

Rethinking governance

A summary of council activities on governance change

Contact information: Ed Hammond, ed.hammond@cfgs.org.uk / 07764 684 182

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About this document

This is an appendix to the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny's "Rethinking governance for the 20s", published in November 2020. This appendix, which will be updated at least annually, provides as comprehensive as possible a range of examples of councils which have, since 2011, changed their formal governance arrangements.

If your council is listed here but you feel the information provided doesn't give the whole story, please contact us; equally, please contact us if your council has changed its governance arrangements, or has considered doing so, but is not listed.

The information in this document was correct at the time of writing.

Councils which considered a formal change, but decided against it

There are a large number of councils who have considered their options – often in depth – and decided not to pursue any formal change. Some of these councils ended up adopting hybrid arrangements, which are discussed in more detail below.

- Plymouth (unitary council). Full Council commissioned a working group to investigate the possibilities around governance change in 2016. A set of design principles were developed and a comprehensive review was carried out which recommended no change to the Council's formal governance model, but amendments to the way that the authority operated within the leader-cabinet system. (Report to committee: <https://democracy.plymouth.gov.uk/documents/s77001/CHANGING%20GOVERNANCE%20ARRANGEMENTS%20REPORT%2016012017%20Constitution%20Review%20Group.pdf>)
- Lancashire (county council). In 2013, a working group was established to consider options around governance change. This gathered evidence (including evidence from a number of other councils), with the results being presented at a meeting of Council in December 2014. Council decided to take no further immediate action, but to review the matter again in the future. (18th December 2014: report to council: <https://council.lancashire.gov.uk/documents/s53622/Political%20Governance.pdf> Minute of council meeting: <https://council.lancashire.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=138&MId=3086>)
- Derby (unitary council). In 2018 a cross-party councillor working group was established to consider options for governance change. After detailed work, proposals were brought to Council in January 2020 but were rejected. (July 2018: council press notice: <https://news.derby.gov.uk/councillors-form-cross-party-group-to-examine-switch-to-committee-system/>; news report: <https://www.derbytelegraph.co.uk/news/derby-news/heated-debate-city-council-leads-3768603>)
- Isle of Wight (unitary council). A councillor laid a motion for governance change shortly before a Council election: Council decided not to consider the matter to allow the new Council to consider the matter separately. The matter does not appear to have been re-tabled following the 2017 election. (15th March 2017: minutes of Council: <https://www.iow.gov.uk/Meetings/committees/mod-council/15-3-17/minutes.pdf> (paragraph 67): News report: <https://onthewight.com/labour-seek-return-to-committee-system-of-council-governance/>)
- North Somerset (unitary council). In 2012, a councillor laid a motion at Council for a change in governance from the leader-cabinet to the committee system, but it was defeated. (News report: <https://www.northsomerstimes.co.uk/news/call-for-change-to-committee-system-rejected-1-1346037>)

- Thanet (district, Kent). A motion was put to full Council at a meeting, but Council voted not to debate it. (10 July 2014: notice of motion: <https://democracy.thanet.gov.uk/documents/s37273/Notice%20of%20Motion%20-%20Committee%20System.html?CT=2> : 10 July 2014: minute of meeting (paragraph 142a et seq): <https://democracy.thanet.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=141&MId=3460>)
- Chelmsford (district, Essex). A motion was put to full Council. Council amended it to agree to a “more open governance system”, with undertakings being given by the leadership about adopting new systems for (in particular) the schedule of key decisions. (16th July 2019: minute of Council, para 14) https://www.chelmsford.gov.uk/EasySiteWeb/HandleRequest/_resources/assets/inline/full/0/2697975.pdf?IsMSOfficeRedirect=1
- Cambridge (district, Cambridgeshire). A report was brought to committee setting out options for governance change in the area. The committee decided to take no action. (21st November 2012: report to CAC: <https://democracy.cambridge.gov.uk/documents/s14325/CAC%2021.11.12%20v3.pdf>; minute: <https://democracy.cambridge.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?Id=1669>)
- West Sussex (county council). A motion was put to full Council, but it was lost on a vote. (17th October 2014: minute: <http://www2.westsussex.gov.uk/ds/cttee/cc/cc121214i2.pdf> briefing note to support debate: <http://www2.westsussex.gov.uk/ds/cttee/cc/cc171014i11a.pdf>)
- Fenland (district, Cambridgeshire). A motion was put to full Council, but it was dismissed. (21st May 2014: minute: <https://www.fenland.gov.uk/localgov/CeListDocuments.aspx?CommitteeId=156&MeetingId=585&DF=21%2f05%2f2015&Ver=2> ; news report: <https://www.wisbechstandard.co.uk/news/councillors-dismiss-bid-to-return-fenland-district-council-to-committee-system-1-4084025>)

