



Report to Audit & Governance Committee and Standards & General Purposes Committee

Date:	17 & 18 January 2024
Title:	Preparations for 2025 Council – Constitutional Arrangements
Contact officer:	Nick Graham/Sarah Ashmead
Recommendations:	To agree to establish a cross party Member task and finish group to bring forward proposals for changes to the Constitution for 2025.

1. Background

- 1.1 In May 2025, the number of Buckinghamshire councillors will reduce from the current 147 to 97, as a result of the review by the Local Government Boundary Commission. This change will have various implications for the way the Council organises itself. With fewer councillors and a revised geography of representation, the Council will want to adopt governance arrangements that are sustainable and effective; these arrangements will then need to be reflected in a revised Constitution.
- 1.2 Tasks to be undertaken in preparation for 2025 will need to include:
 - Review committee structures and size
 - Consider any further changes to the constitution which may be required as a direct result of the reduction in the number of members.
- 1.3 In addition, the Council will need to commission an Independent Remuneration Panel to conduct a review of member allowances, with a view to recommending a new scheme of allowances to Council for 2025.

2. Proposal

- 2.1 It is proposed that a 2025 Constitution Task and Finish group is established on a cross party basis to take a lead role in formulating changes to the constitution for consideration by the two Committees. Membership of the 2025 Constitution Task

and Finish Group could comprise the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of the Standards and General Purposes Committee and the Audit and Governance Committee, the Leaders of the Opposition Groups and one of the Deputy Leaders of the Council.

- 2.2 Any proposals developed by the Task and Finish group to amend the constitution will need to be considered by both the Standards and General Purposes Committee and the Audit and Governance Committee, with the recommendations then submitted to Full Council. Draft Terms of Reference are attached at Appendix 1.

3. Legal and financial implications

- 3.1 The financial savings linked to the reduction in the numbers of councillors will be reflected in the MTFP for 2025/26.

4. Next steps and review

- 4.1 Subject to the agreement of the committees, it is proposed that the 2025 Constitution Task and Finish Group should be convened in February to start to scope the work, with a view to reporting back to the Committees with initial proposals in September 2024. The aim would be to present recommendations to Council in December 2024. It is anticipated that the Group would meet at least every three months and more frequently at the Chairman's discretion, as the work requires.

5. Your questions and views

- 5.1 If you have any questions about the matters contained in this report, please contact the author of this report.



Appendix 1 - Draft Terms of Reference:

2025 Constitution Task and Finish Group – a working group of the Audit & Governance and Standards & General Purposes Committees

Background:

The Audit & Governance Committee and the Standards & General Purposes Committee both have relevant responsibilities in relation to the constitution:

- The **Audit & Governance Committee** is charged with ensuring that the Council's governance arrangements are effective;
- The **Standards & General Purposes Committee** is charged with overseeing the integrity of the Council's Constitution and compliance with high ethical standards.

Purpose:

The 2025 Constitution Task and Finish Group is a cross party working group of both committees. Its purpose is to review the constitution, in the context of the forthcoming reduction in councillor numbers, and develop proposals for any changes that may be necessary from May 2025.

The Task and Finish Group will also advise the Committees on the establishment of the Independent Remuneration Panel and consider its recommendations for a new scheme of member allowances for 2025.

Membership:

The 2025 Constitution Task and Finish Group will comprise 7 members as follows:

- Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Audit and Governance Committee
- Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Standards and General Purposes Committee
- A Deputy Leader of the Council
- Leader of the Alliance Grouping
- Leader of Impact Alliance.



Chairmanship and quorum:

The meeting will be chaired by the Chairman of the Audit & Governance Committee. The Vice-Chairman will be the Chairman of the Standards and General Purposes Committee. The quorum will be three members. A quorum must contain at least one member from each parent committee.

Meetings:

The 2025 Constitution Task and Finish Group will meet at least once every three months. It may meet more frequently at the discretion of the Chairman, if the Group requires.

Status:

As an informal working group of the two parent committees, the 2025 Constitution Task and Finish Group is private and will not meet in public. However, the Group will provide updates on its progress to the two committees as necessary.

The Group is not a decision-making body. The parent Committees retain decision-making responsibility, for any recommendations or options arising from the Group, consistent with the terms of reference of each Committee.

Support:

The Group will be supported by officers from Legal and Democratic Services.

