

The Goals for Change in Governance – progress update

The Goals for Change in Governance were agreed at the last meeting of the Governance Working Group, held on 27 February 2020. The goals were based on a series of conversations with Group Leaders, and discussion points made at the last Working Group. The update below sets out progress against each of the 6 agreed goals (shown in italics).

- 1. *Inclusiveness*** – *more Councillors should be involved in making decisions. Currently (at the time of writing in January 2020), 7 out of the 30 Councillors make decisions in Cabinet. The aim should be to increase the percentage of Councillors who have a role in making policy and service decisions.*

Progress – On 1 February 2020, both the Green and Lib Dem Group Leaders joined the Cabinet and the number of Members on the executive increased to 9. The Labour Group Leader was also invited to join at this time, but declined to accept the offer making the Labour group the only party not holding an executive position.

Since February 2020, the Executive has consisted of 5 Conservative, 1 Lib Dem, 1 Green, 1 Independent group leader and 1 independent member.

Four portfolio holders are not members of the largest political group. The 4 portfolios held are:

- District Economy – Independent group
- Environment – Green group
- Revenues, Benefits, Anti-Fraud and Corruption – Lib Dem group
- Transport and Digital Transformation – Independent group

Since the start of this broader more inclusive executive, there have been 15 meetings held (as at 15 Sep 21).

In addition, the creation of theme based Working Groups has also resulted in many more members being included directly in contributing to policy and service decisions. To date, a total of 36 Working Group meetings have been held involving at least 30 members.

Name of Working Group	Start date / end date	Current Membership	Number of meetings
Corporate Plan	6 November 2019 - 1 July 2020	Councillors Monk (Chair), Mrs Hollingsbee, McConville, Meyers, Prater and Whybrow	3
Otterpool Park	7 October 2019 – 23 July 2020	Councillors Monk (Chair), Fuller, Keutenius, J	8

		Martin, Mullard and Wimble.	
Folkestone Town Centre	30 October 2019 – ongoing	Councillors Brook (Chair), Davison, Monk, Prater, Wade and Wimble.	10
Climate and Ecological Emergency	18 October 2019 – ongoing	Councillors Whybrow (Chair), Fuller, Hills, McConville, Meyers, Wimble	12
Governance working group	5 November 2019 - ongoing	Councillors McConville, Meyers, Monk, Prater, Whybrow and Wimble (Chaired by LGA/CfGS).	3

In addition, since September 2019, members have been invited to attend a total of 13 Member briefings, on various topics of interest to the council including the Otterpool Park project, the Folkestone Place Plan, the Climate Emergency, and a demo of MyAccount. All councillors are invited to attend these briefings.

- 2. Representation** – currently, some communities in Folkestone and Hythe, represented by the Green, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties, have no representation in the main decision making processes of the Council. Change should ensure that more communities feel represented in the way decisions are made, and ensure effective engagement with the public.

Progress – As per point 1, the executive now have broad representation from various wards, and political groups. In addition, the changes to Overview and Scrutiny have resulted in stronger pre-decision scrutiny through a clear well planned and articulated work plan which helps deliver greater inclusiveness and representation (also see point 4 below). Furthermore, communities were surveyed as part of the Corporate Plan preparatory work, and many more surveys and consultations have taken place to secure the views of residents and other interested parties in subsequent policy development and decision-making.

- 3. Accountability** – the current system of portfolio holders gives clear accountability and responsibility for the decisions that are made. Any change should ensure that clear accountability remains.

Progress – The current executive system with portfolio holders has not changed, but since the changes to cabinet membership there are now 4 portfolio holders who are not Conservative members (see above, representing a 55% 45% split). In addition, the expectation now is that portfolio holders

present reports to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee which clearly identify member accountability for reporting, for policy development, for decision-making, and for subsequent service improvements.

In addition, a published forward plan for scrutiny and for decision-making makes the accountability more transparent.

- 4. *Effective Scrutiny*** – *strong scrutiny is to be encouraged. In particular, there should be more emphasis on pre-decision scrutiny to ensure that proposals are explored in detail before decisions are made. In a Committee system this can be achieved through ensuring that each Committee has a clear role in ensuring effective scrutiny. In a Cabinet system, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee can have a stronger and more influential role in decision making (eg the Kirklees model) and not just scrutinising decisions once they are made. A process for call in will remain necessary.*

Progress – A lot of work has been undertaken in making the Scrutiny function more effective, with the support of the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS). Previously, the OSC would see Cabinet reports the night prior to Cabinet, which gave them little opportunity to have any meaningful considered impact. One of the main changes made was that OSC would have an opportunity to scrutinise topics at an earlier stage in development. On 6 October 2020, the Scrutiny Committee adopted an Overview and Scrutiny and Cabinet Members protocol. In addition, the structure of the work plan was revised to allow an average of two topics per meeting (12 topics in total, 3 of which held as ‘reserves’), enabling the Committee an opportunity for more in-depth exploration and scrutiny on each topic. In addition, on 6 October 2020, the Committee agreed to create a dedicated Finance and Performance Scrutiny Sub-Committee to receive detailed finance and performance quarterly monitoring reports. The Sub-Committee is chaired by the Leader of the Opposition and has met 4 times thus far. These changes are still at an early stage but offer a dedicated opportunity to discuss in detail the performance and budget matters of council.

- 5. *Efficiency*** – *the current model is reasonably streamlined. Any change should not increase the overall number of meetings that are held in any year and should be mindful of the capacity of Members and officers alike to attend or service meetings. Any change should not lead to any significant increase in the costs of the Council’s decision making.*

Progress – The changes made to the Scrutiny function have focused the work of the Committee, allowing more time within each meeting to explore in depth the specific topics on the Scrutiny work plan. Many more meetings have been held (see above for a review of Working Groups and all member briefings) and in the current resource base there is no capacity to increase this further.

- 6. *Transparency*** – *the forward programme of decisions and the reasons for decisions, once made, should be communicated clearly to all Councillors and*

to residents and businesses in the District. The number of meetings held in private or confidential papers should be minimal.

Progress – The forward plan has been adapted to show forthcoming decisions for a three month rolling period, whereas previously only key decisions were published, as per the statutory duty of the council.

The number of confidential papers has been reduced, and for the municipal year 20/21, only 4 Cabinet reports out of a total 71 were considered in private, three related to contractual matters regarding the waste contract, and one related to the Otterpool Park Business Plan - financial plan. Where possible, reports now tend to have a 'confidential annex', allowing for debate to take place in public based on the available information with restricted information kept to the minimum on 'pink' papers.

In addition, the Folkestone Parks and Pleasure Grounds Charity Trustee meetings are now a public meeting.

Transparency remains a key element of focus in the current Corporate Plan and will continue to be an important issue embraced through the culture of the council.