

# Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee

10.00am, Tuesday 18 January 2022

## Review of Effectiveness of Scrutiny of Governance, Risk and Best Value (GRBV) – Self-Evaluation and Lessons Learnt

### 1. Recommendations

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1.1 The Committee is recommended to:

- 1.1.1 Note the outputs from self-evaluation workshop undertaken by Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee members on 12 October 2021 to assess current political management arrangements, committee effectiveness and lessons learnt from this Council term; and,
- 1.1.2 Note the outputs from the self-evaluation workshop will be used to inform the design of political management arrangement proposals and support provided to elected members around the local government election 2022 and following council term.

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## Review of Effectiveness of Scrutiny of Governance, Risk and Best Value GRBV – Self-Evaluation and Lessons Learnt

### 2. Executive Summary

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- 2.1 This report provides a summary of a self-evaluation workshop undertaken by Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee (GRBV) members on 12 October 2021 to assess current political management arrangements (PMAs), committee effectiveness and lessons learnt from this Council term.

### 3. Background

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- 3.1 The GRBV Committee Effectiveness Review concluded that the GRBV Committee is fulfilling its core remit, particularly in relation to oversight of the internal and external audit processes, risk management and the operational performance of the Council. The Review further concluded that there is an opportunity to enhance the effectiveness of the scrutiny the Committee performs and the impact it can achieve.
- 3.2 The Review set out a number of recommendations for consideration when the Council reviews its political management arrangements following the 2022 local government elections, as well as a number of standalone recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of the Committee.
- 3.3 The Review specifically noted that the Committee would benefit from taking time away from its busy agenda to consider goals and objectives for the year, highlight good practice and consider lessons learnt. Agreed management actions included preparing a lessons learnt paper following a lessons learnt session with committee members, this will be followed up by a consideration of goals and objectives in the new Council term.
- 3.4 As part of the Council's preparations for the May 2022 Local Government election, the Corporate Governance Team is conducting a review of the Council's PMAs. A key part of this review is the evaluation of current arrangements. Facilitated self-evaluation sessions by committee members will be scheduled with all executive committees before the election and used to inform the design of proposed post-election PMAs and the support provided to councillors for the 2022-2027 term.

## 4. Main report

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- 4.1 All GRBV members were invited to attend a workshop on 12 October 2022. The workshop evaluated current PMAs relevant to the GRBV Committee followed by an evaluation of effectiveness in key areas of responsibility.

### **Political Management Arrangement Assessment**

- 4.2 Workshop attendees evaluated six key PMA areas against the scoring criteria set out in figure 1.1 below. The six key areas were: terms of reference, remit and purpose of committee; balance of reporting; number of reports and time spent on each report/meeting frequency; composition of committee and number of committee members; ALEOs, and training.

<b>Figure 1.1 – Scoring Criteria</b>	
5	PMAs work well in this area and there is no need for change.
4	PMAs are working well but there are small changes that could be made to improve effectiveness.
3	PMAs are sufficient but there is improvement required.
2	PMAs provide some value but significant improvement is required.
1	PMAs are not effective in their purpose/there is a need for complete redesign.

- 4.3 Terms of Reference (TORs), Remit and Purpose of Committee - the score agreed by members in this section was **5**.

- 4.4 Elected members were asked the following questions:

4.4.1 Are the Committee's TORs appropriate?

4.4.2 Is there anything that you think should sit elsewhere/currently sits elsewhere and would work well as part of the Committee's remit?

4.4.3 Are you clear on the overall purpose of the Committee?

- 4.5 Points made during discussion included:

4.5.1 TORs were broad enough, but the committee didn't always utilise their full scope.

4.5.2 The Committee can feel "toothless" and it is difficult to identify situations where changes in direction or action had been forced.

4.5.3 A previous arrangement whereby reports could be scrutinised by GRBV before they went to executive committees should be reconsidered.

4.5.4 It should be considered whether GRBV could look at the risk profile of large projects/decisions before these were approved.

- 4.5.5 That in progressing the comment in the GRBV Effectiveness Review regarding the balance of strategic and operational focus of the committee, elected members would be aided by more guidance and support on the difference between these two areas and how to navigate the complexities of the Code of Conduct.
- 4.6 Balance of Reporting - the score agreed by members in this section was 3.
- 4.7 Elected members were asked the following questions:
- 4.7.1 Are you happy with the balance of reporting?
- 4.7.2 Is there anything that you'd like to see more/less dedicated reports on?
- 4.8 Points made during discussion included:
- 4.8.1 The committee had fewer reports on risk than other key areas of its remit. An increase in this area would be beneficial.
- 4.8.2 It was noted that the Council's current backlog of overdue audit and assurance actions had meant that the committee had spent a disproportionate amount of time on this at the expense of different types of reporting and focus.
- 4.8.3 The quality of reports could be improved in general. There was a need for better written reports that summarised points well whilst providing an appropriate level of detail. A reduction in jargon was required. Annual reports should be comparable with previous reports.
- 4.9 Number of reports and time spent on each report/meeting frequency - the score agreed by members in this section was **4**.
- 4.10 Elected members were asked the following questions:
- 4.10.1 Do you feel the committee spends an appropriate amount of time on each report?
- 4.10.2 Are ten meetings a year appropriate?
- 4.11 Points made during discussion included:
- 4.11.1 That the committee did spend an appropriate amount of time as required on individual reports, this would vary depending on report.
- 4.11.2 Meeting frequency was appropriate.
- 4.11.3 It was worth considering at what time the committee met. The lifestyle changes brought about during the pandemic might mean that evening meetings would be better for committee members and public engagement.
- 4.12 Composition of Committee and Number of Committee Members – a score was not agreed by members in this section.
- 4.13 Elected members were asked the following question:
- 4.13.1 Does the composition of the committee aid good scrutiny and allow it to fulfil its purpose?

