

GOVERNANCE REFERENCE GROUP

Wednesday, 22 January 2025

In Attendance: Councillor Radley, Chairperson; and Councillors Allard, Boulton, Greig (substituting for Councillor Yuill), McLellan, Nicoll, Mrs Stewart, van Sweeden

Also present: Vikki Cuthbert, Steven Inglis, Andy Macdonald, Ronnie McKean, Martyn Orchard, Gogo Okafor, Alan Thomson, and Helen Sherrit.

Apologies: Councillors Brooks and Yuill.

	Agenda Item	Notes of Discussion	Action/Decision	By Whom
1	Minute of Previous Meeting of 22 November 2024	<p>The Group had before it the minute of the previous meeting of 22 November 2024 for approval.</p> <p><u>The Group resolved:-</u> to approve the minute.</p>		
2	Scrutiny Options	<p>The Group had before it the Scrutiny Options paper which summarised the discussions with the internal and external auditors on the effectiveness of the Council's scrutiny model following the previous meeting in November.</p> <p>Vikki Cuthbert – Interim Chief Officer – Governance (Assurance), reminded the Group of the Scrutiny Options and its models adopted by the other Scottish Local Authorities, with reference to Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeenshire councils on how the models into their Committee structure. She advised that the option supported by the Group would be reported to the Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Committee in February, ahead of the next Governance Reference Group meeting in</p>		

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		<p>March and then the Scheme of Governance being reported to Council in April.</p> <p>Mrs Cuthbert advised that Option 1 within the paper was an adaptation taken from England which was based on a cabinet system. She mentioned that Glasgow Council made use of the cabinet system, whereas Edinburgh Council relied solely on the Audit Committee to look into the issues before decisions were being made, then it would be scrutinised by the executive committees. Furthermore, it was mentioned that Aberdeenshire Council approach used a process between Audit Committee and Service Committees, based on a three stage process. It was noted that Option 2 as based on an enhancement of the current system supporting the further development of elected members in effective scrutiny. Mrs Cuthbert updated the Group in relation to :- (a) the Terms of Reference for Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Committee; and (b) training and skills development for the elected members.</p> <p>The Group had a general discussion on the Scrutiny Options and shared their views on the 2 options mentioned in the paper. Members were generally of the opinion that scrutiny should be transparent, and that not all questions should be asked of officers before the meeting. Furthermore, the Group supported that additional training be made available for elected members of a more specialist and strategic nature. The Group also discussed the tone of language when</p>		

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		<p>questions were being asked of officers and responded to. It was suggested that officers should introduce their reports before questions were asked; it was noted that this was always an option, however, it was at the decision of the Convener in terms of whether an introduction was required.</p> <p>The Group was in favour of Option 2 within the report but felt there was an opportunity to look at other enhancements, in addition to modifying Terms of Reference and providing additional training. Andy MacDonald – Director – Corporate Services encouraged the Group to bring forward any specific proposals which officers could look at.</p> <p><u>The Group resolved:-</u> to support, in principle, Option 2, and that officers return with draft changes to the Terms of Reference to a further meeting in February meeting before reporting to the April Council meeting as part of the Scheme of Governance Review.</p>	Draft changes to be made to Terms of Reference (TOR)	Vikki Cuthbert
3	Further Proposals for Scheme of Governance	<p>The Group heard from Vikki Cuthbert who summarised the position with regard to other elements of the Scheme of Governance, which would be considered at the April Council meeting, namely (a) the budget proposal; (b) standing orders; and (c) councillors access to information and rights therein.</p> <p>Mrs Cuthbert sought for the above be brought forward and discussed at the next meeting. In terms of access to information, some members felt that this definitely needed to be made</p>		

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		clearer and it was agreed that this would be addressed. <u>The Group resolved:-</u> to note the update provided.	Proposals to be taken to the next meeting	Vikki Cuthbert
4	Date of Next Meeting - 6 March at 3pm	The Group noted that the next meeting was scheduled be held on 6 March 2025, but had agreed for an additional meeting to take place in mid- February. <u>The Group resolved:-</u> that a date would be circulated and appointment issued to members as soon as possible.	February meeting date to be confirmed.	Gogo Okafor