

Motion to: Council

12 March 2024

Subject: Democratic models of governance

Proposer: Councillor Stutely

Seconder: Councillor Catt

This council notes that:

- 1) Under Norwich City Council's current 'Leader and Cabinet' model, Council is responsible for some decisions and the Executive (the collective term for the Leader, the Cabinet and Cabinet Members) is responsible for others. While the Executive is accountable to Council, it does not act under delegated authority from it, and it is not the case that Council could choose to take the decisions itself which are in practice taken by the Executive.
- 2) In a Committee System, there is no Executive. There is still a Leader, elected by Council in the same way as in the Leader and Cabinet model, but they do not have executive powers. There is no Cabinet and no Cabinet Members, and thus decision-making by individual councillors is restricted.
- 3) Instead, all decisions are in principle taken by Council, but in practice the decisions which, in this Council's current model are taken by the Executive, are in a Committee System taken by politically-balanced Service Committees operating under delegated authority from Council. These Service Committees are generally thematically based, with each committee being responsible for a range of issues and/or a range of council services.
- 4) In most models there is one additional committee, often known as the Policy and Resources Committee, whose membership usually includes senior councillors from each political group and often the financial lead councillors for each political group. This committee differs from a Cabinet primarily in that it is politically balanced, but also in that it is the 'first among equals' in relation to the other committees, which typically retain broad decision-making autonomy.
- 5) It is important to bear in mind that the changes being considered only affect the way that decisions currently taken by Cabinet or Cabinet Members are made. Regulatory Committees such as Planning, Licensing, Audit and Standards, which are all committees of the Council rather than of the Executive, would be unaffected.
- 6) The role of Full Council would in practice also remain unchanged. Council is currently responsible for agreeing the overarching policy and budget frameworks which the Executive proposes to it and within which the Executive then has to

operate, and this would be the same under a committee system. The framework would be proposed to Council by one or more service committees, and once it was adopted, all service committees would take their decisions in accordance with it.

- 7) The Scrutiny Committee is an essential component of the Leader and Cabinet model, intended to provide Council at large with a mechanism for holding the Executive to account for its decision-making. Within a committee model, Scrutiny is usually embedded into the work of individual committees, with each committee responsible for monitoring budgets and performance relating to its functions. In addition, members of the committee could highlight areas of concern and request reports on issues relating to their functions.

This council believes that:

- 8) In a Council under No Overall Control, a Coalition, or with a slim majority administration, the committee system provides democratic engagement and accountability for elected members from all political groups.
- 9) Further benefits of adopting a committee style of governance are, predominantly:
 - a) Increased involvement of all elected members in decision-making;
 - b) Politically proportional decision-making across all committees;
 - c) Returning more decision-making power to the Full Council;
 - d) More regular and focused scrutiny of decision-making and implementation of Council policy

This council **RESOLVES** to:

- 10) Support the adoption, at the earliest opportunity, of a Committee System of Governance.
- 11) Examine the options for a more democratically representative Committee System via a report to the Constitution Working Party by August 2024, including risk, resource, inclusivity, and environmental implications.
- 12) Ensure full implementation of the new system at the Council's AGM in May 2025, with the establishment of a Committee Model Working Group of Councillors to hear from experts and stakeholders about how this system will work.
- 13) Ensure the 2024/25 Constitution Working Party and the new Committee Model Working Group are politically balanced with representatives from all political groups.
- 14) Examine the options for the establishment of a Housing Scrutiny Committee to scrutinise the housing and homelessness service under this Council, via a report to the Constitution Working Party by August 2024. The Committee should not only consist of councillors, but also elected tenant and leaseholder representatives. This Committee would exercise similar powers to the current Scrutiny Committee, and would replace the current Tenant Involvement Panel and Annual Review Group.