

Governance Options

Option 1 - Committee Option

A committee system is “a style of governance involving councillors sitting on committees which make decisions, receive briefings and commission reviews to develop policy.”¹

What will this look like?

There will be a number of service based committees taking decisions previously taken by the Cabinet or Cabinet Members. The decisions currently taken by individual Cabinet Members outside of public meetings would be taken by Committees based on their terms of reference under a committee system. There is no individual delegated decision making.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Increased member involvement in decision making	Decision making may not be as accountable
Members can develop specialisms	Decision making could take longer
Collective responsibility for decisions	May be more bureaucratic and take more resources

Option 2 – No Change

This would mean the present system of governance Cabinet plus enhanced scrutiny remains as is.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Increased member involvement through more use of pre-decision scrutiny	May not be successful
Less change management involved	Members could still disengage
Collective responsibility for decisions	Could be seen as a rubber stamp

¹ Changing Governance Arrangements, CfPS Policy briefing 4, December 2010

Option 3 - A Committee and Scrutiny Hybrid System

What will this look like

Service based committees making decisions similar to the Committee system plus a scrutiny committee. There will be a 'policy and resources' style committee to set the strategic direction of the council and take key corporate decisions such as make recommendations to Council on setting the budget. The Member workshop as part of the governance review identified that this committee's membership should consist of:

- Leader of council
- Deputy Leader
- Leader of Opposition
- Deputy Leader of Opposition
- Leader of any other party, back bench
- Other members to make it politically balanced

Advantages	Disadvantages
Wider Member buy in and involvement in the decision making process	Decision making is slower
Building up of expertise	Blurred accountability
Greater Member satisfaction	Some members not contributing

Option 4 - Retain Cabinet System and Engage Advisory Committees/Boards

What will this look like?

In essence this would be a similar model to that adopted by Kent County Council. There would be a reduced scrutiny function with pre-decision member involvement taking place through Cabinet Advisory Committees or Boards. This would mean more committees like the Strategic Housing Advisory Board and the Spatial Policy and Plans Advisory Group.

Tunbridge Wells have also adopted a hybrid system. Cabinet Advisory Boards are chaired by Cabinet Members while the Deputy Chairs are non-executive members.

- Everything that goes to Cabinet (for a decision) goes through a Cabinet Advisory Board first
- The decision maker for such items is Cabinet. Reports to Cabinet contain information on the discussion / recommendations from the Cabinet Advisory Board.
- The Leader and Portfolio Holders are authorised to take executive decisions on all non-key decisions within their respective portfolios. If the Leader or Portfolio Holder is considering taking a decision, which is contrary to its recommendation, the matter shall be referred the Cabinet for a decision. Unlike Sevenoaks, all non-key decisions are subject to call-in.

Advantages	Disadvantages
More member involvement	Could become a rubber stamp for the administration
Wider debate and challenge in pre-decisions	Risk that distinction between the administration and the opposition will be lost
Collective responsibility for decisions	Too many cooks may spoil the broth

Option 5 – An Elected Mayor

This option was not considered in the original governance review having been taken out by the review group as not appropriate for Maidstone early on in the 2012/13 governance review as the group believed we already had a clear mayoral position. It should however be part of any consideration of alternative options, particularly since the existence of Mayors is increasing in popularity and for completeness.

What will this look like?

A person is elected to the office of Mayor by the electorate following a vote across the Borough. Once the Mayor is elected they can then put in place a Cabinet and the system would be similar to the current Leader and Cabinet Model, although the Mayor may choose to exercise more power individually. So scrutiny would still be required.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Clear Accountability for decision making	Backbench Members could feel disenfranchised from decision making
Efficient Decision Making	Decision making may not be representative of the make-up of the council, could generate more call-ins
A clear and elected voice for the Council	All the autonomy given to one person

This option could potentially reduce member involvement in decision-making still further and so would not meet the stated objectives of members, set out above.