Councils which have already moved to a new system by way of a council resolution

Early adopters: 2012-2014

Some “early adopting” councils were examined as part of previous CfPS and LGA research. More detail on their early experiences can therefore be found in “Musical chairs” and “Rethinking governance”. Below, we have incorporated links to these councils’ most recent (at time of writing) Annual Governance Statement or any recent evaluation of governance and decision-making arrangements.

Some early-adopters – South Gloucestershire and Norfolk - have since switched back to their former governance arrangements.

These councils are:

Changing in 2012

- Sutton. The council’s governance changes in 2012 have been seen by the Council’s leadership as central to its development of the consensual approach to policymaking referred to as the “Sutton Way” – explained in more detail in the context of the pandemic by the Council’s Leader here - <https://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/who-runs-london/boroughs-community/leaders-blog/responding-covid-19-sutton-way>
- Nottinghamshire. A move to the committee system was a manifesto commitment of the Conservative party on the Council;
- South Gloucestershire, which moved back to the leader-cabinet system in 2017.
- Brighton and Hove. This council adopted the committee system after a hiatus of only a few years (it moved to the leader-cabinet system far later than other authorities because of legal circumstances relating to a Mayoral referendum in the early 00s). In 2017, it was reported that councillors were considering moving to a different governance option, but no further action appears to have taken: <https://www.brightonandhovenews.org/2017/07/31/report-paves-way-for-elected-mayor-or-cabinet-to-run-brighton-and-hove/>

In preparation for its own move to the committee system, councillors from Barnet conducted site visits to South Gloucestershire and Sutton; evidence from these site visits can be found at <https://barnet.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s11176/Appdx%20A%20to%20Options%20paper%20Site%20visit%20feedback%20-%20combined%20table%20final%20version.pdf>

Changing in 2013

- Hartlepool. Hartlepool held a referendum triggered by a council petition on removing the executive Mayoral role, which had been occupied since its

inception in 2002 by Stuart Drummond. Local people approved a move to the committee system.

- Reading. More information about the Council's adoption of new arrangements can be found at <https://www.getreading.co.uk/news/local-news/council-returning-to-committee-system-4192112>
- Kingston. Kingston Council has since 2013 made a number of changes to its committee structure, altering the role of neighbourhood committees, establishing an informal Cabinet of committee chairs and tweaking the roles and responsibilities of its strategic committees.

Changing in 2014

- Norfolk. The council resolved to change its governance model in 2012. The conclusions of a member steering group can be found at <https://cdn.ps.emap.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2014/04/New-Governance-Model-for-Norfolk-CC.pdf>. However, in 2019, the council reverted to the leader-cabinet model.
- Barnet. Barnet moved to the committee system in 2014; it is worth noting that it was one of the first councils to adopted leader-cabinet working, in 1998.
- Cambridgeshire. A report reflecting on the first year in operation of the new system can be found at <https://www.wisbechstandard.co.uk/news/cambridgeshire-county-council-leader-steve-count-praises-committee-system-and-reflects-on-first-year-and-looks-to-the-future-1-4067542>.

Since 2014

This list is not exhaustive.

Great Yarmouth (district, Norfolk)

Following a review by a member working group, this council moved to the committee system in 2016.

The work of the working group is notable in having involved a detailed costing of committee work, drawing on similar methods earlier used in Norfolk. Section 7 of the Council report sets out some of the issues to be considered and determined before a change could take place.

