

Council Governance Arrangements Working Group
Governance Options Survey feedback

	Option 1 Executive	Option 2 Exec Plus	Option 3 Committee	Option 4 Hybrid
Councillor 1	-	-	1	-
Councillor 2	-	-	1	-
Councillor 3	4	2	3	1
Councillor 4	-	-	1	-
Councillor 5	-	-	1	-
Councillor 6	2	1	-	-
Councillor 7	-	-	1	-
Councillor 8	-	-	1	-
Councillor 9	1	2	4	3
Councillor 10	1	2	4	3
Councillor 11	-	-	1	-
Councillor 12	-	-	1	-
Councillor 13	1	2	4	3
Councillor 14	2	1	-	-
Councillor 15	2	1	-	-
Councillor 16	2	1	-	-
Councillor 17	1	2	4	3
Councillor 18	-	-	1	-
Councillor 19	2	1	4	3
Councillor 20	-	1	-	-
Councillor 21	-	-	1	2
Councillor 22	3	2	1	4
Councillor 23	-	-	1	-
Councillor 24	-	-	1	-
Councillor 25	2	1	4	3
Councillor 26	4	3	1	2
Councillor 27	-	-	1	-
Councillor 28	3	2	4	1
Councillor 29	-	-	1	-
Councillor 30	-	-	1	-
Councillor 31	3	2	1	4
Councillor 32	-	-	1	-
Councillor 33	-	-	1	-
Councillor 34	-	-	1	-
Councillor 35	-	-	1	-
Councillor 36	2	1	3	4
Councillor 37	1	2	3	4
Councillor 38	1	2	4	3
Councillor 39	-	-	1	-
Councillor 40	2	1	-	-
Councillor 41	-	-	1	-
Councillor 42	2	1	-	-

	Option 1 Executive	Option 2 Exec Plus	Option 3 Committee	Option 4 Hybrid
Councillor 43	2	1	-	-
Councillor 44	1	-	-	-
Councillor 45	1	-	-	-
Councillor 46	4	3	1	2
Councillor 47	-	-	1	-
Councillor 48	-	-	1	-
Councillor 49	1	2	4	3
Councillor 50	1	2	4	3
Councillor 51	-	-	1	-
Councillor 52				
Councillor 53				
Councillor 54				
Councillor 55				
Councillor 56				
Councillor 57				
Councillor 58				
TOTAL	10	11	28	2

Note* - As Cllr Hill has resigned with immediate effect the number of SWT Cllrs is 58
The listing above has been done in a random order so as to ensure that responses are anonymous.

In terms of Member's first preference the totals are:

- Executive/Executive plus = 21
- Committee System = 28
- Hybrid System = 2
- 7 Councillors have not yet responded.

If you remove Hybrid as the least favoured option (and consider the two Councillors second option) the figures then become:

- Executive/Executive plus = 23
- Committee System = 28
- 7 Councillors have not yet responded.

In terms of the option that people classed as their least favourite i.e. score of 4, the figures are, as follows:

- Executive/Executive plus = 3
- Committee System = 10
- Hybrid System = 4
- 34 Cllrs declined to rank an option as their least preferred option.
- 7 Councillors have not yet responded.

Comments

General

My last choice would be to go back to the old Committee system, a time consuming Committee process which would not expedite decision making. The third choice (Hybrid) although more expensive could I believe bring some benefits in decision making and understanding.

I have also sent in the circulated form for completeness. However I wish that the attached be registered with all members of the working group as my survey response.

As we are the life support stage of SWT, I think that option 1 and 2 are the most pragmatic taking on board external issues and public perception.

My ultimatum view is a compromise of systems, albeit I am wary of the implications on staff time. If the constitution can be amended to allow the constitution to be changed anytime in the year, i.e. on governance arrangements, my preference of options remain. However, if this is not the case and the change of system would need to be voted on by May, which for me would be vastly inadequate preparation time, I would switch my first and second preference around. The crucial flaw in Option 3 is a lack of leadership.

My vote is for The third choice with Committee system it allows greater involvement by all councillors. I'm not saying the current system is no good but that personally we could do better I don't see any value in the fourth option to me it just appears bureaucratic

I think in an ideal world I'd be supporting a hybrid system, but based on the costs shown I think that's a non starter. I would also theoretically support an additional Scrutiny committee as our current agendas are regularly over burdened. However, as there are only two years left for the lifespan of this Council I see no benefit in changing the current system and will therefore support that option. I believe this whole exercise has been unnecessary and has needlessly used valuable resources in your governance team.