- 4.14 Points made during discussion included:
  - 4.14.1 Eleven members is too small for appropriate scrutiny and more members would bring additional skills and this aided democratic representation.
  - 4.14.2 Eleven members is an appropriate size. Political groups would struggle to resource larger committees and an increase in size could cause difficulties in terms of political balance.
  - 4.14.3 A paid vice-convenor role for GRBV would aid its effectiveness and ability to deal with workload.
  - 4.14.4 Standing sub-committees should be explored rather than the current working group model.
- 4.15 ALEOs – the score agreed by members in this section was **2**.
- 4.16 Elected members were asked:
  - 4.16.1 Assess the Committee’s ALEOs role in regard to assurance, scrutiny and support of service delivery.
- 4.17 Points made during discussion included:
  - 4.17.1 ALEO committee reporting wasn’t operating as well as it should. Regular ALEO reporting should go to GRBV before executive committees.
  - 4.17.2 There shouldn’t be a limit of what GRBV can scrutinise about ALEOs.
- 4.18 Training - a score was not agreed by members in this section.
- 4.19 Elected members were asked:
  - 4.19.1 Would you benefit from specific training or briefing to assist your work on this committee?
  - 4.19.2 How would this best be delivered?
- 4.20 Points made during discussion included:
  - 4.20.1 All councillors should have to attend training sessions, not just those who are new to the organisation.
  - 4.20.2 A combination of remote and in-person training for each session would be welcomed.
  - 4.20.3 Training should be scheduled to take place at regular intervals during the first year of the new term.
  - 4.20.4 Sessions were suggested on: how to read a report; how to research a report; basic committee structures; reading a set of Council accounts, and specific committee training.
  - 4.20.5 Training sessions should be recorded for future reference.
  - 4.20.6 Cross-party political buddying should be explored.

4.20.7 A pre-meeting for the Councillors on each committee before the first formal meeting could aid effectiveness and help break down barriers to working collaboratively.

**GRBV Effectiveness**

4.21 The Committee was then asked to score their effectiveness in four key areas of responsibility: oversight of audit processes; oversight of risk management; oversight of operational performance, and effectiveness of scrutiny. The evaluation section was informed by previous discussion throughout the session. A scoring guide is provided at figure 1.2

<b>Figure 1.2 – Scoring Criteria</b>	
5	The Committee is fully effective in this area, there is nothing that we could do better or differently.
4	The Committee is effective in this area but there are small improvements that could be made.
3	The Committee fulfils its role in this area but isn't necessarily effective. Improvements can be made.
2	The Committee provides some value but has a long way to go to being fully effective.
1	The Committee does not provide value in this area.

4.22 The key areas were scored as follows:

4.22.1 Oversight of audit processes – 3.5

4.22.2 Oversight of risk management – 2

4.22.3 Oversight of operational performance – 2

4.22.4 Effectiveness of scrutiny – 3

**Conclusion**

4.23 Attendees raised extensive feedback during the PMA section of the workshop. This was noted by officers who will be leading on this work as part of the preparations for Council 2022. Outputs would inform the design of PMA options, guidance and training.

4.24 The evaluation section was informed by previous discussion throughout the session. Findings mirrored the conclusions drawn in the GRBV Effectiveness Review report in that members perceived that the committee was fulfilling its core remit, however, there was room for improvement and that changes to PMAs should be considered to help facilitate this.

4.25 Elected members also perceived an imbalance in the committee's effectiveness and the business considered. The overdue assurance actions and recent red internal audit ratings had dominated the agenda and focus of the committee. Those present noted that they would have liked to have been able to provide additional focus in committee on oversight of risk management and operational performance.

## **5. Next Steps**

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- 5.1 Equivalent self-evaluation workshops will be held with all executive committees. The outputs from these session alongside findings from an elected member survey and exit interviews with those members standing down will inform the design of PMA proposals, guidance and training for elected members following the 2022 election.
- 5.2 The findings will also be utilised in the design of the forward-looking goal and object setting workshop (referenced in paragraph 3.3) to take place early in the new Council term.

## **6. Financial impact**

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- 6.1 Political management arrangements and elected member training during this period will be contained within existing revenue budgets.

## **7. Stakeholder/Community Impact**

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- 7.1 The outputs of this session will be shared with Executive Committees in advance of committee evaluation sessions.

## **8. Background reading/external references**

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- 8.1 [Review of the Effectiveness of Scrutiny of Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee - implementation of findings](#) – Governance Risk and Best Value Committee, 9 November 2021
- 8.2 [Internal Audit Annual Opinion for the year ended 31 March 2021](#) – Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee, 10 August 2021

## **9. Appendices**

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- 9.1 None.