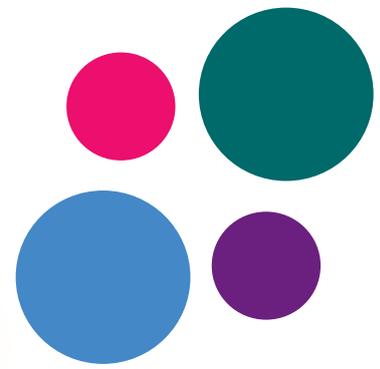


Maidstone Borough Council
**Committee Structure
Review**



In March 2018, the Democracy Committee decided to undertake a review of the committee system at Maidstone Borough Council. The decision was both sensible and well-timed, as the review coincided with the completion of the third full year of the Council operating this system of governance. The review therefore provided an opportunity to take stock of the journey that the Council has been on since the introduction of the committee system, and encouraged us to reflect on how we could improve our current ways of working.

In producing this report, we have attempted to understand whether the committee system achieved the original principle and objectives set when the structure was introduced. Furthermore, we have worked closely with Councillors and Officers to hear their views on what has worked well and what not so well, which has enabled us to identify parts of the process that could be improved.

On behalf of the Democracy Committee, I would like to thank all those who gave their time to contribute to the review. The experiences and comments that were shared have been insightful and valuable, and have enhanced the work throughout. Thanks are also due to the Councillors who formed the interview panel and working group and to the officers for the desktop exercises and evidence gathering without which no review would be complete.

I hope you will agree that the subsequent recommendations are acceptable, and that these will help to 'sharpen up' and improve our committee system.

**Councillor Fran Wilson,
Chairman of the Democracy Committee**

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Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) adopted the committee system of governance in May 2015 under provisions in the Localism Act 2011. Having resolved to change from a cabinet to a committee system, the Council cannot change to an alternative structure of governance for 5 years except by approval at a referendum. The earliest a new model of governance could realistically be introduced is May 2020, however, the Council may adjust the current committee system prior to this.

In March 2018, the Democracy Committee decided to undertake a review to consider the effectiveness of the committee structure and whether it fulfils the original objectives and principles agreed when the system was changed. Initial lines of enquiry included the decommissioning of the Democracy Committee and the creation of an Economic Development Committee. At its meeting on 14 March 2018, the Democracy Committee commented that a wider review of committees should take place, considering committee size, responsibilities and the overall number of committees. Consequently, the Democracy Committee resolved:

“That a review be carried out into the functions and terms of reference of all the Committees, excluding the Regulatory Committees.”

– Democracy Committee, 14 March 2018

To assess whether the committee structure had achieved the original objectives and principles set.

Objective	To achieve greater involvement and participation of all Members in decision making whilst avoiding a cumbersome bureaucratic structure that lacks direction and accountability.
Principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To be cost neutral To increase Member participation in decision making To lead to more effective and efficient decision making

Research to be undertaken:

- Review of the Terms of Reference of all non-regulatory committees to identify if they are effective, any confusion and whether they could be improved.
- Consultation with other Councils who have also changed governance arrangements.
- Desktop analysis of the financial cost of the structure using the information from the original review for comparison.
- Review of the number of meetings and decisions taken by committees applying the objective and principles.
- Detailed look at a sample of decisions from committees.
- Interviews with Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of committees, and Group Leaders, since the structure inception.
- Consultation with Officers and Members on whether the current structure meets the objectives and principles set.

The timetable for the review:

July to December 2018	Evidence gathering and research
January 2019	Report to Democracy Committee
March 2019	Draft Terms of Reference and Draft Constitutional Changes
April 2019	Recommendations to Full Council
May 2019	Implementation of changes

Evidence was gathered using a variety of quantitative and qualitative approaches:

1. Desktop Research

- A comparison of MBC and other Local Authorities operating a committee system.
- An evaluation of constitutional and procedural trends at MBC.
- An assessment of financial and budgetary aspects of the committee system at MBC
- Further investigative work, regarding decision making trends at MBC, arising from interview feedback.

2. Online Survey

- An online survey was circulated to Members and Officers at MBC

3. Confidential Member and Officer Interviews

- 6 individual interviews
- 6 group interviews

Unless stated otherwise, all quotes included in this report are drawn from the confidential interviews.

A Working Group, consisting of Members and Substitute Members of the Democracy Committee, met on three occasions between September 2018 and December 2018. The Working Group has led the Committee Structure Review including conducting a range of interviews, considering evidence and making recommendations.

Direct consultation with other Local Authorities was not undertaken, as the working group decided that site visits were not necessary. A review of the number of meetings and decisions taken by committees applying the objective and principles has been incorporated in the qualitative analysis, due to the subjective nature of the criteria.

A COMPARISON OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Desktop research showed that, when considering the allocation of committee functions, MBC had commonalities and disparities with other Local Authorities. Of the 44 Local Authorities operating a committee system, a sample of four were analysed alongside Maidstone Borough Council. These authorities were:

- Basildon Borough Council
- Canterbury City Council
- Great Yarmouth Borough Council
- Tandridge District Council

Compared to the sample, MBC operated a relatively streamlined number of service committees.

Local Authority	Number of Service Committees
Basildon Borough Council	8
Tandridge District Council	5
Maidstone Borough Council	4
Great Yarmouth Borough Council	4
Canterbury City Council	3

A key commonality across the Local Authorities was the inclusion of a Policy and Resources Committee. Although the name for this committee varied across Local Authorities, the Terms of Reference were comparable, with each Local Authority having in place a 'parent committee' with responsibility for taking decisions which spanned other service committees. Most interviewees stated that the Policy and Resources Committee needed to maintain this overarching functionality in order for the system to function effectively.

“There is a view of Policy and Resources as having an overarching role, which it should have, because it needs to look at policy and resources across the Council. If we are to maintain a degree of strategic direction then this shouldn't be watered down.”

Two authorities, Basildon Borough Council and Great Yarmouth Borough Council, operated an Economic Development Committee. This was in contrast to MBC, where this function was within the remit of the Policy and Resources Committee. Both Basildon Borough Council and Great Yarmouth Borough Council grouped other issues alongside Economic Development, which may be worth exploring when considering the terms of reference for the committees going forward.

Local Authority	Committee	Function
Basildon Borough Council	Economic Development and Growth Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic Development and Skills • Education
Great Yarmouth Borough Council	Economic Development Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arts and Cultural Strategy • Concessionary Pricing Strategy • Museums and Heritage Strategy • Economic Growth Strategy

A further disparity was the use of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee at Tandridge District Council. This Committee was responsible for two types of scrutiny; the review of decisions and “calling upon representatives of outside organisations to present information about services which have a significant impact upon local residents”. The Committee also incorporated an audit function, and met as the Crime and Disorder Committee as required. These functions were undertaken within various committees at MBC, such as the Policy and Resources Committee (Decision Review), Audit, Governance and Standards Committee (Audit) and Communities, Housing and Environment Committee (Crime and Disorder Committee).

The final key difference was apparent when comparing MBC to Canterbury City Council. Canterbury City Council included an Urgency Sub-Committee for each of the service committees. This function was encompassed by a single Urgency Committee at MBC, whereas Basildon Borough Council utilised an Urgent Decision and Staffing Sub-Committee. Tandridge District Council and Great Yarmouth Borough Council both had provision in the constitution for the Chief Executive and other Chief Officers to make urgent decisions in consultation with Group Leaders or the Leader of the Council.

Financial Research

An analysis of the costs associated with the provision of the Member Support and Democratic Services functions. The cost of providing the service is made up from budgets that include member allowances, member training, webcasting, printing and postage as well as staff salaries for Democratic Services Officers (and the team manager).

Spend on Member Support and Democratic Services Salaries	
Year	Spend
2014/15	531,380
2015/16	490,039
2016/17	466,738
2017/18	498,338

Whilst this is not the only definition of 'cost neutrality', this was a definition that was easy to test through data the Council already held.

It is important to note, however, that whilst there has been a reduction in the budget, many of the cost savings would have also been made under the Cabinet system. For example, the member printing budget has been reduced significantly due to careful management of printed agendas and the promotion of use of electronic agendas. There have also been a number of staffing changes over the years that the Committee system has been in place, which has meant that spend has decreased overall. It is likely that the reduction in spend outlined would have happened under either form of governance.

When the costs were estimated before moving over to a Committee system, an assumption was made that a Finance Officer and Legal Officer would be required to attend every Committee meeting, as this was the practice at Cabinet meetings previously. This has not turned out to be necessary, with many service Committee meetings not requiring attendance from these Officers. This has meant that less Officer time than was originally anticipated is required for attendance at these meetings.

Committee Membership Size

Survey results revealed that the majority of respondents considered the current committee membership sizes to be correct. During interviews, Members tended to state a preference for larger committees, as it was believed this would improve participation in decision making. It was recognised, however, that it could be challenging for political groups to fill the current committee memberships. An increased committee size, therefore, may not necessarily lead to participation from a wider pool of Members. Officers also suggested that an increased committee membership did not guarantee better decision making. Instead, it was felt that this sometimes resulted in unnecessarily prolonged debates.

“We have a situation where there are not enough spaces for all Councillors who wish to be involved.”

“The more Members that are on a committee, the longer decisions take, and the quality of debate is not improved.”

In terms of the Policy and Resources Committee, there was a balance between those who wished for the committee to remain at its current size and those who did not feel that the committee warranted a larger membership. It was stated during interviews, however, that the larger membership improved the probability of all political groups represented on the Council being represented on the Policy and Resources Committee. This was considered to be appropriate when considering the oversight function of the Committee.

Finally, most interviewees stated that it was desirable for committee memberships to be an odd number, to avoid potential disproportionate use of the Chairman’s casting vote. This would also ensure that a Chairman can be appointed at the beginning of the municipal year, as this removes the potential situation of a deadlock due to two candidates having an equal number of votes.

“You need an odd number of members, as otherwise the system doesn’t work.”

- 1. RECOMMENDED:** 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.

Political Proportionality of Committee Membership

The issue of political proportionality was raised during interviews. It was broadly agreed across those who discussed the matter that all committees should be politically proportionate. This matter was also considered by the Democracy Committee on 14 November 2018. The issue affected the current arrangements for Urgency Committee and Employment Committee, as all other committees were configured in line with political proportionality. At its meeting on 14 November 2018, the Democracy Committee commented that:

“balance and representativeness were key considerations, as it was necessary for Committees to appropriately represent the public.”
– Democracy Committee, 14 November 2018

Sections 15 and 16 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, and the Local Government Committee and Political Group Regulations 1990, state that the Council must allocate seats on committees and other prescribed bodies so as to give effect to the political balance rules. The Council can only depart from these rules if it is agreed at Full Council, provided no member votes against the proposal. It was explained at interview that if a single Councillor opposed the recommended allocation, then an alternative allocation would need to be agreed that was politically proportionate across all Committees. In reality, this would need to be prepared before the meeting, with a separate negotiation occurring to this allocation at the same time as the allocation that didn't apply the proportionality rules. This introduces unnecessary complexity to the negotiations that are required when preparing a proposed allocation of seats, and incentivises those parties that are advantaged by the politically balanced allocation to vote against the allocation that is not politically balanced.

2. RECOMMENDED: That all committees are politically proportionate.

Member Agenda Item Requests

The survey demonstrated that 56% of Member respondents had requested an agenda item. According to the survey, the majority of requests (71%) were then discussed at committee, while 14% were resolved without needing to be put on a committee agenda. For Members who had not requested an agenda item, the most common reason was that they did not need to (82%). Desktop research showed that there were instances of Councillors requesting agenda items throughout the last four municipal years. It was not possible, however, to consistently identify these requests, as the naming convention for agenda item requests was typically identical to a standard agenda item. Equally, agenda item requests did not always feature as an agenda item, as the issues were resolved outside of committee. It was consequently difficult to identify the proportion of agenda item requests that were discussed at committee. The implementation of a tracking system and naming convention for agenda item requests would therefore ensure that these can be traced, and if necessary, followed up to ensure that all have been dealt with appropriately.

“There is no traceability and agenda item requests don’t get onto the Work Programme unless it is challenged in committee.”

- 3. RECOMMENDED:** That a consistent process for tracking and naming agenda items via Member requests is implemented.

