

Member Working Parties 2023/24

Synopsis of report:

This report asks members to consider and approve a structure for Working Parties in 2023/4 which provides greater focus on key themes within the Corporate Business Plan and greater focus on the Council's priorities.

Recommendation(s):

The revised Working Party structure be introduced with effect from 1st August, 2023 and be reviewed at the end of the municipal year.

That the Council's Constitution be revised to reflect the changed structure composition of Working Parties.

1. Context and background of report

- 1.1 Member Working Parties have existed now for three years. The original concept of Working Parties was to explore ways in which the Council's key strategies could be implemented, exchange ideas between officers and members and to understand new challenges and opportunities. Working parties would either debate key policy issues which need to come before Council committees, analyse results of work undertaken by Council staff such as public consultation or discuss the outline content of important reports to be considered in forthcoming business cycles.
- 1.2 Some of the Working Parties have been successful and the work carried out has been valued by members. Working Parties have acted as a basis for moving strategies forward. However, some Working Parties, have lacked focus and have had new tasks added throughout the year and have therefore been perceived as an additional burden in an already very busy schedule rather than focusing on existing Corporate priorities and acting as an essential part of the Council's structure.

2. Report

- 2.1 For the reasons set out above, the Chief Executive has carried out a review of the existing Working Parties with a view to presenting a revised structure to members (see Appendix A). The objectives of the review are as follows:
 - To focus on matters which are most relevant to the Corporate Plan and reflect the Council's priorities;
 - To focus member attention in an area of particular interest to each individual member without working parties becoming over burdensome;
 - To ensure that the Working Parties are serviced by appropriate officers, that each has a work plan and members are aware well in advance of the topics that will be discussed by way of a work programme;
 - To limit the additional workloads for both Members and Officers to a set number of topics that can be delivered within existing resources (both financial and staffing).
- 2.2 The Property and Assets Task Force has a slightly different remit to the others. Although the Council awaits the final report from DLUHC regarding the Council's

property portfolio and borrowings, it is anticipated that the report will suggest enhancement of governance arrangements in respect of oversight of the Council's property assets. This Task Force will therefore add the extra layer of governance required and ensure that there is a forum for confidential discussions which are often of a commercial nature.

- 2.3 These meetings are not intended merely to be talking shops but a way of ensuring early dialogue (before committee reports are produced in the main) on matters of significance to Council strategy. There will be regular progress reports on key projects and initiatives and early notification of matters which may impact on upon Council services and strategy such as new legislation and Government policy.
- 2.4 The new Working Party structure is not designed to be comprehensive but to reflect the cross-cutting themes which are likely to be of most importance in 2023/4. The emphasis is on themes rather than committees or services. So the work of the Committees will continue largely through the relationship between the service head and Chairman/Vice-Chairman as well as the wider community which makes up the Committee membership.
- 2.5 To avoid over burdening members, it is proposed that 39 members (excluding the Mayor and Deputy Mayor) are invited to become a member of ONE and only one working party. This means that working parties would have a core membership of 7 and no more than 9 members. Any member would be allowed to attend working parties where they are not a nominated member.
- 2.6 Proportionality rules do not have to apply to working parties. It is proposed that the Chief Executive meets with Group Leaders (individually and collectively if necessary) to ensure that each Group gets fair representation and wherever possible, members' preferences for a particular working party are accommodated.
- 2.7 A work programme based around the Corporate Business Plan strategy and workstreams for each of the working parties will be drawn up by the lead officer for consideration at the first meeting. The Chairman will be selected at the first meeting and a discussion will ensue on frequency of meetings. As a guideline, it is expected that there will be no more than 4 scheduled working party meetings per municipal year. Meetings will be able to take place in person, remotely or as a hybrid of the two and will be designed to last no more than two hours. Should additional meetings be required, this will be for each Working Party to debate and the Chairman to decide taking into account the additional workloads required to undertake preparatory work and to service the meetings.
- 2.8 Members are asked to give their approval to the new structure for the current municipal year and to a review of the structure and value of the working parties in April/May, 2024 to be conducted by the incoming new Chief Executive.
- 2.9 The proposed structure can be found at Appendix A, and the terms of reference for each Working Party can be found at Appendix B.

3. Policy framework implications

- 3.1 This structure gives more focus to themes within the Corporate Business Plan.
- 3.2 The aim will be to provide momentum on key initiatives whilst allowing for member debate through the various stages of policy formulation or review.

4. Value for Money

- 4.1 Other than Officer time, there are no direct costs of the working groups. Any work emanating from the groups that requires financing over and above existing resources, will require a full business case and committee approval for any associated supplementary estimate.

5. Legal implications

- 5.1 Runnymede operates what is termed the Committee system. Under the provisions of the Local Government Act 1972 under such system decisions are made by the Full Council, Committees, Sub-Committees, or officers. Full Council can make all decisions, but it is impractical to convene enough meetings of Full Council to enable all decisions to be made in a timely fashion. Section 101 Local Government Act 1972 enables the Full Council to delegate to Committees, Sub-Committees, or officers its powers to make decisions.
- 5.2 There are rules which require the meetings of Committees and Sub-Committees to be held in public and for reports considered by such bodies to be made available for public inspection, subject to such reports not containing confidential or exempt information.
- 5.3 Under a Committee system seats on Committees and Sub-Committees must be allocated in accordance with the requirements of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and regulations made under that legislation (commonly known as the political proportionality rules). In summary, political groups on a local authority will be entitled to a certain number of seats on such bodies which bears a relationship to the total number of members they have and the number of seats available on such Committees or Sub-Committees.
- 5.4 It is open to local authorities to establish other bodies to assist them with the discharge of their business. Such bodies are known by a variety of names e.g., Working Parties, Working Groups or Task Groups. Whilst such groups can assist in allowing matters to be considered in more detail than say in a Committee meeting and enable sensitive matters to be discussed such bodies have no legal powers to make decisions. The normal approach is that such bodies will formulate recommendations which will be incorporated in reports to Full Council, Committees or Sub-Committees.
- 5.5 The rules regarding the publication of reports and the holding of meetings in public do not apply to such bodies. Likewise, the rules regarding political proportionality also do not apply to such bodies as they are not defined in Schedule 1 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 as bodies to which those rules apply.

6. Equality implications

- 6.1 The Council has a duty under the Equality Act 2010. Section 149 of the Act provides that we must have due regard to the need to;
- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
 - b) to advance equality of opportunity

- c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share protected characteristics.

6.2 We should at all times act in a way that is non-discriminatory through our policies and procedures and interactions with people.

7. Environmental/Sustainability/Biodiversity implications

7.1 There are no know environmental/sustainability/biodiversity implications.

(To resolve)

Background papers

None