

REPORT TO: Audit and Governance Board

DATE: 7 July 2021

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director Enterprise, Community and Resources

PORTFOLIO: Corporate Services

SUBJECT: Revisions to Committee Structures

WARDS: Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To bring to the Board recommendations for revisions to Committees following consideration by a group of senior members and to seek appropriate recommendations to Council.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

It be recommended to Council that

- 1) The Audit and Governance Board assume responsibility for the work of the former Standards Committee and that its terms of reference be amended as set out in Appendix 1.
- 2) The composition of the Appeals Panel be amended as set out in paragraph 3.4 of this report.
- 3) A Taxi Sub-committee be set up with terms of reference as contained in Appendix 2.
- 4) That appropriate amendments to the Constitution are made in due course.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 Part of the responsibility of the Audit and Governance Board is the consideration of the Council's arrangements for Corporate Governance, and the agreement of any necessary actions to ensure compliance with best practice.
- 3.2 A small group of senior members has been considering the Council's committee structure and assessing ways in which improvements could be made.

- 3.3 Members will be aware that the Council meeting in May decided not to appoint to the Standards Committee and Appeals Panel this year, pending consideration of this report.

The group concluded that arrangements for dealing with standards issues would be strengthened by removing the previous Standards Committee which met once per year, and had a Hearings Panel to be drawn from its membership and comprising of representation from two political parties where possible. The work of the Standards Committee would be transferred to the Audit and Governance Board, whose amended terms of reference would be as sent out in Appendix 1. The Hearings Panel would remain, but would be populated from the membership of the Audit and Governance Board. The benefit of this new arrangement would be that standards issues could be considered more frequently than the previous one scheduled meeting per year, and the Audit and Governance Board would be the natural home for those areas of work, given its current responsibilities. The ability to call a Hearings Panel at short notice would remain, allowing for consideration of allegations that individual members may have broken the Code of Conduct.

- 3.4 The group also looked at the make-up of the Appeals Panel, and felt that arrangements would be streamlined by amending the composition so that three council members would be asked to attend each individual hearing as before, but that they be drawn from the membership of the Corporate Policy and Performance Board. This would mirror the composition of the previous Corporate Complaints Panel, and would ensure that the Panel would remain as an independent body, rather than being a sub-committee of the Corporate PPB, which would not be permissible under scrutiny rules. The chair for a hearing would be chosen the membership of the Panel on the day. It is not considered that any further amendments to the Appeals Panel's terms of reference are necessary at this stage, but that would be kept under review.

- 3.5 Members of the group also felt that there would be merit in the establishment of a Taxi Sub-Committee to be drawn from members of the Regulatory Committee. It would contain three members on each occasion, and it is felt that it would be able to deal with the taxi licensing issues presented to it in respect of individual drivers, operators etc. in an efficient manner, and in a forum which may be considered less intimidating than attendance before the full Regulatory Committee as at present. The proposed terms of reference are set out in Appendix 2 to this report.

If approved, these amendments will require changes to the Constitution and it is suggested that these are picked up at the appropriate time.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 It is considered that the recommendations contained within this report would make improvements to the Council's Committee structure, for the reasons set out in the body of the report.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The only financial implications arising from the report would a saving in terms of special responsibility allowances.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

- 6.1 **Children and Young People in Halton – None**
- 6.2 **Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton – None**
- 6.3 **A Healthy Halton – None**
- 6.4 **A Safer Halton – None**
- 6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal – None**

Whilst there are no specific implications for the Council's priorities, it is beyond doubt that the most effective arrangements for Corporate Governance will benefit the whole authority and its residents and stakeholders.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

- 7.1 There are no matters requiring a full Risk Assessment. The Council is required to have an appropriate mechanism in place for considering complaints that members may have broken the Code of Conduct, under the terms of the Localism Act 2011.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 The proposed changes set out in the report will benefit all sectors of the community.

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

| Document | Place of Inspection | Contact Officer |
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9.1 None under the meaning of the Act.