Visiting Members

Survey results showed that all respondents understood how to speak as a Visiting Member at committee and were confident using this constitutional provision. An expansion of the role of Visiting Members was suggested during interview, in order to encourage participation in debate. One suggestion was to offer Visiting Members opportunities to speak during debate, however, the Constitution states that Visiting Members may do this already with the Chairman’s consent. It was also suggested that Visiting Members could sit alongside Committee Members in a non-voting capacity. This had practical implications, however, as it could lead to confusion during votes if a non-voting member was erroneously counted as a voter. Current practice with regards to Visiting Members is that the Members sit in the gallery until invited to speak, whereby they approach the Speakers Table. Furthermore, the Constitution states that at the Planning Committee, Visiting Members should sit away from the body of the Committee. This ensures that there is no confusion between Committee Members and Visiting Members. Due to current suitability of arrangements with regards to Visiting Members, as outlined above, no recommendations have been made to adjust the current process for Visiting Members.

Member Involvement in Scrutiny of Key Topics

Following Member participation and engagement in the Committee Structure Review, positive feedback was shared regarding the value of the approach. While the ability to undertake scrutiny-style work is available, this is not commonly used. There is a resourcing implication for undertaking such work, and therefore the outcome and scope would need to be clearly defined at the beginning of the work. Nonetheless, if there is benefit in undertaking an exercise, and the current staffing capacity can accommodate the work, then this should be considered.

- 4. RECOMMENDED:** That the ability to undertake reviews is promoted in order to examine key topics and promote Member engagement.

Speed of Decision Making

A commonly held view was that the committee system did not allow for quick and flexible decision making. 56% of survey respondents stated that they believed this to be the case, while Members and Officers varied in their opinions during interview. In order to assess whether this is an issue with perception or functionality, three areas were explored. Firstly, a comparison of the theoretical timeframes for a decision within a cabinet and committee system is outlined. This is followed by an assessment of the number of decision referrals that took place under the cabinet system, compared to the committee system. Finally, a case study of two commonly mentioned topics; CCTV and the Draft Sports and Playing Pitch Strategy demonstrate the different journey of reports through the system that have been considered on multiple occasions.

“A weaker part of the committee system is the speed in which decisions are made.”

“There is no evidence of decision making being delayed, as there is always an opportunity to take something to a committee soon.”

“Officers have generally got stuff in front of Councillors for decisions well.”

Comparison of Theoretical Models

An assessment of the theoretical Cabinet and Committee models demonstrates the various timeframes associated with decision making. Within the Leader and Cabinet system of governance there are a number of ways in which the system can be configured. This can range from the Cabinet only being able to take decisions as a Committee, with no individual member decision making (as exercised at Dartford Borough Council) to a system where decision making is delegated widely to individual Cabinet Members (as was previously exercised by Maidstone Borough Council). Decisions taken by Cabinet are split between key and non key decisions. Non key decisions could, in theory, be taken relatively quickly. However a report is still required to be drafted by an Officer that outlines the various options available for the Cabinet Member, reasons for recommendations and an outline of the various implications of the decisions. These decisions were not subject to the usual ‘5 clear days’ publication rule that would apply to key decisions or decisions by Committee.

Key decisions were defined in the pre-Committee system Maidstone Borough Council Constitution as executive decisions that were likely to:

- Result in the local authority incurring expenditure which is, or the making of savings which are, equal to the value of £250,000 or more; or
- Be significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area comprising one or more wards in the area of the local authority.

Key decisions required publication on the forward plan. In practice, at Maidstone, this forward plan was published for a four month period as it was relatively simple to plan for key decisions. Requirements in the Local Government Act 2000 state that the minimum period a key decision is required to be published on the forward plan is 28 days.

In terms of the Committee system, there is no requirement to distinguish between key and non key decisions. All decisions by all Committees must be published on an agenda providing 5 clear days notice. This is less flexible than a Cabinet Member non-key decision, but there is no requirement for publication for 28 days in advance for a key decision.

However in practice, both systems have urgency arrangements in place to ensure that if an urgent decision is required that either cannot be published for the required 28 days in advance on a notice of meetings, or cannot be published on a Committee Agenda for 5 clear days in advance, both forms of governance can take this decision. All that is required is a legitimate reason that is agreed by the Committee.

On balance, non-key cabinet member decisions could be taken more quickly and flexibly than under the Committee system. However the decision making model for Cabinet Key Decisions requires the decision to be published for longer than the 5 clear days required for an equivalent decision under the Committee system.

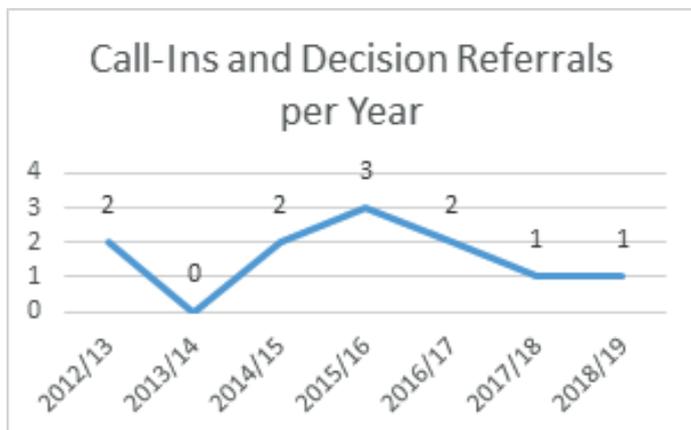
Decision Referrals

Survey results showed that 72% of Member respondents understood how to request a review of a service committee decision. This was the weakest result for questions that assessed Member's understanding of committee procedures. The Decision Referral process was referred to as Call-In under the Cabinet system. Previously, Overview and Scrutiny committees would use Call-Ins to request that Cabinet reconsiders a decision. In the Committee system, this functionality has been included within the remit of the Policy and Resources Committee. The key change is that the Policy and Resources Committee makes a decision on a topic, even if it was not responsible for the original decision. Interview feedback highlighted that decision referrals impact upon the speed of decision making, as the same topic was considered twice. It was stated, however, that it was important to make the right decision rather than a quick decision.

“Speed and efficiency are not the same thing.”

Desktop research showed that the number of decision referrals peaked in 2015/16 when the committee system was introduced (Figure 4). Since 2015/16, the number of decision referrals has returned to a level that was comparable to the cabinet system. The outcome of decision referrals since 2015/16, where only one original decision was fully endorsed, shows that this had been used at appropriate times and in an efficient manner. Furthermore, the Members who signed Decision Referral Forms were often not Members of the original decision making committee. This demonstrates wider participation in decision making for particularly contentious topics. These trends evidence a maturing system that has become more efficient over time. The process appears to work effectively, however, there is a need to ensure that the decision referral process is included in training for Members to ensure the mechanism is widely understood and continues to be used effectively.

Figure 4 – Call-Ins and Decision Referrals per Year



Note: 2018/19 is not a full year.

Case Studies: CCTV and Draft Sports and Playing Pitch Strategy

Despite the evidence demonstrating that the Cabinet and Committee system were comparable in terms of the speed of decision making, it was a commonly held view across the survey and interview feedback that the Committee system was considered slower, and this should not be discarded. CCTV Provision and the Draft Sports and Playing Pitch Strategy were often referenced to demonstrate how the committee system had led to delays in decision making. An assessment of the decision making trends for service committee agenda items in 2017/18, which were not standing items or items for solely for noting, revealed that there were very few items where a decision was not made by the committee. In the case of the Review of Parish Services Scheme (CHE Committee, 14 November 2017), this was deferred to allow for further engagement to take place at a scheduled meeting. The Maidstone Community Lottery (CHE Committee, 20 June 2017), was the only example in the municipal year where the recommendations were wholly refused. It is therefore believed that the perception of the committee system as a slower decision making model arose primarily from issues experienced by the CCTV Provision and Draft Sports and Playing Pitch Strategy items. These have been explored to ensure that lessons can be learned from these two instances.

CASE STUDY: CCTV

CCTV Provision has been discussed on multiple occasions at the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee since 2016. This topic was discussed numerous times at the same committee as additional reports were requested. This resulted in incremental changes being made to the CCTV provision.

Alternative approaches to this could include the use of a briefing to share information that was submitted as a report, or to use the Crime and Disorder Committee as a means to scrutinise CCTV provision prior to a decision being made. These approaches would have assisted with decision making, while promoting participation from a wider audience.

CASE STUDY: DRAFT SPORTS AND PLAYING PITCH STRATEGY

The Draft Sports and Playing Pitch Strategy was discussed at the Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee, Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation Committee and Policy and Resources Committee in 2018, as various aspects of the work fell within the remit of the different committees.

This shows that there is the potential to streamline decision making by designating a single point of decision making, and that committee Terms of Reference could be enhanced to ensure that this is minimised in future.

Committee Terms of Reference

Building on from the findings of the Draft Sports and Playing Pitch Strategy case study, an assessment of MBC committee Terms of Reference indicated that there was potential for improvement. This view was reinforced through the survey and interview process. The survey asked respondents whether Terms of Reference overlapped. This question was answered by 29 respondents, with 76% stating that they did overlap. In addition to this, interviewees suggested that the clarity of committee purpose needed to be enhanced. Furthermore, committees also needed to be defined as the final decision maker for relevant topics. Anomalous subjects within the remit of a committee also required explanation. An example of this was the Crematorium currently being within the remit of the Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee. Finally, it was stated that clarity regarding committee budgets, and when it was appropriate to request additional funding from the Policy and Resources Committee, would minimise unnecessary references between service committees.

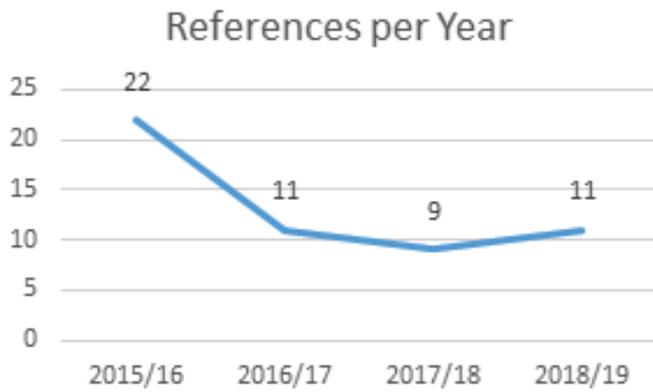
“There always will be overlap in Terms of Reference, but minimising this would help to speed up decision making.”

5. **RECOMMENDED:** That service committee Terms of Reference include:
 - 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.

References between Committees

Interviewees stated that references between committees resulted in slower decision making and also caused confusion as to which committee “owned” the topic. The Draft Sports and Playing Pitch Strategy was an example of this, as it was considered at three service committees. In addition to this, it was stated that if references were made, some topics were considered by a disproportionate number of committees compared to the status of the work. Desktop research showed that the number of references between committees has halved since the committee system was first implemented (Figure 5). The reduced number references therefore evidenced improvement in the efficiency of decision making. Continued monitoring of this trend by Democratic Services would ensure for early identification of any issues. Remedial action could then be undertaken to resolve issues as appropriate.

Figure 5 – The Number of References Made Between Committees Each Year



Note: 2018/19 is not a full year.

“When committees refer across to other committees, such as the Sports Strategy, nobody seems to know who is owning this.”

“Things slow down when a committee makes a reference to another committee.”

“Not every committee should have a say, as the Members of the committee are representatives of the Council.”

Frequency and Number of Committee Meetings

The majority of survey respondents stated that there were the right number of committees (59%), however, a significant proportion (36%) stated that there were too many committees. The majority of respondents also stated that committees met at the right frequency (76%). There were, however, polarised views when comparing Member and Officer responses to these questions. Officers were more likely to say that there were too many committees and that they met too frequently, while the majority of Members stated that the current number of committees was appropriate. This discussion arose at interview, where it was broadly established that a reduction in the number of committees was preferable, as this would streamline decision making and ensure for greater efficiency. It was suggested that there could also be a reduction in the frequency of meetings, depending on the overall number of committees and the respective workload of each committee.

“In terms of reducing the number of committees, that’s a positive thing too.”

Process for Considering Issues that Span Multiple Committees

The survey did not specifically target the issue of cross-cutting topics, however, this was raised in the free text comments. Respondents stated that there was not a suitable protocol to deal with issues that spanned more than one committee, and that this tended to lead to issues jumping between multiple committees. During interviews, there were a number of suggestions for improving this process, however, these had the following limitations:

Approach	Drawbacks
Joint-Committees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Political proportionality is calculated across all committees. By forming a joint-committee, there is a risk that the joint-committee could disproportionately represent groups.
Sub-Committees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sub-committees represent the same issues with regards to political proportionality as joint-committees. Sub-Committees tend to work more effectively when they are set up at the beginning of a municipal year, and this would not be feasible when considering that cross-cutting topics arise throughout the course of the year. There is consistent guidance stating that it is not good practice to set up sub-committees unless such a course is unavoidable.

