

Project Closure Report (Governance Review)

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1. Introduction

In July 2022, Council passed a Motion for officers to undertake a review of the council's governance arrangements to:

- Move to a Strong Leader and Executive system;
- Introduce an Overview & Scrutiny function;
- Strengthen opportunities for public participation.

The rationale for the change was that the delivery of the new Administration's transformation programme would require more regular, timely and efficient decision-making and that may not be well served by long periods between committee cycles.

On 30 August 2022, Labour Group received a briefing on key features and pros and cons of the available governance systems. On 27 April 2023, the Conservative Group received a similar briefing.

Before the initiation of the project, the Monitoring Officer and Head of Governance had undertaken a self-assessment against the Centre for Governance & Scrutiny (CfGS) Risk and Resilience Framework and considered lessons learnt for Barnet from governance failures at other local authorities (as detailed in Public Interest reports and Best Value Reviews). During the scoping phase of the project, it was agreed that the work examining culture and governance issues at other authorities should be progressed as a 'Governance Culture' workstream as part of this project.

In accordance with the directions of Council in July 2022, the Council commenced a Governance Review project in September 2022 to give effect to the requirement from new Labour Administration to review governance arrangement to facilitate a move from a Committee System to an Executive system of governance. It was a broad and complex review and, as such, was delivered in distinctive but interrelated workstreams, as follows:

- Decision-Making – review and update of the Constitution and other key documents; with a sub-group 'Constitution Review Working Group' to support the Monitoring Officer with amendments to the Constitution;
- Governance Staffing – restructure of the Governance Team to support Council, Committees, Cabinet, Overview & Scrutiny and Boards;
- Culture – review of culture and governance issues highlighted in other local authority Public Interest/Best Value Reviews, CfGS Risk & Resilience Framework, and delivery of Council Management Team (CMT) and Senior Management Team (SMT) workshops to inform an organisation wide action plan;
- Engagement - consultation on public participation options and communications to all stakeholders; and
- Cross-Party Working Group – maintain overview and monitor progress of all workstreams; provide guidance to officers on preferred options, ensure that regular updates are reported to the Constitution & General Purposes Committee and refer matters to Full Council for decision as required. Refer to separate Terms of Reference for this group.

The changes to a 'Cabinet/Scrutiny' governance system took effect operationally from the Annual Council meeting in May 2023 with the adoption of a new Constitution.

2. Lessons Learned

Refer to Lessons Learned Log – Appendix 1.

3. Project Objectives & Benefits Realisation

Objectives from in the PID	Benefits from the PID	Status at Project Closure	Comment
<p>Review and update the Constitution and the Schemes of Delegation and put in place arrangements for a new Overview and Scrutiny function to reflect the new governance model</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Members engaged via the Constitution Review sub-working group to inform amendments to the Constitution. ➤ A constitutional framework for the Executive, Overview and Scrutiny committees, other committees and partnership boards. ➤ Legally compliant Constitution with all essential elements in place by May 2023. ➤ Updated Chief Officers Schemes of Delegation if required. 	<p>Achieved</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Legally complaint constitution achieved. All templates and notices drafted. Procedure rules have been tested and are easy to use. Increased public participation rules have been drafted. New committees developed for governance and employment. Terms of reference of committees have all bee completed. Al council deadlines met. ➤ The Governance team need to identify how comments and conclusions from Overview & Scrutiny are fed into Cabinet. ➤ Chief Officers Schemes of Delegation updated on the website at end of July 2023 - barnet.moderngov.co.uk/ecCatDisplay.aspx?bcr=1&sch=doc&cat=13721&path=0.
<p>Review and restructure the Governance Team to support the structure and functions of the executive system</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A restructured Governance Service team with updated job descriptions to support the Executive system and overview & Scrutiny arrangements. ➤ Posts assimilated or recruited in the new Governance Service structure. 	<p>Achieved</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ All posts recruited to, and new Governance Team structure live from 1 May 2023. ➤ New team structure published on the intranet.
<p>Deliver the cultural change required to support new governance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Oversight and monitoring of the corporate implementation of the action plan that has been developed through this workstream 	<p>In progress</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Final Action Plan reported to CMT Assurance on 27 June 2023.