Yarmouth operates a strategic Policy and Resources Committee alongside three service committees. There is no separate General Purposes Committee or scrutiny committee. Committee decisions are reported to Council in a regular digest (for information and noting rather than for debate).

More information

24th November 2015: report to Council:

<https://great-yarmouth.cmis.uk.com/Great-Yarmouth/Document.ashx?czJKcaeAi5tUFL1DTL2UE4zNRBcoShgo=P%2BLgVugHppaCWGCA9eTzCNawx0hxbJrJTN%2FIAMiU29f6GYMQHUf9Lg%3D%3D&rUzwRPf%2BZ3zd4E7lkn8Lyw%3D%3D=pwRE6AGJFLDNlh225F5QMaQWcTPhwdhUfCZ%2FLUQzgA2uL5jNRG4jdQ%3D%3D&mCTIbCubSfXsDGW9IXnlg%3D%3D=hFflUdN3100%3D&kCx1AnS9%2FpWZQ40DXFvdEw%3D%3D=hFflUdN3100%3D&uJovDxwdjMPoYv%2BAJvYtyA%3D%3D=ctNJFf55vVA%3D&FgPLIEJYlotS%2BYGoBi5oLA%3D%3D=NHDURQburHA%3D&d9Qjj0ag1Pd993jsyOJqFvmyB7X0CSQK=ctNJFf55vVA%3D&WGewmoAfeNR9xqBux0r1Q8Za60lavYmz=ctNJFf55vVA%3D&WGewmoAfeNQ16B2MHuCPMRKZMwaG1PaO=ctNJFf55vVA%3D>

News report of the debate leading to the resolution:

<https://www.greatyarmouthmercury.co.uk/news/decision-making-changes-at-great-yarmouth-borough-council-1-4328111>

Melton (district, Leicestershire)

Melton was a committee system council which moved to the leader-cabinet model in May 2019. Cabinet is made up of 5 members. There is a single scrutiny committee. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, two member-level task and finish groups were established to complement this structure.

More information

21st November 2018: report to council:

<https://democracy.melton.gov.uk/documents/s6413/Review%20of%20Governance%20Arrangements.pdf> (with action plan at appendix C) and minute:

<https://democracy.melton.gov.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=2968>

Council press notice:

http://www.melton.gov.uk/news/article/318/council_set_to_change_its_decision-making_arrangements

Worcester (district, Worcestershire)

A motion was carried in November 2016 to change governance to the committee system, citing the council's political contestability and suggesting that the committee system would make it easier to manage a council under no overall

control. This follows a scrutiny review carried out into corporate governance, which supported the detailed design of the new arrangements.

The committee structure has a Policy and Resources Committee, three services committees, a General Purposes Committee and no scrutiny committee.

More information

22nd November 2016: motion to Council:

<http://committee.worcester.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=111&MId=3864&Ver=4>

4th January 2017: report of corporate governance scrutiny review:

<http://committee.worcester.gov.uk/documents/s37607/161130%20Corporate%20Governance%20Report%20FINAL.pdf> : minute:

<http://committee.worcester.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=147&MId=3919&Ver=4>

Richmond (London borough)

Richmond adopted the committee system in May 2019. This follows a motion being put to Council, and carried, the previous November. A cross-party governance working group had previously been put in place to consider the options, and to design the detail of such a system. Regular reports to Council from this group were made in late 2018.

The adoption of the committee system was preceded in May 2018 by the adoption of hybrid-style pre-decision arrangements for scrutiny committees. A set of new committees were established to mirror council directorates and consider decisions before they came to be made by Cabinet. This system was abolished with the coming into place of the committee system.

More information

Council press notice:

https://www.richmond.gov.uk/council_backs_move_to_committee_governance

Wirral (unitary authority)

Full Council tasked a working group to review a move to the committee system. The group drew evidence from a range of internal and external sources,

reporting back with comprehensive information to Council late in 2019. A motion was passed to move to the committee system in 2020.

