Guide to committees
New Committee structure - May 2015

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Council governance and guide to committees

Introduction

There are a number of committees, sub committees, boards and panels which contribute to decision making at the council, all are described here. This guide should help you understand what these bodies do and how they interact with each other.

Membership of Committees

All committees and boards are politically proportionate, this means that the number of seats for each political party is based on the share of seats it has on the Full Council. The membership of the committees can only be chosen by a meeting of the Full Council who will also agree which named substitutes are allowed to sit on these committees. Area member panels have different membership arrangements (see page 6).

Membership of sub committees is determined by the parent committee and must be comprised of members of the parent committee. Named substitutes can also serve if required. The Chairmen are selected by the committees themselves.

Public involvement with meetings

All meetings of Full Council and its committees and sub committees etc are open to members of the public to observe for at least a part of the time, many are also recorded to allow the public who can't attend to listen to the meeting on the council's website. Sometimes it is necessary to for members to consider matters in private, this is usually when public disclosure of a particular matter would cause harm to the council or another party.

The public can also speak at meetings on any item on the agenda for a maximum of three minutes. Apart from the Planning Committee when it is considering planning applications any number of people can choose to address the meeting. No time limits exist for speakers at meetings of the Licensing Sub Committees but they have restrictions on who can participate. With the exception of the Licensing Sub Committee, in all matters to do with public speaking the chairman has discretion.

Working Groups

The council has a number of working groups which may comprise of a mixture of officers and councillors or may just be officers. These meetings are always conducted in private to allow business to progress in an efficient manner. However, their remit is strictly controlled and any decisions made in these working groups must be done by using power that has been specifically delegated to officers in the constitution or by a specific resolution of a meeting of Full Council or one of its committees. More often the output of working groups is reported to parent committees when particular milestones are reached. More information about working groups is available in the council’s constitution.
Full Council

Full Council is the governing body of the council and will decide the budget and policy framework. Whilst the three main service committees (below) can make decisions within this framework, Full Council is the only body able to make decisions outside of this. So if a decision would result in a change to the budget or would go against existing council approved policy then the full council would need to have the final say. Each year the annual meeting of the Full Council also adopts the constitution of the council, the terms of reference for each committee and appoints councillors and substitutes for each committee.

Three service committees

The council has three main service committees. These are:

1. Policy and Resources Committee
2. Community Committee
3. Regeneration and Property Committee

These committees will approve many of the council’s policies, and have a role in budget and performance monitoring. These committees will meet six times a year.

Decision making

In some matters the three committees may make decisions, and in other matters make recommendations to Full Council. Any decision that would require a change to the agreed budget of the council or that would need to step outside of the council’s approved policies will be made by Full Council.

Urgency Sub-Committees

There are times when decisions can’t wait. In these cases the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Chairman, can call a meeting of the relevant urgency sub-committee rather than waiting for an ordinary meeting of the committee. However, if it is not practicable to convene a meeting, then Chief Executive has delegated power to make decisions on an urgent basis.

Policy and Resources Committee

The main areas covered by the committee:

- Recommending the Capital and Revenue Budgets and Medium Term Financial Strategy to Full Council
- Corporate performance and budget monitoring
- Constitutional and governance aspects of Shared Services
- The approval of strategies and plans not referred to Full Council
- Local Plan preparation

Also within the remit of the Policy and Resources Committee are matters such as electoral
registration functions, health and safety at work, pensions, staffing matters and appointments to outside bodies.

The Policy and Resources Committee will deal with matters not given to any other committee. It will also take decisions on matters which are within the remit of more than one service committee. The Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee shall act as council Leader.

Appointments Sub Committee

The Committee primarily considers the appointment or dismissal of the council’s senior officers, and appoints the independent members of the Whitstable Harbour Board.

Regulatory and Appeals Sub Committee

This is a sub-committee of the Policy and Resources Committee. Amongst its duties this sub-committee considers appeals brought by employees, and discretionary rate relief.

Community Committee

The main areas covered by the committee:

- Environment
- Waste and recycling
- Culture, leisure and tourism
- Housing

Also within the remit of the Community Committee are matters such as health and wellbeing, countryside and allotments, community development and safety and voluntary sector funding.