Currently, the constitution states that the Policy and Resources Committee is the decision making Committee for cross-cutting issues. This approach could be supplemented by relevant Chairmen having discussions at the quarterly Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen meetings to identify pertinent items. If items were identified, Chairmen could informally agree to consider the item at a single committee, be it Policy and Resources or another appropriate service committee. This process could be enhanced to ensure that the Members of both committees have the opportunity to interrogate, contribute to and debate the appropriate reports prior to the committee meeting. All Members would then have the opportunity to participate at the decision making committee meeting, either as a Committee Member or Visiting Member.

“Quarterly meetings of Chairs and Vice-Chairs are now in a good rhythm. This helps with forward planning and identifying common interests.”

Chairmanship

Survey results showed that for the majority of committees, more than three out of four respondents felt they were effectively chaired. Free text responses indicated that effective chairmanship was dependent on a number of factors, however, various aspects were identified that could be improved to support Chairmen in their role. These were discussed in further detail during interviews.

Interviewees stated that at committee meetings, Chairmen needed to promote good quality debate. This meant that superfluous discussions needed to be shut down, and that a consistent approach to the order of debate needed to be established. On the whole, Members stated a preference for speaking in the order that they raised their hand, rather than starting at one side of the chamber and moving clockwise or anti-clockwise around the room. Furthermore, it was stated that when a procedural issue was raised, Chairmen were often presented with advice from both the Democratic Services Officer and Legal Representative. A mechanism for consistency and clarity on what advice each Officer provided therefore needed to be established.

“Chairmen need to control the meeting, inasmuch as ensuring that everyone gives their point of view while also knowing when to close down members who are waffling”.

It was commonly recognised during interviews that the effectiveness of a committee was intrinsically linked to good chairmanship. In order to promote effective chairmanship, it was asserted that all Members should be encouraged to consider becoming a Chairman, as this would broaden the pool of prospective candidates. Furthermore, it should be clearly established that this role was a facilitation function, and did not draw comparison with the role of Cabinet Members in the previous governance structure.

- 6. RECOMMENDED:** 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.

Chairman Involvement during the Report Cycle

Survey results revealed that more than half of respondents considered Agenda Setting and Chairman's Briefing meetings to be effective and helpful, although Members viewed these more positively than Officers. Interviewees stated that Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen played an important role in ensuring that Officer reports considered all available options and did not contain deficiencies that would hinder decision making. In order to achieve this, it was crucial for Officers to ensure that Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen were fully informed throughout the report cycle. It was suggested that the approach to Agenda Setting and Chairman's Briefings could be improved, with the desired outcomes and objectives of Agenda Setting and Chairman's Briefing meetings being shared. This would focus discussions, reduce the duration of meetings and introduce a level of consistency for committee preparation.

“Chairmen need to work closely with Officers, as Members and Officers are a team.”

- 7. RECOMMENDED:** That a clear, consistent and disciplined approach is used for Agenda Setting and Chairman's Briefing meetings:
- 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.

Items for Noting

A commonly discussed theme during interviews was the frequency of items for noting on committee agendas which compromised the ability of the committee to allocate time to important decisions. This led to an additional area of desktop research, which aimed to understand this trend.

“Items for noting are debated, and then a decision item goes straight through.”

Guidance within *Knowles: On Local Authority Meetings* states that agenda items “should not ordinarily be used merely to inform. i.e. items for noting: and the items placed before the committee should be those that unavoidably demand the committee/cabinet's consideration”.

An assessment of agenda items for noting since the introduction of the committee system was undertaken. Items that included recommendations solely for the committee to note the report were evaluated to determine if the service committees had made an alternative resolution. Some reports, such as performance and budget monitoring updates, often only require noting. These were submitted to each service committee on a quarterly basis, and were included in the analysis. Standing items that required noting, such as the Committee Work Programme, were excluded.

“If a paper is for noting, then the Chairman should check it's been read, ask if there are any questions – and if there are none, then it is noted and moved on.”

Since the introduction of the committee system, the Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation Committee had the highest average number of items to note per year (15), compared to the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee (8.5), Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee (7.25) and Policy and Resources Committee (4.75). This could be a result of the Committee requesting update reports more regularly, or updates on the same topic being submitted multiple times throughout the course of the year. To reduce the number of items for noting, alternative approaches could be used to update Committees, such as briefing notes. This approach could be encouraged by the Committee when forming a resolution, as it could request that an update be provided without stipulating the method in which this is delivered. Officers and Members would then have the ability to decide on the most appropriate way to deliver updates to the

Committee without being required to bring the update as a Committee report.

When committees received 5 or more items for noting in a municipal year, the majority of these reports were simply noted. The exception to this was the Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee in 2018/19, where 75% (6) noting items had an additional or changed resolution. Further exploration of this anomaly revealed that some Members of the Committee felt that they had not been engaged by Officers ahead of the report, and therefore the report recommendations were not sufficient. This established two trends; that Officers should not treat committees as a 'rubber stamping' mechanism for reports that were within their remit and that inappropriate submission of noting reports led to a higher demand on Officer time, as further actions arose from the committee resolutions.

It was suggested at interview that agendas should be front loaded with items for noting, so that these could be effectively resolved prior to debate on items for decisions. While it is good practice to shape an agenda to ensure for good quality of debate, stipulating where noting items should be considered introduces inflexibility. Where possible, these items should be considered early, however, there may be a need to consider a noting item at an alternative point on the agenda.

8. RECOMMENDED: That guidance be included in the Maidstone Borough Council Constitution to ensure that only appropriate reports for noting are submitted to service committees.

Reports & Agenda Distribution

Survey and interview comments reinforced the view that reports must be read prior to the committee meeting in order to ensure for effective decision making. Members and Officers, however, differed in their opinions regarding the current timescales and approach to report writing and agenda distribution. Members stated that the time to consider a report ahead of decision making was not always sufficient, particularly when urgent items or urgent updates were published. This issue was exacerbated by a reduction in posted hard copy agenda packs to Members. Officers explained that in order to build in additional time for Members to read reports, they would need to commence report writing far in advance of the meeting, and information may not be readily available at this stage. While MBC was compliant with the legal obligation to publish agendas five clear working days before a committee, both Members and Officers stated that the introduction of paperless agendas was a positive step in promoting speed and cost efficiencies. It was recognised, however, that this approach may not be appropriate for everyone and that technical support would need to be available to ensure for the success of a paperless approach.

“It is important to ensure members have enough time to read papers and check information with officers who have written the report.”

“I am a digital convert. It does work.”

9. **RECOMMENDED:** 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.

Report Format and Information

Survey results showed that respondents felt that there was the right amount of information contained in reports to enable decision making. The Joint Transportation Board was the only committee where an equal proportion of respondents felt that there was the right amount of information (44%) and not enough information (44%). On the other hand, the Planning Committee had the highest proportion of respondents who stated that there was not enough information available (19%).

At interview, a number of changes to the reporting style were discussed. Firstly, it was stated that clarity regarding the purpose of each report could be improved. Although report recommendations demonstrate the desired outcome of a report, it was felt that by clearly including whether a report was for ‘Noting’, ‘Discussion’ or ‘Decision’, this would help those who read the reports. It was suggested that colour coded paper could support this, with a different colour being used for noting items, however, this would have a significant impact on printing costs and may not be an economically viable solution.

Secondly, the location of the ‘Cross Cutting Issues and Implications’ section was debated. At interview, a number of Members stated that including this section towards the front of reports would be beneficial in order to provide context to the report, while Officers predominantly believed that it provided an effective summary at the end of the report. As reports are designed to inform Member decision making, this relocation is suggested. It was agreed across Members and Officers that this section would need to be reshaped to reflect the new Strategic Plan, and careful consideration would need to be given to ensure that the information presented in the matrix did not lead to the detail of the report being skipped.

“You should have risks earlier in the report, so that Members can be informed of what they are deciding, and the risks associated with this, ahead of reading the information.”

“The idea of putting implications at the end is that Members have the opportunity to consider the background and key issues. If the considerations were pushed to the beginning, it may stop things being put into context because the background had not yet been considered.”

To support the relocation of the Cross Cutting Issues and Implications section, a common approach to completing this matrix during report writing would also be beneficial. This would ensure that these issues are considered consistently. Operational examples demonstrate that this is not currently completed in a consistent manner, which results in reports being submitted for publication that do not clearly demonstrate that they have been reviewed by all appropriate Officers.

Thirdly, it was agreed that reports should be as concise as possible. This could be achieved by using appendices more effectively, with the report providing a high level summary of the issues at hand and referencing specific details in the appendix. Furthermore, the use of visuals and diagrams may help to reduce report size, improve upon understanding and subsequently lead to better decision making.

“Moving towards a more visual approach and away from typical lengthy report writing may be beneficial.”

Finally, it was stated that legislative requirements could be made clearer in reports to assist the committee. This would need to provide a summary of the legal requirements that were pertinent to the decision, and also clearly state that these matters were not to be debated, as they could not be changed. This could also be mentioned during the Officer presentation at the beginning of the item to ensure for clarity of understanding. This would ensure that unnecessary debate around unchangeable procedures or requirements are minimised.

“Legal and regulatory obligations need to be presented clearly in a report, and clearly stated, as this is vital information to know, even if it isn’t up for debate.”

10. RECOMMENDED: That report styles are altered to:

- 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.

11. RECOMMENDED: 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.

Officer Presentations at Committee

At interview, it was acknowledged that Officer presentations at committees could be improved. It was stated that presentations should assume that the reports have been read, and therefore only provide a summary of key issues. Furthermore, it was suggested that presentations could be pre-recorded and made available prior to committee meetings. While this would ensure that the presentation was focussed, this approach does have limitations. This would lead to increased demand on Officer time, as they would have to dedicate time to pre-recording their presentation. It would also require a technological solution to ensure that this presentation was available to the public, so that everyone had access to the information. Finally, it may lead to Members seeing the presentation twice if they viewed it online, as it would need to be played at committee to ensure that everyone had seen it. This feedback, however, highlighted that other approaches, such as displaying visuals on the TV screens, would enhance presentations in some instances, and that Officers should not feel restricted to an oral presentation at committee.

“Introductions given by Officers are unnecessarily long sometimes.”

12. RECOMMENDED: 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.

Resolving Issues Outside of Committee

During interviews, it was commented that committee efficiency was hindered when issues were raised for the first time at the public meeting. These issues could range from disputing the content of reports, to procedural issues or moving motions that were not well worded. In the case of moving motions, if these were not worded effectively to provide clear direction, this had a further impact on the Officer's ability to implement a decision. It was acknowledged that these situations were unavoidable in some cases, however, they could be reduced through engagement with Officers prior to committee meetings. Furthermore, if issues did arise, Chairmen should be confident to use adjournments and deferments where appropriate, in order to effectively resolve a matter.

“The worst thing, as a Chairman, is when someone comes up with something at committee and it sends everyone in a different direction on the night, and it’s difficult to bring everyone back together.”

“Too often, Members turn up at meetings and ask questions that should have been raised before the meeting.”

“This could help Officers to consider it ahead of the meeting, or avoid embarrassment for Members if they are wrong. This should not be confrontational.”

13. RECOMMENDED: 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).

Delegated Authority

The survey showed that less than half of respondents agreed that the scheme of delegation to Officers was appropriate (47%), with no significant difference in the response levels between Officers and Members. At interview, it was revealed that a common issue was the lack of clarity and transparency regarding the scope of decisions taken under delegated authority. There were disparate views between Members and Officers, with Members stating that while Officers had delegated authority for good reason, they needed to be aware of when this should not be used. Often, sensitive issues were best dealt with alongside Members at committee. A preference was also stated by Members for decisions to be weighted more heavily towards committees. Officers, on the other hand, stated that they felt they were doing their job by using delegated authority, and that they should be trusted to make decisions if they had the authority to do so. If used appropriately, this helped with the speed and efficiency of decision making. It would appear, therefore, that transparency could be improved, as this would ensure that Officers can continue to use delegated authority appropriately, while this would also allow Members to have greater insight into the decisions being made. To support this, guidance could be shared to ensure that Members and Officers alike have a common understanding of delegated authority and when it is to be used. Work is currently being undertaken to produce a framework, outlining the recording and publishing of Officer decisions, in line with the Openness of Local Government Bodies Relations 2014. This work is due to be concluded and the process in place for the start of the 2019/20 municipal year.

