

Committee Structure Review – Response to Recommendations

	Recommendation	Response from	Response
			Participation
1	That committee memberships are an odd number. All service committee memberships therefore remain at 9 Members, with the exception of the Policy and Resources Committee which remains at 15 Members.	Legal Services	No further comments.
2	That all committees are politically proportionate.	Legal Services	This is fine and meets with the requirements of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 which states that, in a Committee system, all committees should be politically balanced unless the council agrees otherwise.
3	That a consistent process for tracking and naming agenda items via Member requests is implemented.	Democratic Services	This will be easy to implement, by ensuring the fact it was a member request and who had requested it remains in the title of the agenda item/s.
4	That the ability to undertake reviews is promoted in order to examine key topics and promote Member engagement.	Democratic Services	This can be covered in the Committee inductions following the Snap Committees in May. Work could be undertaken to further promote this through the Member Bulletin.

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Effective and Efficient Decision Making			
5	<p>That service committee Terms of Reference include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The Strategic Plan objectives that are the focus of the committee. b. Specific examples of other appropriate key issues that are within the remit of the committee. c. Explanation that all service committees are required to make decisions that fall within their given budget. 	<p>Legal Services</p>	<p>These recommendations have been worked into the amended terms of reference which have been submitted with the draft constitutional changes.</p>
6	<p>That the distinct roles and responsibilities of the Committee Clerk and Legal Officer at committee meetings be included in the Maidstone Borough Council Constitution, and that the Chairman is aware of who to go to for appropriate advice.</p>	<p>Legal Services and Democratic Services</p>	<p>This has been added into the Constitution at Part 1, Section 1.4. See Appendix 3: Draft Constitutional Changes.</p>

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7	<p>That a clear, consistent and disciplined approach is used for Agenda Setting and Chairman's Briefing meetings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The duration of these meetings should be minimised.• The focus of Agenda Setting is to ensure that the Work Programme reflects all of the topics that are to be considered by the Committee, and that each monthly meeting has an appropriately sized agenda.• The Chairman's Briefing is used to ensure that any issues with reports are raised with Officers in advance of the meeting, that Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen have the opportunity to clarify issues raised in the reports and that any potential legislative or procedural issues are identified and planned for.	Democratic Services	This guidance can be issued to Chairmen during their Committee inductions, following the Snap Committees in May.
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8	That guidance be included in the Maidstone Borough Council Constitution to ensure that only appropriate reports for noting are submitted to service committees.	Legal Services and Democratic Services	Guidance from <i>Knowles on Local Authority Meetings</i> has now been incorporated into the Councils Constitution under Part 3.1, Section 3.2. See Appendix 3: Draft Constitutional Changes. This provides a reference point for members and officers to refer to in order to provide challenge when a report for noting is proposed.
9	That Maidstone Borough Council continues to move towards a 'paperlite' office approach for agendas and committee papers, although Members retain their right to have paper copies of agendas. Where required, Members should have ready access to appropriate technical support to enhance their ability to use electronic documents.	Democratic Services	<p>A new modern.gov app will be launched in time for the election in May, this will provide the same platform across all devices for members (and officers) to use.</p> <p>Further promotion of the use of modern.gov will take place following elections in May, as there are likely to be a number of new members.</p> <p>A programme of training will be required to ensure members are able to use the new app on their devices (or Council owned devices).</p>

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10	<p>That report styles are altered to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clearly demonstrate the purpose of the report on the front cover, as part of the Executive Summary.• Include the Cross-Cutting Issues and Implications section at the front of reports• Align the Cross-Cutting Issues and Implications section to the new Strategic Plan objectives• Ensure that sections of legislation relevant to a decision are clearly demonstrated.• Ensure that, where appropriate, the length of covering reports are minimised through increased use of visuals and/or appendices.	Legal Services and Democratic Services	<p>Much of this can be picked up through re- running training courses for Officers on report writing. However format changes may be more problematic. Including cross cutting issues at the beginning of the report could be confusing for the public, and would lead to the report template looking disjointed. Therefore, some examples of refreshed report templates have been produced to allow members to see what this recommendation will mean in practice.</p> <p>Amending the report template to include the new Strategic Plan objectives, including within the cross cutting implications section, will be undertaken in time for the new municipal year when the new Strategic Plan comes into effect.</p>
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11	That a consistent approach to completing the Cross Cutting Issues and Implications section of reports is promoted: Building on the guidance contained in the committee report templates, the information and sign off columns should be fully completed by the report author, either with relevant information or “N/A” where appropriate. This information, along with the sign off column should then be updated or edited by appropriate Officers when the report is circulated for review.	Democratic Services	This guidance is already provided on the report template, but can be reinforced through officer training sessions on writing and presenting reports at Committee meetings.
12	That any medium for sharing information with the committee, which adds value to the written report, should be considered by Officers e.g. the use of video or presentations.	Democratic Services	This approach will be promoted during Chairman’s briefings, agenda setting meetings and during training sessions delivered on how to present reports at Committee meetings.

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13	That Members are encouraged to approach Officers, via the Democratic Services Team, in advance of committee meetings to resolve queries regarding report contents, to fully form the wording of possible motions, or to seek advice on Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPIs) and Other Significant Interests (OSIs).	Legal Services and Democratic Services	We would encourage all members to approach either Democratic Services for general queries about procedure and/or report contents or Legal Services about the issue of disclosure of interests as soon as possible before a committee meeting. This will ensure that any questions can be clarified for members in good time for the meeting itself. It is sometimes difficult for officers to give a fully briefed answer when asked questions “on the spot” a committee meeting, particularly if the issue is complex.
14	That a record of officer decisions made under delegated authority be introduced and frequently shared with Members.	Democratic Services	A process for recording Officer decisions, compliant with the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 is in the process of being implemented and is due to be made live for the new municipal year. Information will be sent out to members in advance of the launch of the new process. Members will be updated before the process is made live.
15	That the scope of delegated authority, and the process for using this, is shared and reinforced with Members and Officers, to ensure consistency of understanding.	Legal Services	Delegations are set out in the Constitution, but this can be unfamiliar territory for new members and some officers. This can be picked up through training and guidance and can be added as an item in the induction training for new members.
16	That Full Council is presented with a “tracked changes” document outlining adjustments to the Constitution and the scheme of delegation when it is requested to approve changes.	Democratic Services	<p>This already takes place, through a change in the way in which changes to the Constitution are now presented to Council for approval.</p> <p>Further details on where to find the Scheme of Delegation/Constitution will be provided at Annual Council Meeting Agendas, when members are asked to agree the Constitution and Scheme of Delegation.</p>

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17	That a comparison of delegated authority across other Local Authorities using the committee system is undertaken.	Democratic Services	This can be carried out as a separate exercise to the review and the results shared with members.
18	That, where appropriate, alternative approaches such as briefings, are used to provide updates in order to minimise the number of reports that are submitted to committees.	Democratic Services	Guidance will be issued to Heads of Service, and Democratic Services Officers will provide challenge to ensure that briefings take place instead of reports (if necessary). Next year, specific member briefing dates will be agreed in the calendar of meetings in advance, to provide more structure and advanced notice of briefings.
Committee Structure			
19	That a new structure for committees is introduced based on a combination of the service committees and other committees outlined in Options 2 and 6.	Legal Services and Democratic Services	Please see separate document outlining the proposed amendments to the Constitution.