I am mindful that in order for Council decisions to have a proper basis which cannot be legally challenged, the system that gives rise to them has to be grounded in a formally adopted Constitution. Members have to accept that they cannot adopt a new system on the hoof, but that the Constitution will have to be changed and adopted first before any new system can operate; and we have to accept that as a process that cannot be rushed. The elephant in the room remains FOLGIS. It seems to me a monumental waste of Officer time and resources to be making changes that might only last for a few months.

Final comment. As unitary appears to be Central Government's preferred option in just over 2 years I find this whole operation pointless and a waste of officer time.

Expensive change shortly before moving to a new Unitary Council(s) is an unwise use of resources.

Sorry am not bothering to rank – option 3 all the way - none of the other options have ANY merit. If we are going to do governance reform, as we must, let us do it properly. I would not underestimate the urgent need for change – many of us new

councillors feel completely disillusioned, we feel we are prevented from doing our jobs effectively in serving our communities by the rotten governance system where a group of 9-10 hog power and ignore the rest. The democratic deficit is appalling!!!!

I appreciate we've been asked for to rank the options, however the only option I would choose is option 3. To rank the remaining options would be misleading, as I wouldn't vote for them. My only concern is the cost of changing systems (officer time) with Unitary becoming a reality in May next year.

The existing arrangement seems on the face of it to be the preferred option, it does suffer from the closing down and stifling of discussion from the majority party particularly if the Council Chair is from that same party. It would seem to me that any change at the current time would bring unnecessary expensive change on the very eve of moving to a new Unitary Council(s) a complete waste of money and time.

Option 1 – Executive arrangements i.e. staying as we are

As we are the life support stage of SWT, I think that option 1 and 2 are the most pragmatic taking on board external issues and public perception.

I do not like the Exec system because it favours political parties by allowing a small cabal of Councillors in a ruling group to dominate a Council and stifle debate. Under the Exec system backbench and opposition Councillors have little opportunity to get involved and are little more than voting fodder.

Too little engagement with wider membership on key decisions, resulting in limited perspectives and narrow decisions.

I believe that having an executive does allow for simple representation for the different functions for the public and press. It also allows for Mundane or emergency decisions to be made more easily. However it can mean decisions that would interest councillors and the public in ways that are unexpected can be decided without consultation.

The current system is not democratic. Many members feel disenfranchised and unable to be involved in the decisions which affect the electorate who put their trust in them to act on their behalf.

We can't stay as we are

The present system doesn't allow non-Exec councillors enough influence in decision making. Officers and the Executive decide on proposals and then present to Full Council, often without sufficient notice, and the chance to amend and fully understand what is being proposed. There aren't enough committees and one committee, Licensing, rarely ever meets.

In my view the current arrangements are the most efficient and accountable so far devised to run a Political Authority (which SWAT is likely to remain).

We should move away from any option involving a one-party Executive or Cabinet. Having a one-party Executive is a hindrance to the fair and efficient operation of the council. It compounds the problems of the unfair first past the post voting system by allowing a minority to run the council. These tensions increase in councils, such as SWT, where the largest group hold a small majority of the seats. More groups and councillors should be genuinely involved in decisions, which is likely to lead to more factors being taken into account and better decisions taken. The Executive system has many other problems, including a lack of transparency and a blurring of accountability between officers and portfolio holders, with many decisions apparently being taken behind closed doors. Because Portfolio Holders are firstly chosen because of their party colours, some appear to lack competency in doing the job, which is bad for the council and the communities we serve

Best option

This simply is not getting the best out of elected councillors and their knowledge of their community's and their own expertise and skills.

Don't feel this is working as well as it might. Insufficient buy in from councillors.

Although as a party we would like a committee system I don't think this is practical in the time left before unitary so I would be willing to stay as we are.

I personally think we should just leave things as they are. We have more than enough to deal with right now without having to waste officers' time on this when who knows what will be happening later this year and into next.

I think option 1 has served the council very well.

Being this close to a new kind of administration ie unitary we should be focusing our time money and officers on the future of democracy not on changing something that may only be in existence for 1 year

This would be completely unacceptable. Lib Dems took control of SWT on basis of a manifesto which committed to introducing a modern committee system. The current arrangements mean councillors outside the Executive are little more than 'window-dressing'/ 'useful idiots' rather than able to exercise any real power or involvement and this in turn impacts on the quality of decisions and public policy interventions. Anything that retains powers in the hands of Leader and handpicked bods is a NO GO in my book.

This arrangement is fairly effective and agile but it has led to complaints about the joint audit & governance scrutiny being overworked.

The system has only got to last 2 years until unitary, it is cheap and all understand how it works. To change to any other system will be more expensive and take at least a year to get it to run smoothly.