“A very regular dialogue about roles of Officers and Members takes place, and there are many occasions where the system of delegation is questioned.”

“Openness and transparency is important.”

Furthermore, it was explained that delegated authority was approved by Full Council each year, through the Council adopting the Constitution, and therefore any changes to delegations needed to be clearly understood at the point of approval. In 2018, a document containing tracked changes, outlining how the Constitution and Scheme of Delegation had been amended following previous resolutions of Council, was not provided to Full Council at the annual meeting, and the issue of transparency was raised at the meeting.

In previous years when amendments to the Constitution were made, resolutions outlining the changes required in general terms, and then a final resolution mandating the amending of the Constitution accordingly were passed. The Monitoring Officer would then effect these changes under delegation. However, a new approach has been trialled recently, whereby the proposed changes to the Constitution are drafted using tracked changes and recommended to Council for adoption. This has improved transparency in what members are approving and provides a clear audit trail of the changes made. To enhance transparency further, it is suggested that a separate resolution is agreed at the annual Council meeting, which specifically approves the scheme of delegation to Officers, along with a reference as to where the scheme of delegation can be found in the Constitution.

To further support this key issue, it would be helpful to understand how MBC compares to other Local Authorities when considering delegated authority. This would help to demonstrate whether the issues raised were a result of an anomalous scheme of delegation at MBC. If MBC was comparable to other Local Authorities, then it would suggest that further training could be provided to ensure that clarity of the current system is improved.

- 14. RECOMMENDED:** That a record of officer decisions made under delegated authority be introduced and frequently shared with Members.
- 15. RECOMMENDED:** 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.
- 16. RECOMMENDED:** 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.
- 17. RECOMMENDED:** That a comparison of delegated authority across other Local Authorities using the committee system is undertaken.

Member Briefings and Information Sharing

Interview responses showed that Member Briefings were considered an effective way of sharing information, however, they needed to be disciplined in order to ensure they had maximum impact. It was stated that briefings should be limited to the discussion of a single complex topic, or a combination of interrelated, less complex, topics. Furthermore, these opportunities needed to ensure that strategic topics were discussed, rather than covering the minutiae of topics. It was highlighted that it was often the same Members who attended Member Briefings. Although there was limited flexibility in terms of the timing of these briefings, by ensuring that Member Briefings were considered to be increasingly focussed and valuable, this may support an improved attendance from Members.

“Writing a report for noting is a waste of time, a briefing session is far more powerful and engaging.”

Information could also be shared with Members relating to the committee work programmes, to ensure that all Members are able to easily access information relevant to their interests. This is currently achieved through the monthly Member Bulletin, and is circulated to all Members at the beginning of each month. To improve the accessibility of this information, it was suggested that this information could also be included in the Weekly Notice of Meetings.

18. RECOMMENDED: 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.

Training

Building on the Learning and Development Charter, adopted by the Democracy Committee at its meeting on 5th September 2018, it was acknowledged that there was potential to improve upon the current training offer for Members. Officers would also benefit from training, however, this was not covered by the charter. Feedback suggested that combined Member-Officer training would be valuable, however, it was recognised that certain topics would not be relevant to all. While the upskilling of both Members and Officers was crucial, it was stated that a key outcome from all training needed to be an increased level of confidence for those who participated in the training.

The training that could be provided to Members and Officers was:

- Role playing a committee so that the functions and procedures were familiar. This could potentially be done as part of the snap committees at the beginning of the municipal year.
- Procedural training, such as forming or amending motions at committee.
- A broad introduction to the functions, workings and governance of the Council.
- A tour of the aspects of the Council that related to each committee.
- Public speaking training to improve upon confidence and the effectiveness of presentations and debates.

“Scenario based training would help.”

“We can often get lost in procedures, and more training would help to avoid this.”

Suggestions for Officer training centred largely on report writing and presentations at committee. A current rolling programme of report writing training is in place, and it was agreed that this has led to improved reports. This could be expanded to ensure that all Officers have access to the training.

Suggestions for Member training focussed largely on the induction of new Members, and outlined a number of areas that could be considered:

- An introduction to expectations for Members, such as involvement and behaviour at committee.
- Mentoring and buddying schemes.
- Procedural guidance, to build on the aforementioned role playing training.

“On the job training is best.”

“Members ought to feel free to talk to their colleagues, regardless of parties.”

To support the above training, written guidance could also be developed. Suggestions included advice on how to conduct oneself at committee and a document providing key phrases that could be used in meetings to ensure that all Members could confidently contribute to debates or resolution wording. Furthermore, at the first meeting of each municipal year, Committee Members could be provided with a brief information sheet that outlines the purpose of the committee they sit on, services relevant to the specific committee and other relevant information that would assist in decision making throughout the year.

The formation of a training programme is outside of the scope of the Committee Structure Review, but it is to be considered as a separate project.

Review of the Constitution

Feedback from Members and Officers indicated that in order to support the training given to Members and Officers, work could be undertaken to simplify the Constitution and produce a concise, 'easy-read' version with clear page and section numbering. Further development could include a gap-analysis of the current content, and the correction of inconsistencies and duplication. The delegated authorities currently within the Constitution could also be reviewed in light of a comparison between MBC and other Local Authorities to ensure for consistency of understanding. This work has commenced and the findings of the Constitution Review will be presented to the Democracy Committee.

“Avoid information overload and put it in an easily accessible format.”

Suggested Alternative Options

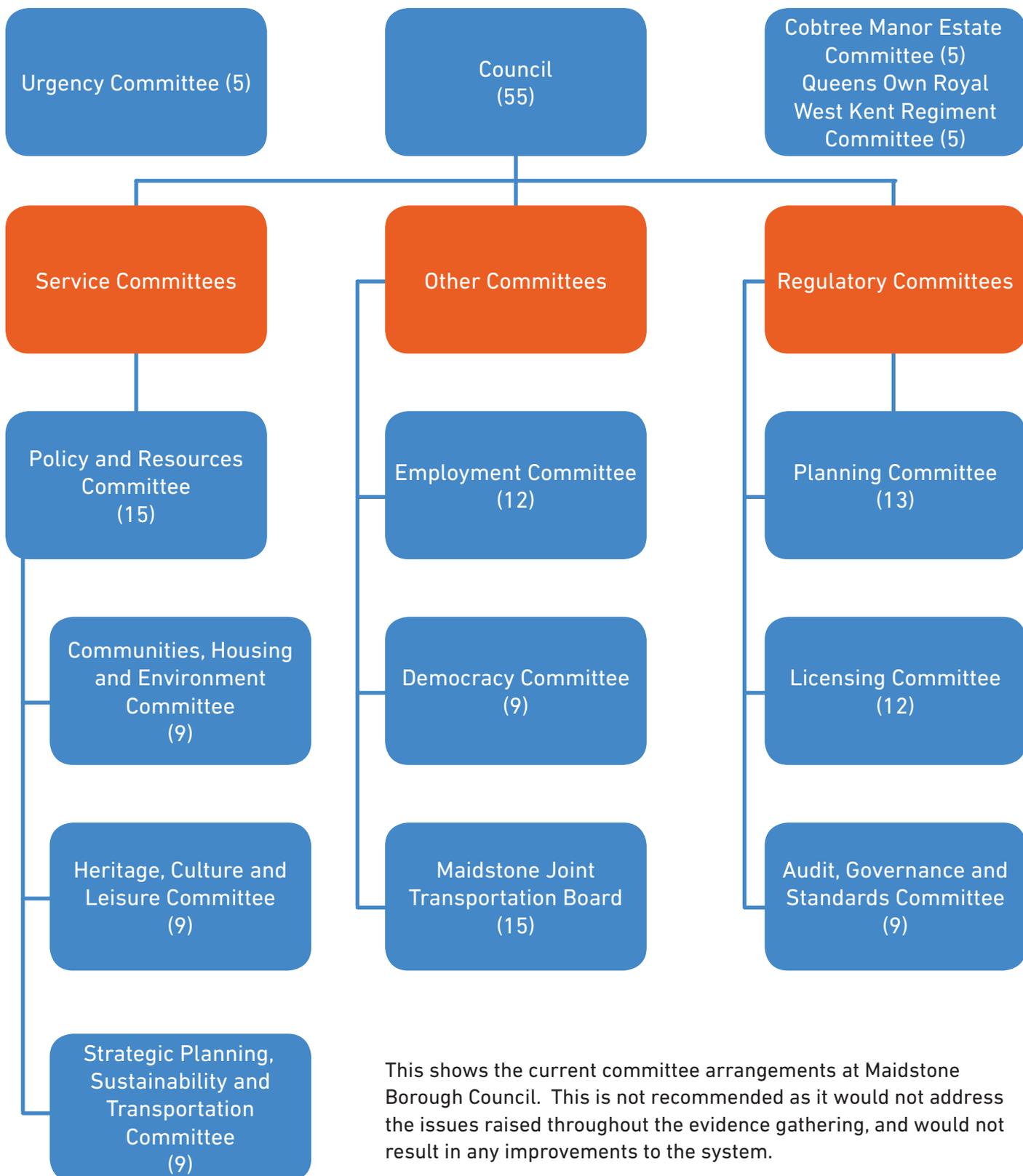
A variety of thematic approaches were suggested for refreshing the committee system. These have not been modelled as there are significant challenges with the implementation of these options. The options, with positive and negative considerations, are outlined below.

Option	Positive Aspects	Negative Aspects
Aligning Committees to the Roles of Heads of Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarity of committee purpose • Consistency of Officer attendance. • Reduced duplication of committee functions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This would not be sustainable if there was a change in organisational structure or frequent turnover of roles. • Decision making would suffer if there was a vacancy for a prolonged period of time.
Aligning Committees to Key Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarity of committee purpose • Consistency of Officer attendance. • Reduced duplication of committee functions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The definition of 'Key Services' is subjective • To achieve a Committee structure based on the 'Key Services' that does not increase the number of Committees (and therefore costs), services would need to be grouped together • This could lead to Committees with a lack of focus and even more overlap in their terms of reference
Aligning Committees to Common Skillsets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committees would take decisions on matters that require common approaches. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A more sustainable and applicable approach would be to align Committee Membership based on the functions of the committee. • Skillsets change every year, depending on elections and the experience gained by Councillors. This may mean that Committees would need to change every year
Merging Economic Development and Housing Functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased exposure for Economic Development would ensure that it is given an appropriate level of focus. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This would create an imbalanced workload across service committees. • When considering Head of Service responsibilities, there are clearer synergies between Economic Development and the current functions of the Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee than housing.
Merging Economic Development and Strategic Spatial Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased exposure for Economic Development would ensure that it is given an appropriate level of focus. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The workload of the current SPST Committee is high and it was not considered appropriate to expand this further.

Using the collated evidence, various committee structure options have been developed. These options consider the arrangements for service committees and other committees independently. The options are then amalgamated to create a final 'full' structure. The names of committees are suggestions only, and are designed to transparently reflect the purpose of each committee. The suggested committee membership size is included in brackets.

A 'Do Nothing' option has been outlined below, for context.

