GROUP RESPONSES for October Constitution Working Group

Following the September Working Group meeting, feedback was requested on the following:
- The proposed Committee structure (Resources Cttee and Communities Cttee) and the split of delegations between them
- The role description for the spokesperson
- Process for referring a decision to committee
- Process for rescinding a decision
- Key decisions.

From Cllr Martin (Green Group)

I am quite content with the two committee structure. The split of delegations seems sensible. I think we need to allow some flexibility to make changes and improvements in the future.

The role of the spokesperson should be to reflect the thoughts of the committee.

Processes for referring and rescinding decisions should be efficient and frictionless.

Key decisions should be highlighted so as many members as possible can have an input.

From Cllr McConville (Labour & Co-op Group)

My group are largely in favour of the 2 committees, policy and communities, at the last meeting it was stated that what they would cover was still up for debate and there was possibly a workshop event which could thrash out those finer details, however they wouldn't be very different from the draft version.

No major issues with the drafts of referral and rescission, with regards to the numbers required, for a decision i think that to refer an item to full council it should require 16 members to agree and 7 out of the 12 on the policy committee. To also be across 2 political groups. This would ensure decisions are not held up or officers/councillors time not used on potentially vexatious political sideshows. Hopefully with the committees being cross party there would be no need for rescission but rather if a committee felt strongly that a decision was too great it would refer that decision to full council in the first place.

No major issues with the key decision definitions and terms, I think with more discussions the practicality of key decisions and what committees will discuss and make decisions on will naturally evolve.

Cllr Hollingsbee (Conservative Group)

Appointing nine Spokespeople is, in our opinion, just a different name to a Cabinet Member albeit, there is no power to make a delegated decision! Why nine when we are moving to a two director structure? Why not two (or perhaps four) spokespeople – one for each Director for each committee? If Officers are expected to brief the chair (and probably vice chair) and the spokespeople as well as prepare reports for the Committee this could lead to resource and cost issues?

Will Licensing sub-committees still be three members? It is often difficult for Committee Admin to get together 3 people during the day and for it to then be politically balanced, although the process works perfectly well and is not always politically balanced!   All Members currently have the opportunity to serve on the Licensing Sub-Committee. Is the Personnel Committee not politically balanced currently?

The split of delegations between the two policy committees probably about right, although we might have a discussion on Housing? There seems to be a lack of financial coverage in the Resources Committee – although I assume it is part of Policy decisions?

From Cllr Prater (Liberal Democrat Group)

We support the "two policy committee" structure (rather than one), although would prefer naming to be "Resources" and "Communities & Environment" to more closely reflect the priorities of the Council. Sometimes the label on the bottle matters as much as the contents. A one policy committee system although mirroring more closely our existing structure does not as fully spread input and decision making through Council: the benefits are much more limited, and frankly I'd like to see us get the big structural changes in place then "refine" over coming years rather than take the change in a variety of steps, because there is always a risk you just stop.

The split of delegations to Policy Committees looks about right to us, but would be one of the areas to "refine" when we have some learning in the new system.

With high thresholds (probably including cross-group support if the Council has more than one group, and probably a Council majority for rescission), we have no issue with the referring or rescission process, and welcome their being there as a check and balance. I'd hope they are little used, but I think the same about airbags, and would still fit them in cars... The key decision process also seemed to be reasonable and transparent.

Role descriptions for Spokespeople seemed reasonable: I'm not against a limited SRA to be honest, but would not want the total allowance budget to increase, and by limiting SRAs at the start that may help. Maybe one for the Independent Panel, might be one for "refining" in future years.