

Corporate Governance Working Group – Member Workshop

Open Invitation: All Members Workshop (7th October 2012):

Attendance: 15 Members (5 of which from the working group)

Key notes from the open discussions:

Is 55 Members too many?

- Maidstone has a growing population, and has the population to support (justify) 55 members;
- If 55 is the right number, there needs to be a structure to support getting them involved in decision making;
- With fewer Members comes less time, and more pressures / expectations;

Paper packs:

- Report agendas make it difficult to see exactly what decisions are being made – they should be brought to the forefront, to grab members attention;
- Paper packs are no longer circulated which discourages members to ‘hit’ key issues – members do not feel that their input has an impact;
- Not all members read their papers!

Feedback on the systems of governance:

- Cllr Paine – Being a Cabinet member can be isolating – a hybrid system would improve member involvement;
- The current system allows for quick/snap decisions (that need to be made quickly) to be made;
- Cllr Ash – The speed of the cabinet process can result in decisions being made too quickly without effective challenge;
- Group discussion – Weakness of the current system is that not enough members are or feel like they are involved;
- Members lack sufficient knowledge and expertise – “jack of all trades but master of none”;
- Too much focus on scrutiny, and not enough overview – reports and recommendations are not revisited;
- The committee system led to more decision being made at full Council;
- The Council needs to make the right decision, not a financial decision;
- The system must not eliminate the overview side of the decision process (such as research). Would this be lost in a Committee system?

Accountability:

- Perception that Cabinet members are not being held to account;
- Scrutiny chairmen are not being held to account
- Cllr Paine: In a committee system would you get a decision made? And would there be clear accountability of that decision?

Cllr Joy: Scrutiny pre-meetings with the Chair and vice have too much influence. As a member of that Committee it is difficult to challenge, as a result members feel like they are just ‘dragged’ along. (Do members have the confidence to speak up and challenge?).

Cllr Lusty: It comes down to the competence of the Chairman. They must know their role – they are not good enough.

TWBC / KCC model:

- Allows for cross-party pre-decisions discussion,;
- Group is politically proportionate;

Appendix E – Member Workshop Notes

- Cllr Mrs Wilson: There are practical barriers for collective accountability – advisory boards effective ‘eliminate the opposition’;

Communication:

- Cllrs cross party do not talk enough;
- Need to get away from party line in order to build up strong working relationships;
- Cabinet members actually want constructive dialogue with Members, working together;
- There needs to be a system in place that is the best for Maidstone, not political administration – it need sot stand the test of time;

Succession Planning:

- Members knowledge and expertise has been eroded;
- Under a hybrid approach (service committees) Members could ‘specialise’ or gain all round knowledge;
- There was a much stronger cross party balance of knowledge;
- The current cabinet scrutiny system does not provide this;

Cllr Paine: Have we just failed to adopt the current system properly?