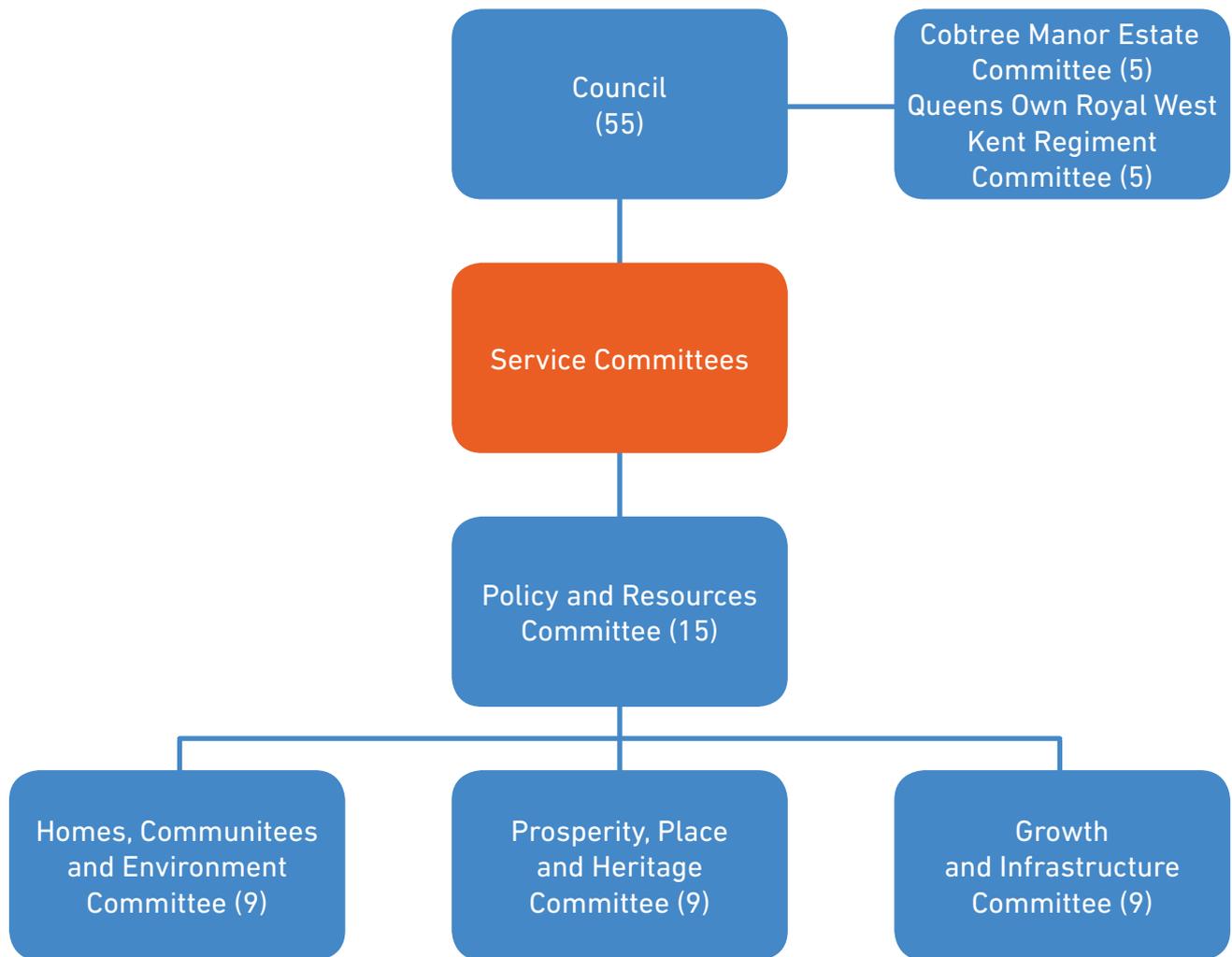
Option 1 – Do Nothing



This shows the current committee arrangements at Maidstone Borough Council. This is not recommended as it would not address the issues raised throughout the evidence gathering, and would not result in any improvements to the system.

Service Committees

Option 2 – Adjustments to the Current Committees



“These would need to be multi-disciplinary, and the focus should be on outcomes rather than on shaping it to the teams who are working on stuff.”

This option would see the current service committees adjusted. Amendments would be made to Terms of Reference to reflect the objectives and priorities in the new Strategic Plan, to ensure that committees are focussed on outcomes rather than activity. The Urgency Committee would be decommissioned, as an urgent meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee would perform the same function. This urgent decision functionality was considered in detail at the Democracy Committee on 14 November 2018, whereby the Committee commented that a quorate urgent Committee meeting was a sensible alternative to the Urgency Committee.

“The focus needs to be on the purpose, rather than the activity.”

An adjustment to committee names would ensure that previous perceptions of committees are not carried into the new governance model, and would also help to establish the strategic priorities that each committee is responsible for.

Introduction

The current functions are retained excluding Economic Development which moves to Prosperity, Place and Heritage Committee. The functionality to consider any topics that cannot be assigned to a single committee is included specifically in the Terms of Reference.

Strategic Plan Objective/s

- Responsible for oversight of progress against the whole Strategic Plan and overarching matters

Functions

- To make recommendations to Council on budget and policy matters;
- To provide strategic direction to the operation of the Council, determining policies in areas within its terms of reference and any cross cutting policies that impact on other Committee areas;
- To make decisions regarding land and property including acquisition (by agreement or compulsorily), disposal, appropriation and development with the exception of the declaration of Open Space surplus to requirements for the purposes of advertising and disposing of open space under Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 or any other similar enactment and the final decision on the disposal of Open Space (unless delegated to officers or within the remit of another Committee);
- Retain a strategic overview of risk management;
- Be responsible for all policy matters not otherwise allocated to any other Committee and to determine any disputes or differences between Committees; and
- To determine planning applications referred to it by the Head of Planning and Development.

Policies that are reserved for P&R are People Strategy and Workforce Plan, Medium Term Financial Strategy, Communication and Engagement Strategy, Corporate Improvement Plan, Information Management Strategy, Risk Management Strategy including Counter Fraud, Commissioning Strategy, Asset Management Strategy, Council Accommodation Strategy and Emergency and Resilience Planning.

This Committee would remain responsible for corporate services (including Shared Services) which would include Revenues and Benefits, Property and Procurement, Corporate Finance, ICT, Legal Services and Policy, Communications and Governance.

Introduction

Formerly the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee, this would be responsible for the Strategic Plan objectives 'Homes and Communities' and 'Safe, Clean and Green'. This would include parks, green spaces and biodiversity in the remit of the Housing, Communities and Environment Committee. Furthermore, responsibility for the crematorium and cemetery would be transferred to the committee.

Strategic Plan Objective/s

- **Homes and Communities**
 - A diverse range of community activities is encouraged
 - Existing housing is safe, desirable and promotes good health and well-being
 - Homelessness and rough sleeping are prevented
 - Community facilities and services in the right place at the right time to support communities
- **Safe, Clean and Green**
 - People feel safe and are safe
 - A Borough that is recognised as clean and well cared for by everyone
 - An environmentally attractive and sustainable Borough
 - Everyone has access to high quality parks and green spaces

Functions

This Committee will be responsible for setting the Council's policy around key issues in relation to Housing, Communities and Environment including the Housing Allocations Policy, Waste Management Strategy, Recycling Strategy, Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy, Community Safety Strategy, Housing Strategy, the Parish Charter, Licensing Strategy and Policies, Street Scene and Environmental Strategy, Parks and Open Spaces 10 year Plan and Renewable Energy Strategy. The Committee would retain the function of meeting as the Council's Statutory Crime and Disorder Committee twice yearly. Key services this Committee would be responsible for would include Waste Collection, Street Scene, Environmental Enforcement, Housing Services, Parks and Open Spaces (to declare Open Space surplus to requirements for the purposes of advertising and disposing of open space under Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 or any other similar enactment and to take the final decision on disposal), Environmental Health, Licensing, Community Safety and Bereavement Services. Additionally, the Committee will be responsible for strategic performance, budget related staffing matters and budget monitoring for its area, in addition to submitting budget estimates and capital programmes within its area to P&R Committee with a view to P&R Committee submitting the budget to Council.

Introduction

Formerly the Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee, this would be responsible for the Strategic Plan objective 'A Thriving Place'. This would mean that parks, green spaces, the crematorium and cemetery are removed from the remit of the current committee Terms of Reference, with Economic Development included. Museums would be retained as part of the committee, as these are linked to tourism and economic development.

"I can see the synergies in aligning Economic Development to Heritage, Culture and Leisure [...] it is well known that arts and heritage are good regenerators."

Strategic Plan Objective/s

- A Thriving Place
 - A vibrant leisure and culture offer, enjoyed by residents and attractive to visitors
 - Our town and village centres are fit for the future
 - Skills levels and earning potential of our residents are raised
 - Local commercial and inward investment is increased

Functions

This Committee will be responsible for setting the Council's policy around key issues in relation to Heritage, Culture, Leisure, Sport and Economic Development. Some key areas of responsibility will be oversight and monitoring of the contracts for the Leisure Centre and Hazlitt Theatre, as well as the long term plans for the Museum. Responsibilities around Economic Development will include setting, reviewing and monitoring the Council's Economic Development Strategy and considering any key Economic Development projects that require Council funding. The Committee will also have responsibility for Maidstone Market. Key strategies and policies this Committee would be responsible for will include the Economic Development Strategy, Commercialisation Strategy, Festivals and Events Policy, Tourism Destination Management Plan, and Museums 20 year Development Plan. Additionally, the Committee will be responsible for strategic performance, budget related staffing matters and budget monitoring for its area, in addition to submitting budget estimates and capital programmes within its area to P&R Committee with a view to P&R Committee submitting the budget to Council.

Introduction

Formerly the Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation Committee, this would be responsible for the Strategic Plan objective 'Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure'.

Strategic Plan Objective/s

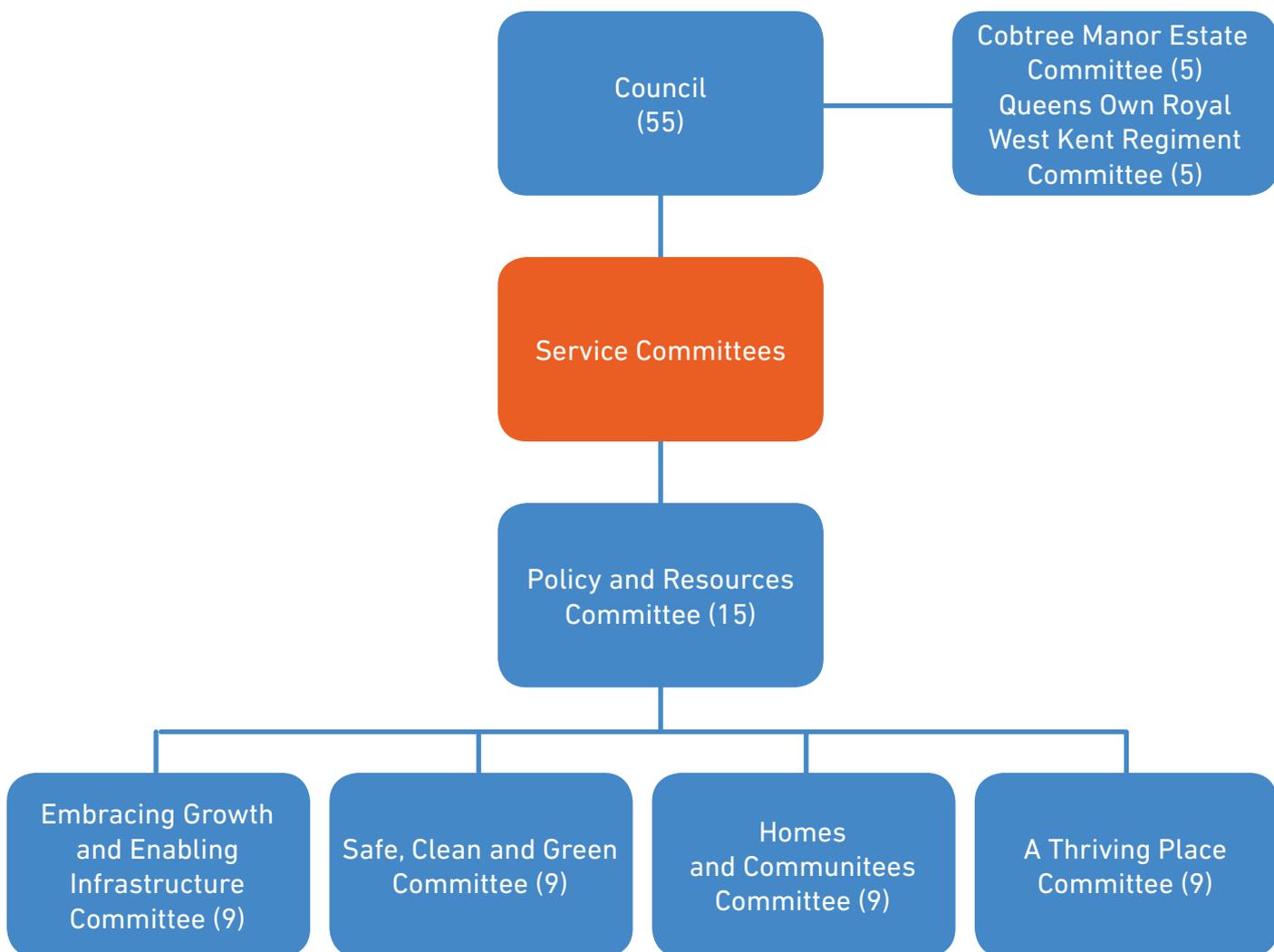
- Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure
 - The Council leads master planning and invests in new places which are well designed
 - Key employment sites are delivered
 - Housing need is met including affordable housing
 - Sufficient infrastructure is planned to meet the demands of growth

Functions

This Committee will be responsible for developing the Council's policies, including Planning Policies, to help the Council achieve its Strategic Objective in this area. Some of these policies will be required to be referred to full Council for approval, for example policies that will become part of the Development Plan, but the Committee will take the lead role in developing and setting the direction of these policies prior to submission to Full Council for approval. The Committee will be responsible for services that relate to this strategic objective including Development Management, Planning Enforcement, Parking Services, Building Control and Planning Policy. Additionally, the Committee will be responsible for strategic performance, budget related staffing matters and budget monitoring for its area, in addition to submitting budget estimates and capital programmes within its area to P&R Committee with a view to P&R Committee submitting the budget to Council.

