

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Council

8th January 2025

Report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services – Mr Craig Griffiths

Matter for Decision

Wards Affected: All

Establishment of a Modernisation Group

Purpose of the Report

This report proposes the establishment of a Modernisation Group within the Council to review and enhance our decision-making processes. The aim is to ensure that our procedures are efficient, transparent, and aligned with best practices.

Executive Summary

In recent years, the complexity and volume of decisions required by the Council have increased significantly. This has highlighted the need for a review of our current decision-making processes to identify areas for improvement and modernisation.

It would be proposed to establish a Modernisation Group, comprising of elected members to review the council's constitution, processes, and decision-making frameworks. The group will identify areas for improvement and develop recommendations to modernise and streamline constitutional processes, ensuring it is effective, transparent, and fit for purpose in a changing local government environment.

The overarching objectives for the group will be to deliver:

1. A review of the council's constitution, decision making structures and processes.
2. Evidence-based recommendations to modernise and improve decision making and constitutional requirements considering service user perspectives..
3. A detailed implementation plan, including timelines, resources, and success measures.
4. A framework for monitoring and evaluating the impact of changes.

Background

In recent years, the complexity and volume of decisions required by the Council have increased significantly. This has highlighted the need for a comprehensive review of our current decision-making processes to identify areas for improvement and modernisation.

It would be proposed to establish a Modernisation Group, comprising of elected members to review the council's constitution and decision-making frameworks. The group will identify areas for improvement and develop recommendations to modernise and streamline constitutional processes, ensuring it is effective, transparent, and fit for purpose in a changing local government environment.

The group will:

1. Review existing decision-making structures, including cabinet/committee arrangements, decision-making processes, and officer-member relationships.
2. Identify inefficiencies, gaps, or barriers within current structures and processes.
3. Consider opportunities to modernise processes in line with best practices, legal requirements, and emerging technologies, undertaking a review of the Constitution of the Council as and when required.
4. Propose recommendations to improve accountability, transparency, inclusivity, and responsiveness considering service user perspectives as part of recommendations.
5. Foster a culture of continuous improvement within the council's constitutional processes.

It is proposed the Modernisation Group will comprise:

- Elected Members: Politically balanced with 11 Elected Members (5 Labour, 2 Plaid Cymru, 3 Independent, 1 Coedffranc Liberal and Green Group). Members to be determined by Group Leaders.
- Chair/Vice-Chair: To be appointed by the group at its inaugural meeting.
- Officer Support: Relevant senior officers will provide legal, technical advice and administrative support led by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Democratic Services Manager

The group will adopt the following approach:

1. Evidence Gathering:
 - Review documents, such as the constitution, terms of reference, and meeting minutes.
 - Benchmark practices from other councils and organisations.
2. Stakeholder Engagement:

- Consult with council members, officers, and any appropriate external stakeholders i.e. Audit Wales.
- Seek feedback from the public where relevant.

3. Workshops and Discussions:

- Conduct structured workshops to identify strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities.
- Use case studies to explore practical challenges and solutions.

4. Analysis and Recommendations:

- Evaluate findings and develop evidence-based recommendations.
- Ensure recommendations are practical, achievable, and aligned with the council's strategic objectives.

The group itself will have no decision-making powers and will report its findings and recommendations to Full Council as and when a decision is required, and it would be proposed the group will meet on a as required to achieve its objectives. Progress reports will be provided at key milestones, with reports outlining findings, recommendations, and an implementation plan at various intervals.

Timetables for each area of work will be agreed by the group to ensure a manageable and appropriate workload for those involved.

Scrutiny

For the avoidance of doubt, the proposed review of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny model will not be considered by this modernisation group.

At the Council meeting of the 20th March 2024, members resolved that any of the changes to the model of scrutiny suggested are reviewed on a six-monthly basis by the Chairs and Vice Chairs of Scrutiny with any suggested amendments be reported back to Full Council before the Annual General Meeting each year. Therefore, the Chairs and Vice Chairs of Scrutiny will continue to lead on this area.

To ensure however maximum involvement of members in this review, each individual scrutiny committee will be consulted and views sought, along with Democratic Services Committee. In addition, a personal survey with elected members following recent approval by the Democratic Services Committee will be carried out.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications at this stage, but any actions considered by the group will be assessed as part of an ongoing review of financial implications

Integrated Impact Assessment

As this report relates to the proposed establishment of a working group there is no requirement for an integrated impact assessment.

Workforce Impacts

There are no impacts at this stage.

Legal Powers

A local authority is under a duty to prepare and keep up to date its constitution under s.9P Local Government Act 2000 as amended. The constitution must contain:

- the standing orders/procedure rules;
- the members' code of conduct;
- such information as the Welsh Ministers may direct;
- such other information (if any) as the authority considers appropriate.

Constitutions must be available for inspection at all reasonable hours by members of the public and supplied to anyone who asks for a copy on payment of a reasonable fee.

Risk Management

Potential risks include:

- Resistance to Change: Mitigated by engaging members and stakeholders early in the process.
- Resource Constraints: Addressed by prioritising actions and allocating adequate support.
- Delays: Managed through regular progress reviews and adherence to timelines.

Consultation

There is no requirement for external consultation for this proposal

Recommendation

It is recommended that members approve the establishment of a modernisation group on the terms identified in this report.

Reason for Decision

Establishing a Modernisation Group is a proactive step towards ensuring that our decision-making processes are fit for purpose in a rapidly changing environment. This initiative will not only improve efficiency and transparency but also reinforce the Council's commitment to continuous improvement of our constitutional processes,

Appendices

None

List of Background Papers

None

Officer Contact

Mr Craig Griffiths

Head of Legal and Democratic Services