More information

Report of Governance Working Group:

<https://democracy.wirral.gov.uk/documents/s50061944/Standards%20and%20Constitutional%20Oversight%20Committee%20governance%20190926.pdf>

28th September 2020: new committee structure at council AGM:

<https://democracy.wirral.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=123&MId=8578>

News report: <https://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/liverpool-news/council-could-spend-200k-moving-16993020>

Basildon (district, Essex)

Council resolved in December 2016 to adopt the committee system in May 2017. Detailed information on the design of a new system was taken to a Council EGM in May 2017.

Of note is the decision of Council to require that the Leader style him/herself as “Chair of Policy and Resources” rather than use the title of Leader.

More information

Landing page on council website for comprehensive information on governance change: <https://www.basildon.gov.uk/article/6243/Basildon-Borough-Council-Change-in-Governance-Arrangements>

Councils which are currently considering a move or which have determined to move in 2021 or later

Cheshire East (unitary)

The council resolved to adopt a committee system form of governance in May 2019. The original plan was to adopt the committee system from May 2020, but this was delayed following detailed study of the issues by the Council's

constitution committee. At the time of writing, members and officers continue to consider the final design of a new system in detail.

More information

Council press notice:

https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/council_and_democracy/council_information/media_hub/media_releases/council-set-to-move-to-committee-system-of-decision-making.aspx

Letter from group leaders confirming the delay:

https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/council_and_democracy/council_information/media_hub/media_releases/moving-to-a-committee-system-group-leaders-letter.aspx

Swale (District council, Kent)

The Council has considered a change in governance alongside a wider constitutional review. Changes to area committees were taken forward, but further discussion of future governance models was deferred after having been discussed by councillors in July 2019.

Discussing the objectives of a constitutional review, councillors considered that clear lines of demarcation, involving more Members in decision-making; timeliness of decision-making; working more effectively with the public; the additional burden on officer time and the costs of a new system were all of importance. They also considered that maintaining a strong role for scrutiny was important.

More information

17th July 2019: reports to committee

<https://services.swale.gov.uk/meetings/documents/s12848/PDRC%20-%202017%20July%202019%20-%20Objectives%20of%20constitution%20review%20v5.pdf>

And

<https://services.swale.gov.uk/meetings/documents/s12850/PDRC%20-%202017%20July%202019%20-%20Governance%20models%20v4.pdf>

17th July 2019: minutes of discussion

<https://services.swale.gov.uk/meetings/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=127&MId=2210>

(at paragraph 136 et seq)

York (unitary council)

The executive has commissioned a review of the constitution, part of which incorporates a review of governance arrangements. A staged approach is being taken, with governance change being stage 2. Councillors agreed to expedite the process in September 2019 but pandemic impacts have resulted in no further updates being submitted to Cabinet at the time of writing (September 2019).

York currently operates what we think are “hybrid” arrangements. These are described in more detail in the section below.

More information

26th September 2019: report to Executive

<https://democracy.york.gov.uk/documents/s134806/Review%20of%20the%20Constitution%20and%20Governance%20Procedures%20Report.pdf>

Arun (district council, West Sussex)

A Governance Working Party was convened, meeting on a couple of occasions in late 2019. After debate, a motion to move to the committee system in May 2021 was passed at a meeting of Council in January 2020.

The working party took evidence from a range of external sources, which are linked to in the full Council report below.

More information

15th January 2020: reports and minutes of discussion at Council:

<https://democracy.arun.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=141&MIId=771&Ver=4>
(at paragraph 388)

News report: <https://www.bognor.co.uk/news/politics/switch-committee-system-arun-agreed-after-lengthy-and-heated-debate-1368177>

Uttlesford (district council, Essex)

A report was presented to Council in July 2019 to establish a member working group, to consider options relating to governance change. The Council's leadership considered that it would be possible to make changes to come into force in May 2020.

Later in the year, the Working Group resolved that, instead of proposing changes for May 2020, instead a (non-public) "shadow committee" should be established to experiment with cross-party working and decision-making, evaluated through comparison with the authority's existing governance arrangements.

More information

30th July 2019: report to council:

<https://uttlesford.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s13818/Governance%20Review%20Proposal%20to%20establish%20a%20Council%20Working%20Group.pdf>;

minutes at

<https://uttlesford.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=159&MIId=5264>

Governance Review Working Group agendas and papers:

<https://uttlesford.moderngov.co.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?CommitteId=496>

Councils which have moved to a hybrid model of governance

This is not a complete list of councils operating hybrid arrangements.