This is the preferred option for service committees, as it ensures that the priorities of the new Strategic Plan are covered efficiently. Furthermore, it does not require significant additional resource to implement or service. This supports both the efficiency and cost-neutrality aspects of the original committee system principles.

Option 3 – New Committees Aligned to the New Strategic Plan



“Our committees should be focused around the 4 strategic outcomes.”

The strategic objectives of the Council, and the implementation of these in a consensual way, is the key thing to look at.”

This option would see all current service committees, except for the Policy and Resources Committee, decommissioned. Four new service committees would be created to reflect the objectives in the new Strategic Plan. The Urgency Committee would be removed as an urgent meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee would perform the same function. This urgent decision functionality was considered in detail at the Democracy Committee on 14 November 2018, whereby the Committee commented that a quorate urgent Committee meeting was a sensible alternative to the Urgency Committee.

Introduction

The current functions are retained excluding Economic Development which moves to A Thriving Place Committee. The functionality to consider any topics that cannot be assigned to a single committee is included specifically within the Terms of Reference.

Strategic Plan Objective/s

- Responsible for oversight of progress against the whole Strategic Plan and overarching matters

Functions

- To make recommendations to Council on budget and policy matters;
- To provide strategic direction to the operation of the Council, determining policies in areas within its terms of reference and any cross cutting policies that impact on other Committee areas;
- To make decisions regarding land and property including acquisition (by agreement or compulsorily), disposal, appropriation and development with the exception of the declaration of Open Space surplus to requirements for the purposes of advertising and disposing of open space under Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 or any other similar enactment and the final decision on the disposal of Open Space (unless delegated to officers or within the remit of another Committee);
- Retain a strategic overview of risk management;
- Be responsible for all policy matters not otherwise allocated to any other Committee and to determine any disputes or differences between Committees; and
- To determine planning applications referred to it by the Head of Planning and Development.

Policies that are reserved for P&R are People Strategy and Workforce Plan, Medium Term Financial Strategy, Communication and Engagement Strategy, Corporate Improvement Plan, Information Management Strategy, Risk Management Strategy including Counter Fraud, Commissioning Strategy, Asset Management Strategy, Council Accommodation Strategy and Emergency and Resilience Planning.

This Committee would remain responsible for corporate services (including Shared Services) which would include Revenues and Benefits, Property and Procurement, Corporate Finance, ICT, Legal Services and Policy, Communications and Governance.

Introduction

This committee would be responsible for policy matters relating to the Strategic Plan Objective 'Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure'.

Strategic Plan Objective/s

- Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure
 - The Council leads master planning and invests in new places which are well designed
 - Key employment sites are delivered
 - Housing need is met including affordable housing
 - Sufficient infrastructure is planned to meet the demands of growth

Functions

This Committee will be responsible for developing the Council's policies, including Planning Policies, to help the Council achieve its Strategic Objective in this area. Some of these policies will be required to be referred to full Council for approval, for example policies that will become part of the Development Plan, but the Committee will take the lead role in developing and setting the direction of these policies prior to submission to Full Council for approval. The Committee will be responsible for services that relate to this strategic objective including Development Management, Planning Enforcement, Parking Services, Building Control and Planning Policy. Additionally, the Committee will be responsible for strategic performance, budget related staffing matters and budget monitoring for its area, in addition to submitting budget estimates and capital programmes within its area to P&R Committee with a view to P&R Committee submitting the budget to Council.

Introduction

This committee would be responsible for policy matters relating to the Strategic Plan Objective 'Safe, Clean and Green'.

Strategic Plan Objective/s

- Safe, Clean and Green
 - People feel safe and are safe
 - A Borough that is recognised as clean and well cared for by everyone
 - An environmentally attractive and sustainable Borough
 - Everyone has access to high quality parks and green spaces

Functions

This Committee would be responsible for setting the Council's policies such as the Waste Management Strategy, Recycling Strategy, Street Scene and Environmental Strategy, Parks and Open Spaces 10 year Plan and Renewable Energy Strategy. The Committee would perform the statutory function of the Crime and Disorder Committee twice yearly. Key services in this Committee would include Waste Collection, Street Scene, Environmental Enforcement, Parks and Open Spaces (to declare Open Space surplus to requirements for the purposes of advertising and disposing of open space under Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 or any other similar enactment and to take the final decision on disposal), Environmental Health, Community Safety and Bereavement Services (including the Crematorium and Cemetery). Additionally, the Committee will be responsible for strategic performance, budget related staffing matters and budget monitoring for its area, in addition to submitting budget estimates and capital programmes within its area to P&R Committee with a view to P&R Committee submitting the budget to Council.

Introduction

This committee would be responsible for policy matters relating to the Strategic Plan Objective 'Homes and Communities'.

Strategic Plan Objective/s

- Homes and Communities
 - A diverse range of community activities is encouraged
 - Existing housing is safe, desirable and promotes good health and well-being
 - Homelessness and rough sleeping are prevented
 - Community facilities and services in the right place at the right time to support communities

Functions

This Committee would be responsible for setting the Council's policies such as the Housing Allocations Policy, Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy, Community Safety Strategy, Housing Strategy, the Parish Charter and Licensing Strategies and Policies. Key services this Committee would be responsible for would include Housing Services and Licensing and Community Safety. Additionally, the Committee will be responsible for strategic performance, budget related staffing matters and budget monitoring for its area, in addition to submitting budget estimates and capital programmes within its area to P&R Committee with a view to P&R Committee submitting the budget to Council.

Introduction

This committee would be responsible for policy matters relating to the Strategic Plan Objective 'A Thriving Place'.

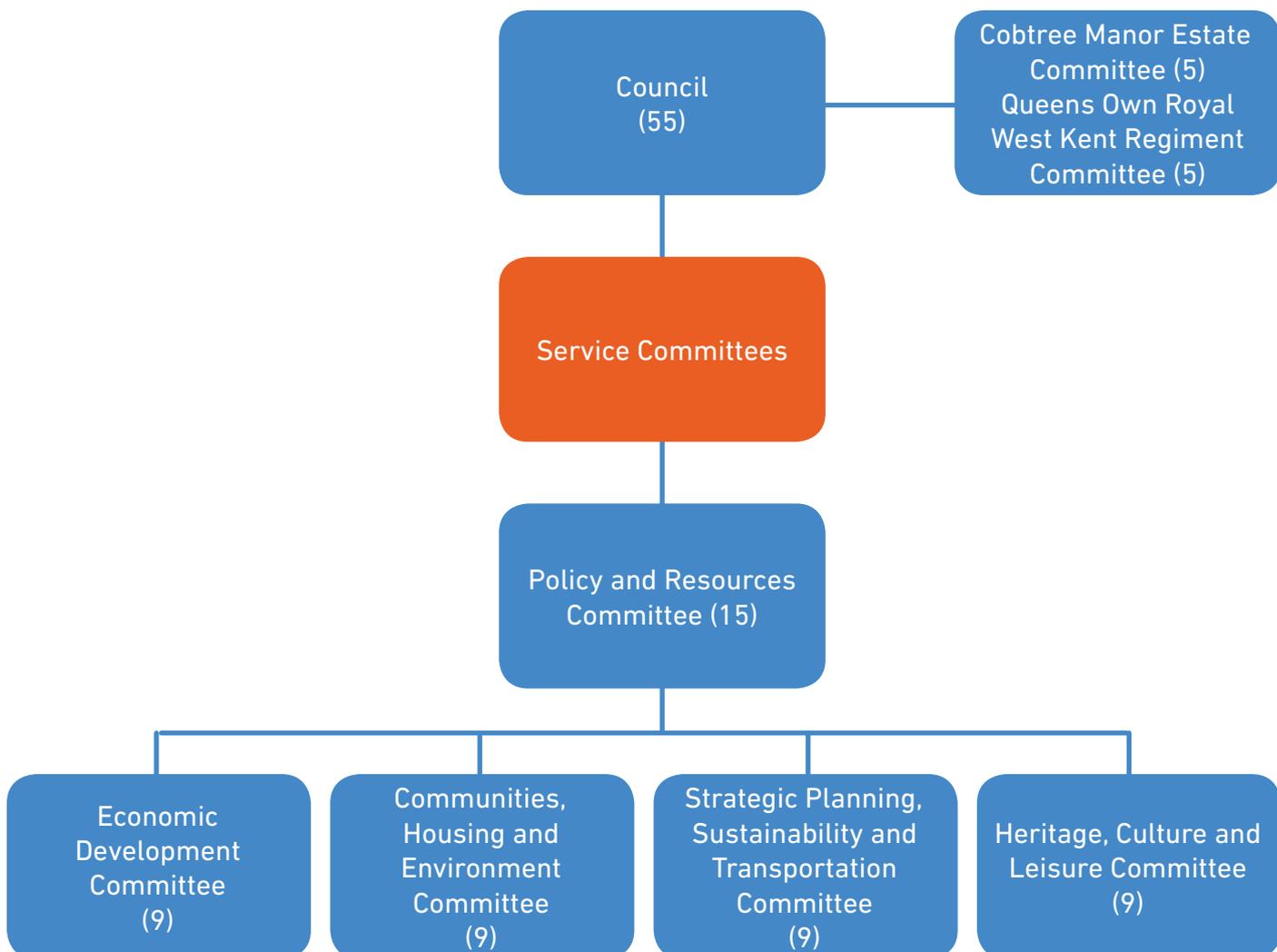
Strategic Plan Objective/s

- A Thriving Place
 - A vibrant leisure and culture offer, enjoyed by residents and attractive to visitors
 - Our town and village centres are fit for the future
 - Skills levels and earning potential of our residents are raised
 - Local commercial and inward investment is increased

Functions

This Committee will be responsible for setting the Council's policy around key issues in relation to Heritage, Culture, Leisure, Sport and Economic Development. Some key areas of responsibility will be oversight and monitoring of the contracts for the Leisure Centre and Hazlitt Theatre, as well as the long term plans for the Museum. Responsibilities around Economic Development will include setting, reviewing and monitoring the Council's Economic Development Strategy and considering any key Economic Development projects that require Council funding. The Committee will also have responsibility for Maidstone Market. Key strategies and policies this Committee would be responsible for will include the Economic Development Strategy, Commercialisation Strategy, Festivals and Events Policy, Tourism Destination Management Plan, and Museums 20 year Development Plan. Additionally, the Committee will be responsible for strategic performance, budget related staffing matters and budget monitoring for its area, in addition to submitting budget estimates and capital programmes within its area to P&R Committee with a view to P&R Committee submitting the budget to Council.

This option is not recommended as although it would focus committees on outcomes, , and align each committee to a single objective in the Strategic Plan, it does have a number of drawbacks. Firstly, it would require the creation of an extra service committee. This contradicts interview feedback, which stated that a reduction in the number of committees was preferential. The required resource to service an additional committee also represents a significant risk to the delivery of this model, as the streamlining of other committees would not balance the capacity to deliver the model. This would mean that cost neutrality may not be achieved. Furthermore, there would be substantial investment in the re-writing of the Constitution, which would be required each time the Strategic Plan is refreshed or renewed. Consequently, despite the advantages this model presents, it is not considered to be a sustainable approach.



“Economic development in its broadest sense is the most important, fundamental driving force of the wellbeing of the borough. It needs to have its own committee.”

“because Economic Development currently sits with Policy and Resources, it doesn’t get enough air time.”

This option would see the current committee system maintained, with a separate Economic Development Committee created to perform functions currently within the remit of the Policy and Resources Committee. This urgent decision functionality was considered in detail at the Democracy Committee on 14 November 2018, whereby the Committee commented that a quorate urgent Committee meeting was a sensible alternative to the Urgency Committee.

