Committee Structure Review

April 2025

Updated following Strategy, Policy and Development Committee.

Richard Williams
Town Clerk & Proper Officer

Introduction

This paper sets out a review into the committee structure at Welshpool Town Council.

Background

The Council's current committee structure can be found at Appendix 1. It consists of 8 committees, 6 of which meet every month. 2 committees meet quarterly.

The general purpose of Council committees is to enable a smaller, more focussed group of councillors to discuss and make decisions on topics which have been determined by Full Council.

At a meeting of the Strategy, Policy and Development Committee on 20th February 2025, a sub-committee was formed. It made a recommendation to Full Council that Services & Property Committee and Strategy, Policy and Development Committee be merged. It did not consider the model of committee powers.

Analysis of the current structure

It is clear from discussions with councillors and staff that the current structure is unwieldy for the following reasons:

- Committees are bunched up on the same day which don't allow for proper scrutiny and decision making.
- There are too many committees meeting regularly which requires a lot of administration, detracting away from implementing the decisions of the Council.
- Topics and issues bypass committees depending on the severity/priority and go straight to Full Council without having the in depth deep dive sometimes required in a smaller group.
- Committees have too many members in ratio to the overall number on the Council (e.g. 10 out of 15 councillors).

Way forward

In exploring committee structure, consideration of the delivery of committees, their mode of operation and timings has also been taken into account. This is broken down into the following headings:

- Number of Committees
- Committee powers
- Timing and scheduling
- Number of participants and maximums

NUMBER OF COMMITTEES

Options

There are several options for reducing the number of committees which are outlined in more detail below:

Option	Description	No of Committees
A	Adopt the recommendations from the Committee Structure Sub-Committee to merge Services & Property and SPD.	5
B	Combine Finance and Staffing to form Finance & Governance Combine Events & Tourism and Planning to form Events & Planning Combine Services & Property and SPD to form Operations & Development	3
C	Combine Finance and Staffing to form Finance & Governance Combine Events & Tourism and Planning to form Events & Planning Rename Services & Property to Operations & Development Split SPD responsibilities to: • Strategy to Finance & Governance • Policy to Finance & Governance • Development to Operations	3
D	Abolish committees and hold two Full Council meetings each month	0

There are also variations on the above options to either:

- Planning functions to transfer back to Full Council away from a committee, as the number of applications discussed is low.
- Health and Safety – retain the committee or transfer responsibilities to Full Council and Operations and Development Committee.
- Audit – retain the committee or split responsibilities between Finance & Governance and Full Council.

Recommendation

The Town Clerk would recommend that Option C would be the best to properly theme the areas referred to each committee and also allow for a balance of matters to be evenly distributed across all the committees.

The Town Clerk does not recommend Option D as this would remove the quality features of committees e.g. smaller more focussed meetings to focus on detail and delivery.

Strategy, Policy and Development Committee has recommended:
- **Option B to establish three standing committees,**
- **Retain Health and Safety and Audit Committees as advisory committees, to meet quarterly.**

COMMITTEE POWERS

The Council currently operates a non-delegated powers model of committee, except for the Planning Committee. This means all decisions from the committee have to go back to Full Council for ratification.

Strengths and Weaknesses

In order to explore the current model, a strengths and weaknesses analysis has taken place.

Strengths	Weaknesses
• Committees to provide recommendations to Full Council. Full Council then debates the recommendation and makes a decision which carries the full democratic backing of the entire Council. • Planning Committee has delegated powers to comment on planning applications on behalf of the entire Council.	• Inefficiency of non-delegated committees, as most committees lack powers to make decisions, all decisions must then be referred back to Full Council, which delays progress on timely projects. • Full Council meetings are lengthy as previous discussions and debates in committees are re-explored. • High work load as staff are required to prepare the same decision for multiple committees, often duplicating work for matters to be revisited at Full Council. • Decision making delays as waiting for Full Council approval slows down project decision making and operations, which impacts service delivery and responsiveness.

Options

There are several options for committee models and powers which are outlined in more detail below:

Option	Description
1	Status Quo Continue with the current model of non-delegated powers, with recommendations to Full Council.
2	Delegated Powers

		Committees have full delegated powers over their respective areas, however some decisions will still be made by Full Council and committees to provide comment. Audit and Health and Safety to not have delegated powers.
3		Hybrid Model Committees to have full delegated powers over their respective areas, however decisions made by committees can be 'called in' whereby a number of councillors can request that the decision be reserved to Full Council. Audit and Health and Safety to not have delegated powers.
4		Some Delegation Continue with the current model of non-delegated powers with recommendations to Full Council, except for the Events & Planning Committee which should have full delegated powers over their respective areas and within their agreed budget.