Kent (county council)

Has a large number of member committees. There are a set of Cabinet Committees, which take more of an active role in policy development, and which agree decisions which go on to be made by Cabinet itself. There is an overview and scrutiny committee which manages a number of formal "select committees", which are formal committees established on a time-limited basis.

Functional distinctions. The Scrutiny Committee primarily manages and oversees the work of select committees (and holds portfolio holders to account); select committees themselves carry out detailed policy development work, but the way in which tasks are selected (and the way that this ultimately influences decisions) is unclear (although see below). Cabinet Committees take performance and finance updates as well as general updates on ongoing work, and are involved in making decisions; this suggests a heavy workload. The Policy and Resources Committee takes responsibility for a range of commercial

activity including commissioning and contracts, involving frequent taking of exempt reports.

The decision journey. Cabinet committees review decisions on the Forward Plan before submission to Cabinet for formal decision-making. In some instances this is preceded by activity in scrutiny – general member updates or consultation on a given matter – because Cabinet committees themselves are focused on decision-making arrangements. Some decisions are made via full Council but the range is similar to that in other authorities.

Members’ roles. With a large number of members Kent also through a range of committees has a large number of “spaces” available for councillors on committees. Much of this role is focused on recommending decisions rather than policy development, although select committee activity does provide this opportunity to a smaller number of members.

More information

15th December 2011: report to committee

<https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/documents/s28560/Item%2003%20Options%20or%20new%20Governance%20Arrangements%20for%20Kent%20County%20Council.pdf>

Oxfordshire (county council)

Oxfordshire’s model is more like that of a traditional leader-cabinet authority. Cabinet establishes a range of time-limited “advisory groups” to provide advice and guidance on developing policy. There is individual cabinet member decision-making. There are a number of scrutiny committees although they are quite streamlined and focused on performance review (there are three – education, performance and joint health).

Functional distinctions. Advisory Groups are entirely creations of Cabinet and are private meetings, although their products are reported up. Scrutiny committees undertake what might be seen as “legacy” scrutiny responsibilities – the statutory functions supplemented by some performance review. There does not appear to be significant co-ordination between the two functions (the extent of any crossover is possibly hidden by the private nature of CAGs). Performance scrutiny undertakes “deep dives” into particular issues and takes annual and quarterly reports from the council and its partners.

The decision journey. This is more of a standard leader-cabinet council so the journey of decisions follows that general trajectory.

Members' roles. Members have an opportunity to take part in Advisory work or scrutiny work but these opportunities seem more limited than in other authorities in this list.

More information

22nd January 2019: minutes and reports from motion to Council:

[https://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/\(S\(13eh2v55wfbk5sb2diauy42c\)\)/mgAi.aspx?ID=19378](https://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/(S(13eh2v55wfbk5sb2diauy42c))/mgAi.aspx?ID=19378)

Sevenoaks (district council, Kent)

Cabinet's work is bolstered by a range of Advisory Committees whose work is specifically focused on "policy initiation and development". Portfolio Holders have a responsibility to refer particular issues to these committees. The number of advisory committees has recently been streamlined.

Functional distinctions. The distinction between the roles of Advisory Committees and those of the scrutiny committee is fairly distinct – scrutiny is focused on performance and on holding portfolio holders to account.

The decision journey – policy matters will go to Advisory Committees for a view and be developed by officers; they are presumably shepherded through informally by portfolio holders. Formal decisions are made in Cabinet (which reports its decisions to Council on a regular basis). Performance review is carried out by scrutiny.

Members' roles. There are a range of distinct member roles – policy development, scrutiny and decision-making.

More information

18th September 2014: report on hybrid changes to Governance Committee:

<https://cds.sevenoaks.gov.uk/documents/s19438/05%20Governance%20Arrangements.pdf?J=1>

Tunbridge Wells (district, Kent)

The council has three Cabinet “Advisory Boards” and a single overview and scrutiny committee. The committee has the power to establish task and finish groups, which it does occasionally. The committee generally takes updates on items of interest to members.