Introduction

The current functions are retained excluding Economic Development which moves to the Economic Development Committee. The functionality to consider any topics that cannot be assigned to a single committee is included specifically in the Terms of Reference.

Strategic Plan Objective/s

- Responsible for oversight of progress against the whole Strategic Plan and overarching matters

Functions

- To make recommendations to Council on budget and policy matters;
- To provide strategic direction to the operation of the Council, determining policies in areas within its terms of reference and any cross cutting policies that impact on other Committee areas;
- To make decisions regarding land and property including acquisition (by agreement or compulsorily), disposal, appropriation and development with the exception of the declaration of Open Space surplus to requirements for the purposes of advertising and disposing of open space under Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 or any other similar enactment and the final decision on the disposal of Open Space (unless delegated to officers or within the remit of another Committee);
- Retain a strategic overview of risk management;
- Be responsible for all policy matters not otherwise allocated to any other Committee and to determine any disputes or differences between Committees; and
- To determine planning applications referred to it by the Head of Planning and Development.

Policies that are reserved for P&R are People Strategy and Workforce Plan, Medium Term Financial Strategy, Communication and Engagement Strategy, Corporate Improvement Plan, Information Management Strategy, Risk Management Strategy including Counter Fraud, Commissioning Strategy, Asset Management Strategy, Council Accommodation Strategy and Emergency and Resilience Planning.

This Committee would remain responsible for corporate services (including Shared Services) which would include Revenues and Benefits, Property and Procurement, Corporate Finance, ICT, Legal Services and Policy, Communications and Governance.

Introduction

This new committee would be responsible solely for Economic Development matters.

Strategic Plan Objective/s

- A Thriving Place
 - Skills levels and earning potential of our residents are raised
 - Local commercial and inward investment is increased

Functions

This committee would be responsible for the Council's Economic Development Strategy and considering any key Economic Development projects that require Council funding. Key strategies and policies this Committee would be responsible for will include the Economic Development Strategy and Commercialisation Strategy. Additionally, the Committee will be responsible for strategic performance, budget related staffing matters and budget monitoring for its area, in addition to submitting budget estimates and capital programmes within its area to P&R Committee with a view to P&R Committee submitting the budget to Council.

Introduction

This committee would remain unchanged.

Strategic Plan Objective/s

- **Homes and Communities**
 - Existing housing is safe, desirable and promotes good health and well-being
 - Homelessness and rough sleeping are prevented
 - Community facilities and services in the right place at the right time to support communities
- **Safe, Clean and Green**
 - People feel safe and are safe
 - A Borough that is recognised as clean and well cared for by everyone
 - An environmentally attractive and sustainable Borough

Functions

The functions of the committee would remain unchanged.

STRATEGIC PLANNING, SUSTAINABILITY AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

Introduction

This committee would remain unchanged.

Strategic Plan Objective/s

- • Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure
 - The Council leads master planning and invests in new places which are well designed
 - Key employment sites are delivered
 - Housing need is met including affordable housing
 - Sufficient infrastructure is planned to meet the demands of growth
- • A Thriving Place
 - Our town and village centres are fit for the future

Functions

The functions of the committee would remain unchanged.

Introduction

This committee would remain unchanged.

Strategic Plan Objective/s

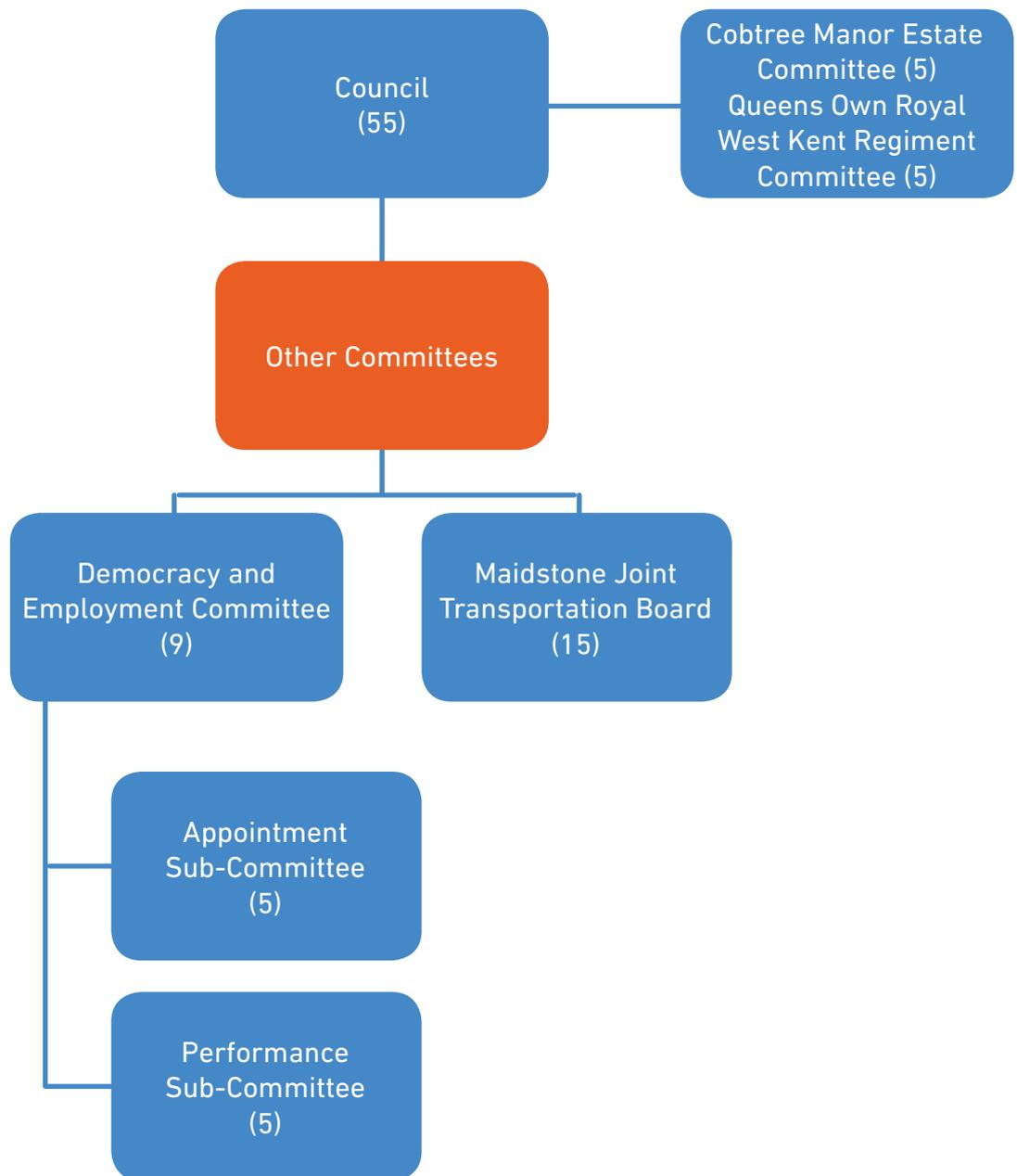
- Homes and Communities
 - A diverse range of community activities is encouraged
- Safe, Clean and Green
 - Everyone has access to high quality parks and green spaces
- A Thriving Place
 - A vibrant leisure and culture offer, enjoyed by residents and attractive to visitors
 - Our town and village centres are fit for the future

Functions

The functions of the committee would remain unchanged.

This option is not recommended as the creation of an Economic Development Committee would not create a balanced workload across the service committees. Furthermore, lines of accountability for Officers would be unclear, with Officers required to attend multiple committees in order to fully represent their portfolio of work. The creation of an additional committee would mean that cost neutrality is jeopardised, while this arrangement creates a lack of clarity regarding which committee is responsible for Strategic Plan objectives.

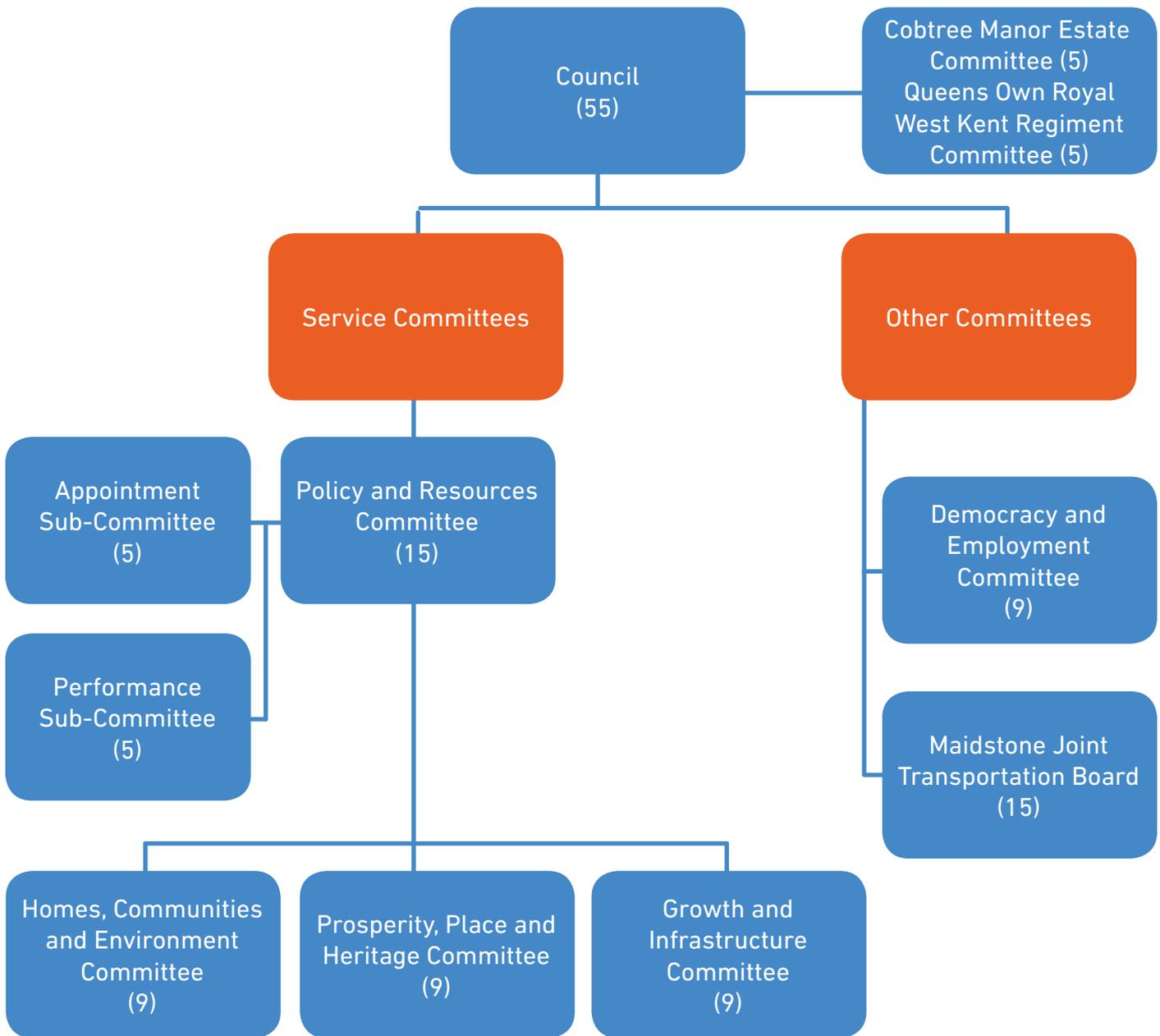
Option 5 – Democracy and Employment Committee with Sub-Committees



This option would see the functions of the Democracy Committee and Employment Committee merged. It was suggested that this could be called a General Purposes Group, however, it was felt that naming this as the Democracy and Employment Committee allowed for greater transparency regarding the function of the Committee. The Democracy and Employment Committee would then form sub-committees to perform the functions that currently fall within the remit of the Employment Committee sub-committees. This allows for the streamlining of committees, in line with the feedback received, and also ensures that the Democracy and Employment Committee has a healthy workload throughout the municipal year.

“The work should be called something different, although the function should continue.”

“A General Purposes Group that looks at the internal functions of the Council.”



This option would see the Democracy Committee and Employment Committee merged. The current sub-committees of the Employment Committee would then be included under the remit of the Policy and Resources Committee as the Appointment Sub-Committee and Performance Sub-Committee. This has the same advantages as Option 4, however, it promotes the participation of a wider group of members due to the membership size of the Policy and Resources Committee. This also allows for Group Leaders to participate in the sub-committees, as they are typically members of the Policy and Resources Committee.