<p>arrangements from May 2023</p>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Action Plan to be reviewed in the context of the LGA Peer Review Action Plan. ➤ Implementation of the Action Plan will be monitored by the Head of Governance through the Annual Governance Statement during 2023/24.
<p>Deliver a planned programme of communications activity to ensure that Members, officers and the public are aware of the forthcoming changes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Continuous review and update of the Communications and Engagement Plan to deliver timely messages to Members, staff and the public regarding the Governance Review project, both leading up to 23rd May 2023 and beyond. 	<p>Achieved</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Continuously reviewed and refined Comms & Engagement Plan throughout the project and delivered timely comms to all stakeholders through various mediums. ➤ On-going Social media schedule signed off by Project for comms activities post 23 May 2023. Aim to continuously engage stakeholders and encourage participation in the council’s decision-making process.
<p>Facilitate and deliver CMT and SMT workshops to improve corporate awareness of governance issues and support actions to prevent governance failures in Barnet</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ ‘Culture’ focussed workshops with CMT and SMT provided opportunities to socialise the planned governance changes with senior officers, as well as capturing valuable insights, reflections and ideas. 	<p>Achieved</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Completed SMT workshops during October. 64 % (83/130) overall attendance at workshop sessions. Invitations extended wider than corporate SMT to include those that write reports to Committees and/or have direct contact with Members. ➤ Positive feedback from attendees regarding the purpose/content of the workshops, good level of engagement with officers across the organisation with informative discussions taking place. ➤ Roretti’s ‘Initial findings’ report produced by Sanjay Mackintosh and Nicola Hughes, highlighting what could be improved through the change of governance structure. Merged into the Governance Culture Action Plan.

<p>Develop public participation arrangements in the Constitution and to take the results of this consultation into account</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Consideration given to all public participation options available to local authorities. ➤ Incorporation of best practice for public participation and engagement in overview and scrutiny. 	<p>Achieved</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 6-week consultation took place between 14 Dec 2022 – 25 Jan 2023. Total of 53 responses received. ➤ Consultation outcomes informed the public participation options included in Part 3 (Rules of Procedure) of Constitution amends, reported at Council meeting on 8 Mar 2023 alongside EqIA. ➤ Formal ‘We Asked, You Said, We Did’ published on the Engage Barnet website following the decision from the Council meeting. ➤ Enhanced public participation options embedded into the council’s decision-making process via the new Constitution.
<p>Identify and manage synergies with the Community Participation Strategy Review work programme, particularly in relation to public participation in council decision-making process, and more generally different ways in which the public can engage with the council through the Constitution</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Consider linkages and overlap with the Community Participation Strategy Review work programme, particularly the relaunch of the Leader Listens events, review of number of resident questions at Committee meetings, etc. 	<p>Achieved</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Consultation questions shared with Leader ahead of ‘Leader Listens’ event on 15 Dec 2022 to promote the consultation. ➤ Reviewed feedback from the consultation and utilised the information to develop arrangements to broaden the opportunities for public participation at council decision-making meetings, embedded via the new Constitution.
<p>Maintain overview of the project and ensure that all workstreams are being delivered in accordance with agreed timescales to</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Robust programme management approach with oversight of interdependencies between workstreams, management of risks/issues/concerns at a programme level, with an 	<p>Achieved</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Agreed Project Initiation Document which set out the full scope, project governance arrangements and timescale to deliver the project. ➤ Developed and monitored Project Plan, identifying interdependencies,

<p>ensure that the council can implement a Cabinet/Scrutiny system in May 2023</p>	<p>understanding of the impact of decisions/activities on project timetable.</p>		<p>key pressure points and key milestones.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Executive Director of Assurance provided strategic direction and ownership of the programme. ➤ Assistant Director of Assurance provided Project Assurance role to ensure project governance, management, and execution conducive to successful delivery. ➤ Project Team focused on delivering activities to progress the project (5 workstreams), highlighting issues/risks/ concerns for escalation to Board/CMT/ Leader. ➤ Cross-Party Working Group maintained overview and monitored progress of all project workstreams.
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4. Handover to Business

Tasks Handed over as BAU	Owners	Date	Status
<p><i>Brief description of the task</i></p>	<p><i>Name and job title of individual responsible for delivering the task</i></p>	<p><i>Date by which the task will be completed</i></p>	<p><i>Progress Status</i></p>
<p>Snagging list for the Monitoring Officer to make 'housekeeping changes' to the Constitution such as terminology to ensure consistency, numbering and formatting changes. Any substantial amends to the Constitution to be reviewed by the Constitution Review Working Group to be directly reported to Council for approval</p>	<p>Jessica Farmer, Monitoring Officer</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Changes have been made. First Constitution Review Working Group has also been held. Done</p>
<p>Implementation and monitoring of the Governance & Culture Action Plan (link in into the LGA Peer review recommendations)</p>	<p>Andrew Charlwood, Head of Governance</p>	<p>31 Mar 2024</p>	<p>Assigned to Governance Officers to progress</p>