Functional distinctions – Advisory Boards have responsibilities which map to those of Cabinet and have a particular role laid out in the constitution and scheme. They may recommend one of three options to Cabinet when considering items – supporting a recommendations, supporting a recommendation with caveats, or rejecting a recommendation. Scrutiny committees focus on holding portfolio holders formally to account and on updates to policy areas, taken in an ad hoc manner (see above).

The decision journey – decisions on the Forward Plan are passed to Advisory Boards and from those boards to Cabinet for a formal decision. Usual call-in arrangements apply.

Members’ roles – members appear to be principally involved at the decision-making point.

More information

3rd December 2019: report to Governance Working Group on changes which have been in place since 2012, setting out pros and cons:

<https://democracy.arun.gov.uk/documents/s3085/Addendum%205%20Hybrid%20Option%20Report.pdf>

Wandsworth (London borough)

There are seven overview and scrutiny committees, including sub-committees. The average committee cycle is about six weeks. The size and number of committees means that all councillors are in some way involved in the process. Tasks for scrutiny committees are, in the constitution, divided with reference to “policy development” and “scrutiny”. In practice, overview and scrutiny committees act as de facto

service committees, taking a range of reports on which “recommendations” are made which are then submitted to Cabinet for endorsement. This results in quite heavy agendas, with a number of substantive items being discussed. There are a small number of advisory boards alongside these committees such as a Residents’ Panel made up of representatives from a range of local residents’ associations, but this appears less systematic.

Functional distinctions – in the Constitution the terms of reference of scrutiny committees is expressed in significant detail – reflecting the fact that on a de facto basis decisions pass through these committees. Committees also carry out performance monitoring.

The decision journey –The Forward Plan contains those matters which are due to be considered by the executive. Matters are considered by the scrutiny committee in question, or in some cases by Council, before being submitted to the executive to be signed off. Councillors may request that a decision, prior to being made, be “referred up” to council, where it might otherwise have been considered by a committee. Formal “call in” powers still also exist. We expect that informal systems – between chairs, senior officers and cabinet members – will exist to plan out the decision-making process, but reference is not made to these in the constitution.

Members’ roles – attempts to amend recommendations at scrutiny committees, and the use of recorded votes, is common.

More information

General information on governance arrangements:
<https://www.wandsworth.gov.uk/the-council/council-decision-making/full-council-executive-and-committee-meetings/>

York (unitary council)

A more conventional leader-cabinet authority with some committee-style features. Executive advisory groups exist alongside scrutiny committees; a scrutiny management board controls overall workload and maintains oversight and there is a regular programme of task and finish working, although this is not linked closely to the executive’s policy development priorities.

Functional distinctions. Executive advisory groups are provided for in a general sense in the council's constitution. The one extant group focuses on equalities and contains representatives from people with protected characteristics under the Equality Act, so is not really a councillor body.

The decision journey. Follows the general form of leader-cabinet councils.

Members' roles. Not appreciably different to elsewhere although a greater use of task and finish working does afford more opportunities for members to be involved in aspects of policy development.

More information

26th September 2019: report to Executive on governance review:
<https://democracy.york.gov.uk/documents/s134806/Review%20of%20the%20Co%20nstitution%20and%20Governance%20Procedures%20Report.pdf>

Guildford (district, Surrey)

The council considered change options by way of a scrutiny review, which also involved an independent person. The review took evidence in public, including from a local campaign group. It recommended the adoption of hybrid arrangements.

There are two "executive advisory panels", as sub-committees of the Executive. These panels are tasked to assist in policy development.

Functional distinctions: Two executive advisory boards carry out research and produce reports to support the executive's decision-making role.

The decision journey: members consider the executive Forward Plan and consider which items they wish to consider in more depth at committee before decisions are made.

Members' roles: some fairly detailed policy-focused discussion happens at committee – while much appears to focus on information-sharing, committees make substantive recommendations on change and refinement to proposed decisions, which are then taken up by the Executive.