Regeneration and Property

The main areas covered by the committee:

- Property acquisitions and disposals
- Economic development
- Regeneration through development
- Parking, travel and some highway matters

Also within the remit of the Regeneration and Property Committee are matters such as the beach hut service, including site provision and letting, public rights of way and joint working with Kent County Council on highways issues. Where property is no longer required for service delivery, this committee may decide on its retention or disposal.
Decision Review Committee

It is not always possible to get everything right first time. This committee has the ability to review the decisions that have been made by the three main service committees (Policy and Resources Committee, Community, and Regeneration and Property). A decision can only be reviewed if 14 councillors request a review in writing within three working days of the decision being published. The review must also be based on evidence that the decision has not been properly taken. For example if the councillors felt that the matter fell outside of the existing budgets or policies, the report failed to give proper reasons, the consultation policy was not followed or the implications were not fully set out.

If a review is requested and meets the criteria then the committee will hold a meeting to consider the request. It then has to decide whether to refer the matter back to the committee that took the decision, or to Full Council (if outside the Budget and Policy Framework) or it may decide that no action is necessary. Because this process could result in significant delay to a decision being implemented, decisions taken under urgency procedures will be exempt from review by this committee.

Committee Membership

The number of councillors on the committee is based on the political balance of the council. Any councillor involved in making a decision cannot consider the decision being reviewed. To ensure this is possible, membership of the committee is drawn from across the council with sufficient named substitutes.

Audit and Governance Committee

The main areas covered by the committee:

- Internal and external audit issues
- Constitutional and governance matters
- Statement of accounts and treasury management
- Corporate risk management

Also within the remit of the Audit and Governance Committee are matters such political management, work-related issues such as anti-fraud, corruption and whistle-blowing, complaints and reports by the Ombudsman.

Governance Sub-Committee

This sub-committee will meet as and when required and will consider detailed governance matters referred to it by the main committee.

Area Member Panels

Area Member Panels (AMPs) are local, consultative bodies which may discuss any matter, excluding specific planning applications, affecting their respective geographical areas. There are five AMPs: Canterbury, Whitstable, Herne Bay, Rural North and Rural South. AMPs may forward their views and recommendations to the service committees. The Panels provide
a local link to communities and are generally quite well attended. Each AMP has a £15,000 Opportunities Fund to spend on local projects and community groups.

**Committee Membership and Meeting Cycle**

Membership of Area Member Panels consists of councillors who represent the area. Therefore, the membership numbers will vary accordingly and the panels may not be politically balanced.

**Standards Committee**

The main areas covered by the committee:

- Code of Conduct
- Local ethical governance protocols and procedures
- Register of Councillors’ Interests and declaring gifts and hospitality Committee

The main job of this committee is to promote high standards of conduct from the council’s elected representatives. It does this by considering relevant new guidance and legislation that is referred to it by the Monitoring Officer and advising on any reviews of procedures and policies relating to them. It also deals with any complaints received about breaches to the code of conduct.

**Membership and Meeting Cycle**

The committee will be politically balanced and additionally includes three co-opted parish council members. It will meet on a quarterly basis.

**Planning Committee**

The main work of this committee is to consider whether or not to grant planning permission to residents and developers on an individual basis. The committee can also deal with a variety of other matters relating to the various town and county planning acts, including enforcement matters.

The Planning Sub-Committee will support its parent committee by considering any matters referred to it. Primarily it considers the planning enforcement report on a quarterly basis and conducts any site visits requested by the main committee.

**Licensing Committee**

Generally this committee will meet once a year to consider the annual report from the various authorities (eg the police) with responsibilities under the Licensing Act 2003. It also has responsibility for licensing in regard to many areas, for example, alcohol, taxis, late night refreshments and scrap metal dealers. In practice the determination of individual applications is carried out by its sub-committee.
Licensing Sub Committee
This sub-committee has a date reserved each week in the committee programme. This is to ensure it can act quickly to deal with applications within the various statutory deadlines. The sub-committee will consist of three panel members plus a reserve member. The membership is determined by a rota which is agreed at the beginning of the council year.

Whitstable Harbour Board
The Harbour Board will make strategic decisions regarding the Harbour land, property and marine safety.

Membership and Meeting Cycle
There are eight members of the Board comprised of five councillors, selected on a politically proportionate basis, and three independent members. These independent members are not elected councillors. Instead they are selected by the Appointments Sub-Committee for a period of three years after a preliminary recruitment process by officers. The independent members have full voting rights on all matters.

Joint Transportation Board
The Joint Transportation Board (JTB) is a forum for consultation between Kent County Council and Canterbury City Council on policies, plans and strategies related to highways, road traffic and public transport.

Membership of JTB will consist of an equal number of County and City Councillors, plus a representative of the parish and town councils within the district. There will be four meetings a year.