

Report to: **Council**

Date: **22 May 2018**

Title: **REVIEW OF HUB COMMITTEE AND MEETING START TIMES**

Portfolio Area: **Democratic Services – Cllr Sanders**

Wards Affected: **All**

Relevant Scrutiny Committee: Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Urgent Decision: **N** Approval and clearance obtained: **Y**

Date next steps can be taken: **22 May 2018**

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RECOMMENDATION:

That the Political Structures Working Group **RECOMMENDS** to Council that:

1. the existing number of Members on Hub Committee (9) should be retained;
2. views be sought from the Members of West Devon Borough Council on whether to progress a change of governance structure to a Cabinet/Executive model, to take effect from the Annual Meeting in May 2019;
3. the individual roles and responsibilities of Hub Committee Members are amended as set out in Appendix A;
4. the start time of full Council meetings be changed to 4.00pm (from 4.30pm), to take effect after the Annual Meeting in May 2018.

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 In considering Revenue Budget proposals for 2018/19, Members supported a number of options, one of which was to explore the merits of a reduction in the number of Members who currently served on the Hub Committee.
- 1.2 It was recognised that the Political Structures Working Group (PSWG) was the appropriate forum for a review of the number of Members on Hub Committee. It was further accepted that such a review may incorporate a discussion about the roles and responsibilities of individual Hub Committee Members.

- 1.3 The Working Group has made recommendations in respect of the Hub Committee, and also had discussions in relation to wider governance changes.
- 1.4 At the Council meeting held on 27 March 2018, when considering the agenda item 'Calendar of Meetings', (Minute CM 72 refers), a Member asked that the PSWG consider the start time of Council and Committee meetings. This proposal was subsequently agreed by the Council and the Working Group has considered and made a recommendation in respect of the start time of Council meetings.

2. Background

- 2.1 At the meeting of the Hub Committee on 6 February 2018, Members considered a report that set out options for consideration in relation to the revenue budget setting process for 2018/19. One of the items supported by Members in the Budget Survey, was a reduction in the size of the Hub Committee from 9 Members to 6 Members, to take effect from the Annual Council meeting in May 2018. This reduction would result in a saving of £11,500.

- 2.2 The minutes of that meeting reflect the discussion as follows:

Members had a discussion regarding the proposal to reduce the membership of the Hub Committee. Concerns were raised over the additional workload on Hub Members if the Committee reduced in size to six. It was then PROPOSED, SECONDED and on being put to the vote declared CARRIED, that the reduction in Hub Committee membership be deferred to the Political Structures Working Group for further consideration with the potential saving therefore being removed from the list.

- 2.3 The Revenue Budget proposals for 2018/19, as presented to Council on 20 February 2018, included the following note:

Note, following the meeting of the Hub Committee on 6th February 2018 (Minute HC 61), it is not proposed to reduce the size of the Hub Committee from 9 Members to 6 Members in 2018/19.

- 2.4 At its meeting on 20 February, the Council approved the recommendation of the Hub Committee to defer a decision on the reduction in its membership pending a review of the PSWG.
- 2.5 Following this Council decision, the PSWG was convened on 23 March 2018. A further meeting was held on 24 April 2018.
- 2.6 At the meeting of Council held on 27 March 2018, Members were presented with the draft Calendar of Meetings for approval. During the discussion on this item, Members considered whether a change in time of the Council and Committee meetings might encourage a wider range of people to stand as prospective candidates for election on to the Borough Council.

- 2.7 The Council consequently asked that the PSWG also give consideration to whether it was felt appropriate to vary the start times of Council and/or any formal Committee meetings.

3. Outcomes/outputs

Hub Committee

- 3.1 At the meeting of the PSWG on 28 March 2018, the Group considered a number of questions relating to the Hub Committee.
- 3.2 It was agreed that the original principles of the Hub Committee still applied, with the exception of the principle that the Committee arrangements were aligned to the revised officer structure. The remaining principles are set out below:
- a. That Members lead on policy and governance;*
 - b. That regard is given to the external environment to ensure the Council adopts the most efficient and effective arrangements for West Devon even if that means standing still/staying as we are;*
 - c. That decisions are made in the most effective way balancing the need for discussions and deliberation with decisiveness and speed;*
 - d. That decisions are reached and seen to be reached democratically and Members are seen to be accountable for their decisions; and*
 - e. That the best use be made of Members' experience, talent and time.*
- 3.3 The Group then discussed moving to a Cabinet/Executive model. It was agreed that before any work was undertaken to review and make such a change to the governance arrangements, the views of the wider membership should be sought. The most significant implication to consider was that a Cabinet/Executive model did not require political balance. Therefore, if the Council decided to change the governance structure to a Cabinet/Executive model, the day-to-day decision making body could be solely made up of the ruling group Members. If there was appetite amongst the wider membership, the Group still felt that any such change should not be made before May 2019, but in any event, the Group did not feel it would be appropriate to progress consideration of this without the support of the wider membership. A recommendation seeking those views is included in this report.
- 3.4 As part of the discussion on whether a Cabinet/Executive model was appropriate, the Group was concerned that the Hub Committee had drifted into making too many recommendations to Council. The Council Constitution granted similar decision making powers to the Hub Committee as to an Executive, and the perception of there being too many recommendations (rather than decisions) made by the Hub Committee could have arisen from the number of significant decisions that ultimately required Council approval over the previous year.