The Maidstone Joint Transportation Board is included in the above structures. As this board is subject to an agreed Memorandum of Understanding, signed by both Kent County Council and MBC, any changes to the board will need to be agreed by both authorities.

CONCLUSION

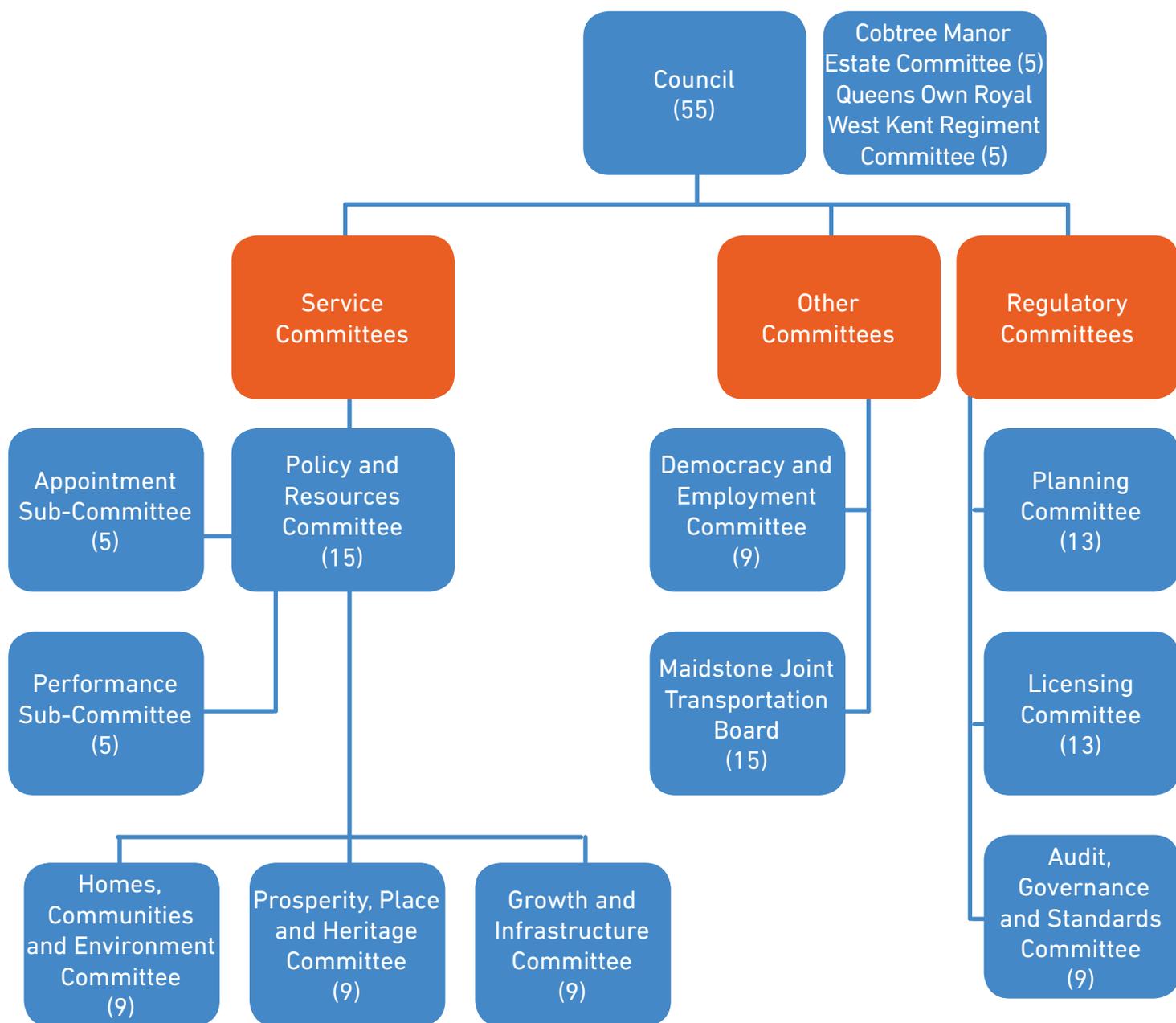
In conclusion, the objective and principles of the original committee system have been met in many cases. The evidence demonstrates that the implementation of the committee system has resulted in greater Member engagement in decision making, while cost neutrality has also been achieved. While opportunities for participation have improved, there have been varied opinions regarding whether this has improved the quality of decisions made. Equally, it has been raised that these opportunities have not always been taken up or fully understood. The Working Group therefore spent much time on this aspect, with the resultant recommendations attempting to address this issue. When considering the effectiveness and efficiency of decision making, and ensuring that the structure is not cumbersome or bureaucratic, elements of the system could be developed. To address this, the number of committees could be reduced, the Constitution could be developed to provide clarity regarding the remit of each committee and a programme of training could be explored to promote a consistent understanding of the system.

To improve decision making processes, a number of adjustments could be made to the committee structure. The structure outlined in Option 2 represents the recommended way to streamline service committee decision making, as this aligns decision making to the new Strategic Plan objectives and minimises the overlap of functions. This also maintains cost neutrality. Furthermore, efficiencies could be achieved through the amalgamation of the Democracy Committee and Employment Committee and the decommissioning of the Urgency Committee. The preferred option for this would be Option 6, as this has the benefits of streamlining committees while also providing an appropriate way to include Group Leaders on the Appointment and Performance Groups.

The suggested model eradicates many of the issues that were raised regarding overlap of Terms of Reference and committee responsibilities. There is one aspect of decision making, however, that could not be allocated to a single committee in any of the options. The Strategic Plan objective Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure contains “The Council leads master planning and invests in new places which are well designed.” There is a distinction between master planning where MBC owns, or has an interest in, the property and the formation of broader spatial policy to encourage development and investment in infrastructure. It is important that the Council’s role as the planning authority, and its other roles, are kept separate. It is entirely appropriate for the Growth and Infrastructure Committee to be responsible for spatial policy, however, the Policy and Resources Committee should be responsible for master planning where the property is owned by the Council. This will be clarified when the committee Terms of Reference are drafted, with further conversations to take place to ensure that potential nuances are understood and that the process for these are clearly defined.

This would mean that the recommended overall structure would appear as below (Figure 6).

Figure 6 – Final Suggested Governance Model



19. RECOMMENDED: 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.

	Recommendation	Rationale	Page Number
		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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An odd number of Members avoids potential disproportionate use of the Chairman's casting vote. Disparate views between Members and Officers showed the strengths and weaknesses of increasing or decreasing membership size. Retaining the current membership sizes promotes participation without prolonging committee debates. Policy and Resources Committee requires a larger membership as this improves the probability of all political groups represented on the Council being represented on the committee. This is appropriate considering the oversight function of the committee. 	9
2	That all committees are politically proportionate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This view was shared widely during interview feedback, and would ensure that all committees were subject to the same proportionality rules. Furthermore, the views expressed by the Democracy Committee on this topic have been taken into account. 	10
3	That a consistent process for tracking and naming agenda items via Member requests is implemented.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The introduction of a tracking system will provide transparency for both Members and Officers. This would also ensure that the number of requests made, and the outcome of these requests, can be easily determined. A naming convention for agenda item requests would ensure these are easily recognisable on committee agendas. 	11
4	That the ability to undertake reviews is promoted in order to examine key topics and promote Member engagement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Following positive feedback regarding Member engagement in the Committee Structure Review, the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Democracy Committee requested that the ability to undertake reviews is promoted to ensure that future topics can be considered in a similar manner. This would help to address the feeling of disengagement that has been shared by Members, while also allowing for detailed analysis of key issues. While this approach is available to use currently, there is a resourcing implication, as it would be reliant on Democratic Services to facilitate the process. The resource implication and desired outcome would therefore need to be fully scoped at the beginning of the exercise. 	11

Effective and Efficient Decision Making

5	<p>That service committee Terms of Reference include:</p> <ol 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. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each service committee is clearly aligned to the objective/s in the new Strategic Plan. Including this in the Terms of Reference would provide direction for Officers regarding the appropriate forum for topics to be debated and resolved. This will reduce instances of reports being considered at multiple committees, a negative aspect of the current system that was identified by Members and Officers. 	14
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>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was stated that there was a lack of clarity regarding 'who does what' at committee, which can lead to Chairmen being given incompatible advice. By ensuring that each Officer was responsible for providing advice on specific topics, this would help to provide consistency to Chairmen and therefore promote effective decision making at committee. 	17
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. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was accepted that Agenda Setting and Chairman's Briefings were helpful for Members and Officers, however, common feedback indicated that it was a time consuming process for Officers, particularly for those involved in more than one committee. • Agenda Setting and Chairman's Briefing meetings are not currently conducted consistently across all committees. Providing a clear purpose, and guidance regarding duration, ensures that these will be conducted more efficiently. 	18
8	<p>That guidance be included in the Maidstone Borough Council Constitution to ensure that only appropriate reports for noting are submitted to service committees.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The volume of items for noting was a consistent source of feedback, with concerns that this was often not necessary. There is best practice guidance available that can be incorporated into the Constitution, which states that the number of noting items should be minimised. 	19

9	<p>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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A paperless approach to distributing committee agendas would ensure that all Members are able to access agendas and urgent updates on the day these are published. • Paperless approaches lead to significant cost savings, due to reduced printing & postage requirements. • The functionality of electronic agendas does not differ from that of a paper agenda, as it is possible to annotate reports, tab pages etc. in a similar manner. Furthermore, electronic agendas allow users to search for key information quickly during committee meetings. 	20
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. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback showed that the purpose of the report should be clearly stated on the front page of reports to assist with the reading of reports and preparation for committee. • Feedback indicated that the Cross Cutting Issues and Implications section needed to reflect the new Strategic Plan objectives, and that this should be moved to the front of the report to provide contextual information for Members when they read the full report. • Legislative requirements needed to be understood by Members when making decisions, however, it also needed to be clear that this information was not debatable as it was unchangeable. This could also be mentioned during Officer presentations. • Feedback showed that the lengths of covering reports could be significantly reduced. By diversifying the way that information is presented, it would make it more accessible and digestible to the target audience. 	21
11	<p>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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Currently, this section is completed inconsistently, as Officers are not clear on who has responsibility for this. This results in reports being submitted for publication that do not clearly demonstrate that they have been reviewed by all appropriate Officers. 	21
12	<p>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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback suggested that this was an area that could be significantly improved, and that the diversification of how information was presented would improve information sharing. 	22

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).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feedback from both Members and Officers showed that there are instances where issues with reports, motions, DPIs and OSIs were first raised at committee. The early resolution of issues would ensure for improved efficiency of decision making. 	23
14	That a record of officer decisions made under delegated authority be introduced and frequently shared with Members.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feedback stated that delegated authority was not as transparent as it could be, and that a record of Officer decisions would support a common understanding of this. This has previously been identified by the Democratic Services Team, and work is underway on this issue. This will be completed in 2019. This record will be published on the Council website. 	24
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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feedback from Members and Officers suggested that although delegation could be improved, the issues centred on a misunderstanding of the current arrangements, rather than a deficiency in the arrangements. Officers should be encouraged to engage with appropriate Members if they require clarification regarding the contentiousness of an item, and whether it would be appropriate to take it to committee. 	24
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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This approach improves transparency and provides a clear audit trail of the changes made. 	24
17	That a comparison of delegated authority across other Local Authorities using the committee system is undertaken.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This would ensure that delegated authority is consistent with practice elsewhere and reflects best practice. 	24
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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The quantity of items on committee agendas could be reduced if information was shared outside of committee meetings. This would have a positive impact on the efficiency of the committee meeting, and allow appropriate topics to be explored fully at committee. 	25

Committee Structure

19	<p>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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This provides a clear remit for each service committee. Distinct alignment to Strategic Plan objectives ensures for minimal overlap in Terms of Reference, which was commonly referred to during interviews. • Through removal of the Urgency Committee, and combining the Democracy Committee and Employment Committee to create the Democracy and Employment Committee, decision making is streamlined. This also ensures for greater cost efficiency by minimising the number of committee meetings required each municipal year. • By assigning the Appointment and Performance Sub-Committees to the Policy and Resources Committee, this promotes the opportunity for Group Leaders to be involved in the appointment and appraisal process for Corporate Leadership Team, as Group Leaders are typically represented on the Policy and Resources Committee. 	50
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