from the majority group

(3 or 4 committee structure also tested but little appetite shown)

Arguments in favour of rebalancing



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- Relatively easy to achieve (although arguments advanced for deferral at Annual Council suggests otherwise)
 - Line of least resistance
 - Could work if Chairs can cope with workload or use other Members as a supportive resource
 - Could raise the profile and role of Vice-Chairs
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Move to Single Committee/ Policy Hub



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- Envisages a politically balanced grouping of 10 or 11
- Within the grouping key roles would be assigned to some Members to align with senior officer structure
- Division of decision making between Council and this grouping to be negotiated annually depending on key decisions coming forward
- Key role holders in the grouping would call on wider membership on particular topics, organised on a task and finish basis
- “Appointments” to key roles following an appraisal process where aptitude and commitment can be assessed
- Key role holders will have no delegated powers

Executive



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- All members drawn from the majority group
 - 7 or 8 Members
 - Key role holders aligned to senior officer structure but with no delegated individual powers (unlike a Cabinet model)
 - Task and Finish Groups to support key role holders in developing policy
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Advantages of Single Committee/Policy Hub or Single Party Executive over 2 Committee System



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- Individual Members in the grouping would align with senior managers and develop expertise
- Would be a good counter balance to South Hams' Executive on matters of common interest
- Would be able to work at pace
- More Members would feel more valued
- Could secure the most committed and able Members and exploit a wider set of strengths
- Should help develop a stronger sense of “team” within the grouping

Future Proofing



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- T18 Programme – proof of concept work could lead to profound change in officer functions/structure
- Localism – will appetite of Town and Parish Councils increase in next five years?
- Housing Growth – need to build in housing growth projections to Electoral Review submission
- Finances – will be tighter still
- Wider growth agenda – combined authorities suggesting even closer working with SHDC and potentially others. Therefore even more important that leading Members punch their weight

And the magic number is?



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- Where numbers have been mentioned, the range has been 27-32
 - 31 seems about right for most Members
 - Should be minimising multi-Member wards where possible but it would not be desirable to achieve single Member wards across the Borough
 - Conclude that ?? is appropriate for West Devon and our rationale will not be affected whichever decision making option is chosen, the number being largely driven by the representational role
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We have been cutting edge before



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- No reason why we cannot think radically again and do things “the West Devon way”
 - Is there the appetite to test one of the alternative leadership/decision making structures; a discretionary approach to O&S; beefed up role for full Council as described?
 - If accepted in principle the detail, including review of remuneration, will need working up
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Next Steps



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- Time to ruminate until 8 October or 7 December Council
 - Can mull over in political groups and at Informal Councils on 8 July and 2 September
 - T18 Proof of Concept conclusions will inform the decision
 - Whatever changes are made to be introduced May 2014
 - In meantime a pragmatic way forward is needed to deal with imbalance between Resources and Community Services
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Overcoming the present imbalance



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- Option 1 – As per recommendation deferred from Annual Council on 21 May, ie, transfer strategic planning issues to Resources Committee
- Option 2 – Sub-Committee under Community Services Committee. 6/7 Members with a specific remit to address key issues in the next year. Sub-Committee to use Task and Finish Groups
- Option 3 – Council could dictate that Sub-Committee reports directly by-passing Community Services Committee (in effect creating a 3rd Committee for the next year)

A way forward needs to be formally agreed at Council on 30 July