



CAI.02 11/12

Challenge and Improvement Committee.

21 June 2011

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Subject: Implementation of 'New Ways of Working' to enhance the decision making capabilities of Committees.

Report by:

Manjeet Gill
Chief Executive

Contact Officer:

James O'Shaughnessy
Business Development Officer
01427 676537
James.O'Shaughnessy@west-lindsey.gov.uk

Purpose / Summary:

To introduce Members to 'New Ways of Working' in relation to policy & strategy formulation, Committee effectiveness and delivery against the Corporate Plan.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

That members NOTE the contents of this report and support its aims and objectives.

IMPLICATIONS

Legal: None directly arising from this report

The Council's Constitution provides the formal structure of decision making within the authority . This report is a support to Member fulfilling these legal roles in providing clarity as to the informal structures that support effective governance .

Financial: None directly arising from this report

Staffing: None directly arising from this report

Equality and Diversity including Human Rights: None directly arising from this report

Risk Assessment: None directly arising from this report

Climate Related Risks and Opportunities: None directly arising from this report

Background Papers:

The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report. If none were used then please state.

Title:	Location of Background Papers:
NONE	

1. Introduction

- 1.1 With the introduction of the new Constitution and work over the last 12 months to strengthen Member involvement in informal policy development this report introduces Members to a revised process developed to enhance both policy and strategy formulation and the effectiveness of Committees, in order to maintain focus on and delivery against the Corporate Plan.

2. Background

- 2.1 Members were keen to see an improved governance structure as part of the revised Constitution which included more focus on strategic and long term policy direction. This included the joining up of agendas which were previously dealt with separately to create a more corporate approach and to improve the quality of Committee reports to help Member discharge their democratic duties.
- 2.2 Members identified within the review that on occasions Committees were insufficiently mindful of the work load of other Committees thus creating a lack of 'joined up' decision making and that reports were not adequately robust to support Members in taking key decisions.
- 2.3 In addition a significant number of reports had to be considered by more than one Committee duplicating time and effort and often Update reports simply providing information to Members were tabled which could have been better dealt with elsewhere .
- 2.4 Officers have an important responsibility in supporting the democratic process more effectively and this lack of 'corporate' working within the Council has been indicated and work to remedy this has been underway for some time.
- 2.5 As such Members and Officers have participated in a number of Workshops in 2010 to build more effective Officer / Member relationships and a number of informal working groups have successfully delivered projects in the last year which are an indicator of good work that can be built upon. The Boundary Commission submission, the Whole Council election decision, the formation of the Budget and indeed the revised Constitution were all examples of effective cross party Member involvement in shaping policy.
- 2.6 It has been recognised that appropriate governance is required to ensure that information presented to Committees is relevant, comprehensive and has considered all due implications. In turn this will ensure that any decisions made by Committees will be safe and based on the best evidence/information available and will lead to the delivery of the outcomes detailed in the Corporate Plan.

Members also made a plea for Reports which were consistent, clear, well presented and concise and this is a commitment that Officers have made to improve overall governance.

3. New Governance Arrangements

3.1 The revised Constitution introduces a more efficient and streamlined governance structure with Policy Committees with broader responsibilities which will facilitate a collective, joined-up approach to policy formulation and development and ultimately business delivery. This will vastly improve the formal decision making processes of the Authority .

3.2 It also introduces a new approach to Scrutiny with the Challenge and Improvement Committee which will have a critical role in developing policy ideas and driving the Council's responses to key areas affecting its communities. The strengthening of the role of this Committee will include a range of different approaches including Task and Finish groups, Day Commissions and evidence gathering akin to Parliamentary Select Committees to sift the experiences on the ground in such a way as to inform the Councils strategic direction.

3.3 In order to support these new collective and corporate approaches, it is also important that the informal processes are also reviewed and developed

3.4 The following developments are to be introduced;

Committees will adopt a standard agenda format and officers will ensure that reports are clear and concise and support effective member decision making.

- The Leaders Panel which is an informal meeting of the Chairs of the key Committees meeting with the Core Management Team will meet regularly to debate developing policies and forms the strategic direction of the Council. This will include Strategic Planning Days throughout the year.
- In addition regular meetings between the Chair of Standards Committee and Leaders Panel and a separate meeting between the Panel and the Chair of Challenge and Improvement will allow work plans to be more effectively aligned and issues picked up early to enable appropriate action to be taken.
- Member Champions and Members serving on particular Outside Bodies for specific areas of work will also be invited to attend the Leaders Panel when issues relevant to their areas are to be debated in order to report back to Members on their work and the implications of this to the governance framework.

- Individual Chair and Vice Chair briefings will be developed to introduce standard agendas and support strategic debate around the key policies and projects in the Committee's work for the year in delivering the Corporate Plan.
- Member working groups will continue to be an important feature of the way in which issues are developed and considered prior to the decision making processes within the governance structure.
- The Group Leaders will also meet on a six monthly basis to share information and support partnership working across the political groups.

3.5 The aim of all these improved processes is to ensure that the Council's democratic governance can deliver the aspirations Members determined on the adoption of the new Constitution and the move to 4 yearly terms of office i.e. of a more efficient , and effective Council with the right tools to deliver better outcomes for its community .

4. Outcomes

4.1 These processes will ensure that:

- All corporate implications are considered.
- Committees only consider matters relating to delivery of corporate plan and corporate governance.
- Members are able to directly shape strategic decisions.
- Issues concerning risks/political considerations/communications are effectively considered.
- Other relevant decision bodies have been duly consulted prior to Committee report.
- All Members and Officers work together to shape policy and strategy.
- There is no duplication of effort.
- The reputation of WLDC as an authority that delivers is enhanced.

5. Recommendation

That Members NOTE the content of this report and support its aims and objectives.