More information

9th April 2015: report submitted to Executive from Joint Scrutiny Review of governance arrangements:

<http://www2.guildford.gov.uk/councilmeetings/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=1732>

Local campaigns, petitions and referendums

In a number of areas, successful local campaigns have been run to provoke governance change – even if councils do not wish to make such a change.

The law provides for change to happen as a result of a referendum which is brought about by way of a local petition. A petition must, within a year of being opened, receive the signatures of 5% of the local electorate. A “verification number” – setting out the exact number of electors for this calculation – must be published by a Council annually¹.

A number of local campaigns have been established to secure these signatures. This is a challenging task – in a large unitary authority for example, over 20,000 signatures may be required.

Campaigns tend to focus on governance change as a mechanism to make the authority more democratic. We have noted above the importance of culture, and the fact that without cultural change, structural change is less likely to bring about improvements. This is a particular risk when governance change is brought about in this way, because the council is being compelled to make the change against its will, increasing the change that change will not result in fundamental improvement.

Councils are likely to need to engage early with campaigners – to understand their objectives, to liaise with councillors about the political dynamics relating to these objectives², and to see whether they can be brought into a collaborative process if possible.

Campaigns have generally focused on movement from the leader-cabinet system to the committee system but some (as in Croydon) have sought the establishment of a Mayoral system instead.

Some examples of campaigns are provided below. Summaries reflect the position as we understand it to be in September 2020.

- Sheffield. A large scale campaign took place, with a petition resulting in a referendum originally scheduled for May 2020, later postponed to 2021. The campaign organisers have provided significant background information on their work on their website: <https://www.itsourssheffield.co.uk/>
- Barnsley. Steps are being taken to gather signatures for a petition. There has been some debate on the issue at full Council. (<https://www.thestar.co.uk/news/council-structure-defended-barnsley-opposition-call-return-old-system-639456>)
- Croydon. A petition campaign has, at time of writing, secured the required number of signatures to trigger a referendum. If arrangements proceed a

¹ For example - <https://www.lambeth.gov.uk/elections-and-council/elections/elections-and-voter-registration-guide>

² Some campaigns are led by political parties. It is worth noting that adoption of the committee system is a policy objective for the Liberal Democrats, UKIP and the Green Party of England and Wales.

referendum will be held in May 2021 for the introduction of new governance arrangements in 2022. News report:

<https://insidecroydon.com/2020/09/03/21000-residents-petition-for-elected-mayor-referendum/>

- Fylde. Fylde was the first council to undergo a referendum triggered by petition. More information at <https://www.lythamstannesexpress.co.uk/news/4000-strong-petition-trigger-system-vote-2675001>
- West Dorset. While the council has since been abolished, replaced by a new unitary which operates the leader-cabinet system, a referendum was triggered by a local campaign. The council only operated the new systems for two years before abolition. More information at <https://www.dorsetecho.co.uk/news/14270589.west-dorset-district-council-votes-on-potential-new-governance-structure-ahead-of-may-referendum/>.
- Redbridge. A petition was launched in December 2019. More information at <https://www.ilfordrecorder.co.uk/news/politics/redbridge-council-referendum-governance-system-1-6444773>

Some councils have chosen to hold referendums on governance change without this having been precipitated by a referendum.

- Torbay. Torbay has held two referendums on governance change – one in 2005 which led the Council to adopt the Mayoral system and one in 2016 to return to the Leader-cabinet system. The 2016 referendum³ followed on from a survey sent to local people, inviting feedback⁴. Because the 2016 referendum was held only one year into the term of the Mayor, governance change did not in fact happen until 2019.
- North Tyneside. The council resolved to hold a referendum on retaining the Mayoral system of governance in 2016. More information at <https://my.northtyneside.gov.uk/category/510/mayoral-referendum>

³ The full results of which can be found at <https://www.torbay.gov.uk/council/voting-and-elections/elections/referendums/governance-referendum-2016/>

⁴ <https://cdn.ps.emap.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2015/09/Torbay-governance-survey.pdf> ; see also <https://www.lgcplus.com/politics/governance-and-structure/torbay-voters-would-scrap-elected-mayor-22-09-2015/>