The only viable option in my view is the introduction of a Full Committee system no later than April 2021. The Executive arrangement is not working for most Councillors

and should be terminated as soon as possible and the Committee system introduced with immediate effect.

The current system needs updating to make sure All councillors views are taken into consideration.

The current system is not sustainable, whereby an individual makes a decision and the rest have to follow.

It's hard to keep most cllrs motivated and engaged when they feel so excluded from policy-making and decision-taking.

This arrangement is clearly not working and is not sufficiently transparent. Back bench councillors' views are totally disregarded

Option 2 – Executive arrangements with an extra Scrutiny Committee and splitting the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee into two – Audit & Governance Committee, Standards Committee

Support this as a hybrid model due to the life expectancy of the council

Pointless. Seems like it will fall between the gaps.

The one scrutiny committee which we have is largely ignored by the Executive and they simply argue against almost all recommendations which scrutiny make. There would simply be 2 scrutiny committees which would be ignored.

This is not much different to the current system

I don't believe this would make any difference. Scrutiny doesn't have much teeth anyway.

I feel that there is little to be gained, but if it helps create greater member engagement, pragmatically it might be worth doing.

We should move away from any option involving a one-party Executive or Cabinet, for reasons given above (option 1).

Cannot see much advantage

This still does not address the involvement issues as referenced in comments on 1.

I think this would be an improvement on the current system and hope we can bring it in for the beginning of the next municipal year.

My preferred option is option 2 - Wonder if at all relevant now we are probably going to unitary in some form in a years time

The previous council had two scrutiny committees, corporate and community which looked at items relevant to those titles. This enabled councillors who were interested in certain subjects to sit on or attend and be involved in the debates and recommendations. Having the two committees also involved more councillors and there was more time for different subjects to be covered. I was unhappy during the transformation and said so that the council was only having one scrutiny committee and the reason was to save costs.

The current system with informal policy advisory groups (PAG) would enable back bench members to be involved in discussions and also allow officers to bring ideas informally for discussion

Bit pointless. This would be moving deckchairs around when the deck has rotted. An extra scrutiny committee would just be an extra committee for the Exec to ignore so more time wasted for councillors.

This arrangement presents the best way forward in my mind, by maintaining a working Executive and providing more scrutiny committees where needed.

I think staying as we are is fine but 2 gives a little more balance for scrutiny which I think is reasonable given the volume of work

The current system with two committees (AG & Standards) is frankly a non starter and offers nothing new or useful.

Scrutiny is only advisory and the Executive can ignore any recommendations made.

What is the point, scrutiny committee has no teeth, and they are advisors

Changes are too small to address issues above i.e. It's hard to keep most cllrs motivated and engaged when they feel so excluded from policy-making and decision-taking.

This would appear to be particularly burdensome

Option 3 – Committee System designed on the Directorate Structure

If SWT was not coming to an end and we had far more information on this, i would review it further as to full cost, time and impact on working arrangements eg when will the committees meet, how long does a decision take, who would decide on evictions in housing portfolio, how do curveball events get dealt with, what is cost of set up etc

This seems a fairer way to enable and ensure the widest participation in decision making. The ruling group would still control committees but it would allow a much wider involvement for all Councillors.

In the absence of proper discussion, which committees would bring, we are left with the chaotic scenes we have witnessed in recent Full Council meetings. Committees will enable all members to have an input into issues in which they have some skills, knowledge or interest at any early stage when these are most needed, rather than at a late stage when any changes will be blocked.

A Committee Structure would allow all councillors to be more involved and encourage a 2 way process of engagement. It would allow councillors to choose and focus on a committee they are interested in with some knowledge or expertise. Councillors would have more confidence in Full Council proposals and feel that the minor details have also been adequately scrutinised.

In my view this is the least desirable option: slow, less focussed, and - as I have pointed out to others - it is likely to have to be more tightly politically whipped and therefore (counterintuitively perhaps) is the option where backbenchers will have least room for manoeuvre.

This is by far the best option. It is very important to give all groups a greater say and to give more members a greater opportunity to be involved in developing policy and taking decisions through committees, especially in areas in which they have an interest. A committee system should allow a greater variety of voices to be genuinely taken into account in council decision making, so being better for the council and the communities we serve.

Delayed decision making

This option allows for all councillors to be involved and does not cause the financial cost to go up as significantly as option 4.

I like the idea of linking with the Directorate structure, a logical move so that officer/budget implications, etc are in line. Pleased this does not involve significant extra costs.