- 3.5 A further analysis of the recommendations and resolutions showed that the majority of reports presented to Hub Committee that resolved to make recommendations to Council, were all decisions that needed full Council approval as they were outside the agreed budget or policy framework.
- 3.6 Some Members of the Group did feel however, that Members of the Hub Committee, as Lead Members of the Council, should abide by decisions and or recommendations of the Hub Committee, and work as a Lead strategic group of Members of the Council.
- 3.7 The Group considered whether Lead Members were working effectively. Some Members of the Group felt that generally Lead Members were working well and had grown into their roles, although the Group noted that all Lead Members should be encouraged to be more proactive and vocal, and that Lead Members had to take responsibility.
- 3.8 The Group discussed whether Lead Members received the right level of support. There was a perception at some Hub Committee meetings that the relationship between Lead Members and officers was not always close. Lead Members should use officers, but officers should only attend Hub Committee to respond to technical questions, whilst the Lead Member presented the report.
- 3.9 It was also agreed that it would be beneficial for Lead Members of the Hub Committee to meet informally as a group, and that Lead Members and Committee Chairs should have a performance appraisal. This was a supportive process and intended to ensure that Members had the skills they needed to undertake their roles. The Council was part of the Devon and Somerset Member Development Group and a resource was available to provide this support.
- 3.10 At the meeting held on 24 April 2018, the Group firstly considered the number of Members who should sit on the Hub Committee. One Member had circulated a paper that set out how the Hub Committee could work with seven Members rather than nine. The Group discussed the number of Lead Members in detail, and a majority concluded that the number of Lead Members should remain at nine. Concerns were raised that any additional workload to Lead Members as a result of reduced numbers could result in a deterioration in work.
- 3.11 The Group then considered the individual roles and responsibilities of Lead Members. It was accepted that some roles involved more work than others and there could be a better balance of workload. It was also accepted that the role of Deputy Leader was not being maximised.

- 3.12 The Group discussed each role in detail. The resulting amendments are outlined in the revised roles and responsibilities document presented at Appendix A.

Council and Formal Committee Meeting Start Times

- 3.13 Research had been undertaken and presented to the PSWG that outlined the meeting start times for a number of neighbouring local authorities. It showed that across the South West there was no consistent approach to the start time of meetings. In discussing WDBC specifically, the Group did have sympathy for those Members (and prospective candidates) who were in employment. However, the Group did also recognise that Members had a vast number of meetings (e.g. local Town and Parish Council meetings) and other commitments that made evening meetings equally difficult. As a result, the Group felt that there was not enough evidence to justify a significant change in the start times of meetings.
- 3.14 There was one exception however, being the start time of full Council meetings. Some Members of the Group noted that recently Members were having to leave the full Council meetings before the conclusion of the meeting, as they had other commitments that took place on the same evening. The Group therefore recommends that the full Council meetings commence at 4.00pm rather than 4.30pm, to allow a little more time for the completion of business before Members with other commitments need to leave the meeting.

4. Options available and consideration of risk

- 4.1 The Group considered a number of options in their discussions, as summarised above, and have concluded that the recommendations made represent the most effective future governance structure for West Devon Borough Council.

5. Proposed Way Forward

- 5.1 To adopt the recommendations as set out and make changes to the Hub Committee roles and responsibilities accordingly, to take effect from Annual Council May 2018.
- 5.2 To amend the start time of Council meetings to 4:00 pm (from 4.30pm), to take effect after the Annual Council meeting in May 2018.
- 5.3 To gauge Members views on whether to progress with undertaking a review into changing the governance structure of the Council to a Cabinet/Executive model that would come into effect following the May 2019 local elections

6. Implications

Implications	Relevant to proposals Y/N	Details and proposed measures to address
Legal/Governance	Y	In accordance with the Council Constitution, it is ultimately a decision for the Council if it wishes to make any proposed revisions to the Council's governance arrangements.
Financial	N	There are no financial implications associated with this report. The proposed budget saving resulting from the reduction in Hub Committee numbers has already been removed from the 2018/19 budget
Risk	N	The proposed amendments to the working arrangements will ensure that the Council retains an efficient and cost effective governance structure.
Comprehensive Impact Assessment Implications		
Equality and Diversity	N	There are no equality and diversity implications associated with this report.
Safeguarding	N	There are no safeguarding implications associated with this report.
Community Safety and Crime and Disorder	N	There are no Community Safety and Crime and Disorder implications associated with this report.
Health, Safety and Wellbeing	N	There are no Health, Safety and Wellbeing implications associated with this report.
Other implications		There are no other implications associated with this report.

Supporting Information

Appendices:

Appendix A: Updated Roles and Responsibilities for Hub Committee Members from May 2018

Background Papers:

Council Report and Minutes – 20 February 2018 Meeting

Council Minutes – 27 March 2018 Meeting

The Council Constitution

Notes and supporting papers presented to the Political Structures Working Group Meeting