Option 2 is used in the vast majority of local council's across England and Wales and allows committees to act within agreed budget and Terms of Reference, allowing officers to carry out their decisions in a timely manner.

Option 3 would be an hybrid approach to both Option 1 and 2, allowing for speedy decision making in less controversial areas but still retaining the ability for an issue to be reserved to Full Council. This would be a similar approach to the current operation of the Planning Committee which in its terms of reference allows for delegation except on areas of a controversial nature.

Recommendation

The Town Clerk has no preferred model, except to say that with the right committee structure the all three models would be achievable. If the committee structure and number of committees to stay the same then recommendation would be either Option 2 or 3.

If Option 3 was selected then work would need to take place to determine the number of councillors to request a 'call-in' and this number would need to strike the right balance.

Strategy, Policy and Development Committee has recommended:
- **Option 4 - continue with the current model of non-delegated powers with recommendations to Full Council, except for the Events & Planning Committee which should have full delegated powers over their respective areas and within their agreed budget.**

TIMING AND SCHEDULING

The Council currently operates two committees on each Wednesday in the month with Full Council being the fourth Wednesday in the month.

The Committee Structure Sub-Committee considered the timing and scheduling and agreed that Full Council should not be 'paired' up with another committee and should meet standalone.

Opinion

The Town Clerk would agree with the recommendation from the sub-committee regarding scheduling. The proposed scheduling of meetings would be:

- 1st Wednesday – Events & Planning (Events & Tourism and Planning)
- 2nd Wednesday – Operations & Development (Services & Property and SPD)
- 3rd Wednesday – Finance & Governance (Finance and Staffing)
- 4th Wednesday – Full Council

This would allow a consistent schedule which members and residents would be familiar with. Finance is always scheduled later in the month to enable payments for that month to be scrutinised and recommended for approval.

> **Strategy, Policy and Development Committee has recommended:**
> - **That meetings of committees and Full Council commence at 6:30pm in line with the above weekly schedule.**

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS AND MAXIMUMS

The Council currently allows a councillor to be a member of up to 5 committees (out of 8). It has no minimum requirement and each committee is allowed to be a maximum of 10 councillors.

The size of the committee (e.g. the number of councillors who can sit on it) is far too big as a ratio compared to full council (10 is currently 2/3rds of the Council). It would be recommended to reduce that maximum to a number more manageable e.g. 50% plus 1, or 1/3rd plus 1.

It would also be recommended to reduce the number of committees a councillor can sit on, in order to share the workload amongst the councillors and to ensure that proper time and attention can be paid to the issues facing that committee.

It may also be prudent to set a minimum, so that all councillors fully engage with work done in committees.

Strategy, Policy and Development Committee has recommended:
- **That each committee have a maximum of 7 councillors**
- **That each councillor be required to sit on a minimum of 1 committee**
- **That each councillor not exceed membership of 2 standing committees.**

CONSULTATION

Consultation on the changes has been carried out among members. Responses included:

Number of Committees

- Support for Option C (3 committees)
- Retention of Health and Safety and Audit Committees but hold these quarterly
- Moving 'Arts' from Operations to Events and Planning
- Support for Option D (no committees, two full councils per month)
- Planning to become a full council function
- Health and Safety to become a standing item for all agendas

Powers

- Retention of Option 1 (No Delegated Powers)
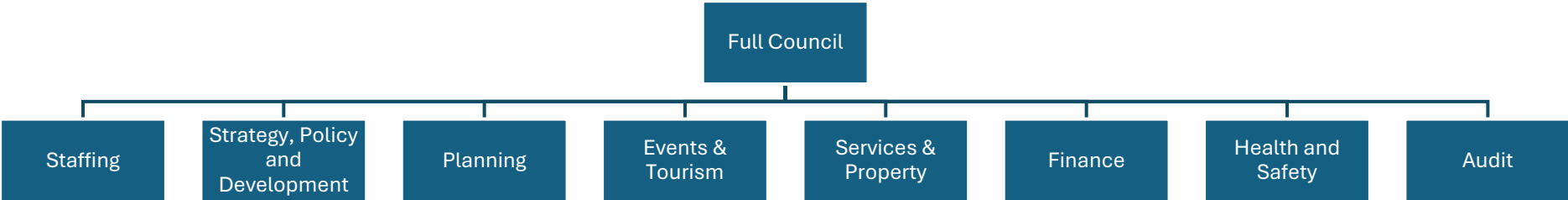- Support for Option 3 (Hybrid Model of Powers)

Number of Participants

- At least one committee and no more than two
- Membership to be limited to one third plus two

CONCLUSION

For Council to make a decision based on the above. Terms of Reference for (the preferred option as recommended by SPD) Option B are included in the pack with flexibility to amend based on the decision taken in respect of powers and functions.