I think if we could have another year or two to design and work out the details plus train Cllrs how it would work then this might be the best option but in view of unitary coming I do not think we should attempt to make this change now

My vote would be for option three the committee system as hopefully this would give greater representation based on the make up of the council than the current system

I believe this is the only viable option.

Committee system worked in the past and will work now and therefore should be introduced as soon as possible

This would be a retrograde move for the council, it would slow down decision making. Councillors who are not members of the existing committees do not attend other committees so I wonder if there will be the interest or commitment to fill lots of different committees. The current council is nearing its end if unitary moves forward and setting up and changing the whole system of the council is an unnecessarily

time consuming operation. It also increases costs to the council which is already working hard to maintain standards of services for the residents of the area. Officers should be spending their time working on a review of the unparished area rather than on the system of governance of the council which has worked exceptionally well during a pandemic and post transformation.

Very strongly support this option for which there is a DEMOCRATIC MANDATE from electorate. I want this introduced for next municipal year. Finally ALL councillors would actually have a meaningful role and we would see more consensus-based policy and decisions. YES!!!! Have been having a close look at our existing constitution in preparation for serving on Constitution working group and comparing with committee system local authority decision structures and constitutional arrangements. Change would not be difficult to implement from that point of view.

I would like to have it noted that I strongly believe number 3 is the way to go, so I am all for the committee system.

This is a recipe for slow and difficult decision making, where every single decision is the result of late-night horse-trading and requiring a huge input of time from both committee members and officials. As originally envisaged, it would also have handed significant power away from the ruling group.

I feel this is the only option that would work well to enable very one to have their say. Much fairer system.

3 is definitely not ok in my opinion. It's very cumbersome and not responsive. Presumably if all Committees are politically proportionate then the ruling group could take all the chairs and vice chairs as you couldn't stipulate anything other than the ruling group taking those positions. I think the opposition parties would find this very irksome!!

The Committee System is in my view the only viable option as it allows Councillors with an interest or competence to sit on the committees that interest them and allows a much more collegiate and consensual approach to be made before going onto Full Council for ratification.

This is the most viable option and ideas/expertise can be used to the benefit of the committee.

The only viable option, whereby councillors with interests and expertise can choose which committee they can sit on to add value, debate/discuss issues in a proactive way rather than a chaotic ways that we have witnessed in recent full council meetings that goes on for ever!

Optimum system if we were not facing major time constraints due to re-organisation

Yes this is the only option I have voted for as I do not support any of the other option. Committee system would provide a more collaborative and transparent regime. A more modern and democratic government in these modern times.

This is the only viable option, it's more democratic than all of the others. I also believe that the number of Chairs should be handled in the same way as members of Committees. In that if one group has 51% of the Members on the Council, they should be allocated 51% of the Chairs, and 51% of the Deputy Chairs. Another group with 25% of the Members they should get 25% of the Chairs, and 25% of the Deputy Chairs.

Option 4 – Hybrid system designed on the Directorate Structure

If SWT was not coming to an end and we had far more information on this, i would review it further as to full cost, time and impact on working arrangements eg when will the committees meet, how long does a decision take, who would decide on evictions in housing portfolio, how do curveball events get dealt with, what is cost of set up etc

Any hybrid scheme will involve two sets of decision-making bodies and this will continue, or perhaps even accentuate, the conflict within the Council. This is the last thing we need.

This is too similar to the current system

A hybrid system is preferable to leaving the system as it is but is inadequate when compared to the Committee system.

I think this could offer the best of both world in keeping the accountability and speed of the Executive system but giving. Members a real sense of influence and engagement over Policy at all stages of its creation.

We should move away from any option involving a one-party Executive or Cabinet, for reasons given above (under option 1).

Most expensive

Creates a much bigger burden of cost, and I think will result in conflict between the old model and new with issues arising should executive move in a different direction to the committees.

Expensive.

I don't know enough about this and would have to find out more about how it would or could work before opting for it. Again I do not think we have enough time left before unitary to make this change.

Will not cut the mustard

This would again be moving deckchairs around when the deck has in fact rotted. Policy development committees would have no real power and just be extra committees for the Exec to ignore so more time wasted for councillors.

This is likely to set the policy development groups against the executive. It seems to combine the worst features of both systems into one gigantic bear-pit.

4 is ok

The Hybrid System is just a fudge which will make the whole decision making process more complicated and less inclusive leaving even more back bench councillors feeling left out of the process entirely and should not be considered for that reason alone.

A Hybrid will lead to going back to the old way of working.

The current system is not working; any hybrid will have a tendency to revert back to its original structure.

Best available short-term improvement

This looks unworkable and is likely to be very cumbersome and could cause delays in decision making