Appendix 1 – Current Structure

```
                                    ┌──────────────┐
                                    │ Full Council │
                                    └──────┬───────┘
    ┌──────────┬──────────────┬───────────┼───────────┬──────────┬──────────┬──────────┐
┌───────┐┌──────────┐┌──────────┐┌──────────┐┌──────────┐┌─────────┐┌──────────┐┌───────┐
│Staffing││Strategy, ││ Planning ││ Events & ││Services &││ Finance ││Health and││ Audit │
│        ││Policy and││          ││ Tourism  ││ Property ││         ││  Safety  ││       │
│        ││Developmnt││          ││          ││          ││         ││          ││       │
└────────┘└──────────┘└──────────┘└──────────┘└──────────┘└─────────┘└──────────┘└───────┘
```

Appendix 2 – Proposed Structure

<u>Option A</u>
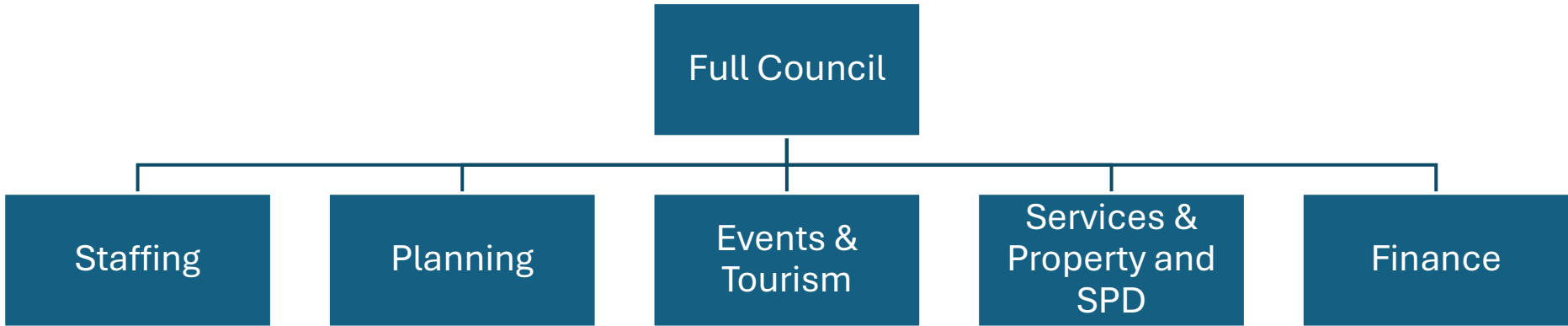
Option B and Option C

Appendix 3 – Responsibility Areas

This table sets out the overall areas of responsibility within each proposed committee from Option B. Option C would be the same, except for Strategy, Policy and Transfer of Services to sit with Finance & Governance Committee.

Full Council areas may require comment from other committees e.g. virements would require a comment from Finance & Governance.

Full Council	Finance & Governance	Events & Planning	Operations & Development
• Precept and Budget setting • Virements and variations (with a comment from Finance & Governance Committee) • Borrowing money • Statutory documents e.g. standing orders • By-laws • Prosecution or defence • Inquiries • External consultations • Outside bodies • Acquisition and disposal of land and assets • Matters reserved by law • Consideration of recommendations	• Financial Management • Staffing including capability, discipline and grievances • Information Management • Grants and Fundraising • Engagement and Communications	• Events and Festivals • Marketing and Branding • Planning and Enforcement • Economy and Regeneration (town wide) • Tourism and Tourist Information • Heritage, Arts & Culture	• Recreation and Playgrounds • Toilets • Playing Fields and Open Spaces • Street Furniture • Street Scene • Gardens and Flower Beds • Markets • Equipment / Plant and Vehicles • Buildings and Property • Development of New Projects • Strategy (but not approval of) • Policy (but not approval of) • Transfer of Services (but not approval of)