Tasks Handed over as BAU	Owners	Date	Status
Implementation of ongoing social media schedule for promoting council-decision making meetings to promote public participation options	Jonathan Schroder, Deputy Head of Communications	Ongoing	Ongoing
Liaise with Strategic Political Advisor and Leader over recess period (Aug 2023) to review Cabinet processes and Member Development needs (linking into the recommendation from the LGA Peer Review)	Andrew Charlwood, Head of Governance	Dec 2023	
Review of new governance arrangements following post implementation at 6- and 12-month interval	Andrew Charlwood, Head of Governance	30 Nov 2023 31 May 2024	
Member training on new governance arrangements, member/officer relationship, governance and scrutiny, and the Members Code of Conduct to be incorporated in the on-going Member Development Programme.	Andrew Charlwood, Head of Governance	Ongoing	Ongoing
Develop ongoing governance communications work	Andrew Charlwood, Head of Governance	Ongoing	Ongoing
Inform the Association of Democratic Services Officers (ADSO) of the Governance Review project and share information on how the change in governance arrangements and new Constitution has been delivered.	Andrew Charlwood, Head of Governance	TBC	TBC

5. Conclusion

The change in governance arrangements and revised Constitution was delivered via this project that spanned nine months. Comparatively, other councils that have undertaken a change in governance arrangements have had between 12-18 months for delivery. It has involved a collaborative effort across multi-disciplinary teams, extensive engagement with internal and external stakeholders as well as implementation of robust project governance and management to ensure successful and timely delivery of the project. It has been a very demanding project to deliver in such a short period of time and added pressure on the project team including Governance team, the Monitoring Officer, HB Public Law and other officers across Assurance and Corporate Services whilst also delivering business as usual.

The costs of delivering this project were contained within existing budgets or funded from the Transformation Fund.

The project implemented the governance changes within the agreed timescale and budget. Overall, the changes were delivered on time and in an effective way. Anecdotal feedback would suggest that within the organisation there is widespread knowledge of the changes and what they mean for day-to-day business. Communications input was integral to achieving this, especially around the various forms of engagement internally that took place from March to May 2023 (breakfast briefings, lunch and learns, presentations to senior management conference calls, etc).

Feedback on the change of governance project has been sought from across the organisation following completion of a full cycle of committees under the new structure with a new Constitution in operation, to allow meaningful insight into the experiences of staff engaging in the new decision-making process. The following questions were asked as part of the survey:

1. How easy it is to understand the new system?
2. What has worked well?
3. What could be improved?

Overall feedback has been:

- The project was successfully delivered on time and in budget with good communications and engagement across all stakeholders;
- The new arrangements have bedded in well, the Cabinet briefing has worked very well as strategic discussion rather than just a report clearance meeting and support across the Governance team has been very good. Regular comms and engagement with all stakeholders to provide project updates and obtain feedback was helpful.
- A common suggestion for improvement is to clarify the role of officers at Cabinet meetings. Post implementation, feedback has highlighted the need for greater clarity on the operational processes relating to single Member decision-making; working with Portfolio holders; overview & scrutiny and call-in; how CMT work with Cabinet Members and so on.
- Updated intranet and internet pages have been helpful in providing information and resources relating to the new governance and decision-making process, making information more widely and easily accessible.

Work examining culture and governance issues at other authorities was progressed as a 'Governance Culture' workstream as part of this project. The 'Governance Culture' workstream provided opportunities to socialise the planned governance changes with senior officers, as well as capturing valuable insights, reflections and ideas. No fundamental governance related issues were identified. However, there was room for improvement and an opportunity to embed best practice and the highest standards as the council implements its new governance arrangements from May 2023. Barnet is in a strong position with regards to its governance arrangements and culture and has an opportunity to take proactive steps to further enhance these. Councillors and officers, regardless of their role, are likely to conduct work that intersects with the council's governance framework. The emerging actions are wider than the remit of the Governance Review project and will be implemented as part of other projects and programmes, beyond this project's lifetime.

Appendix 1: Lessons Learnt Log

Lessons Learned Log		
Lesson ID	Lesson Description	Recommendation
L01	The permitted timescale for project delivery was very stringent given that such projects normally have a 12-18 months lead in time. Though the new administration were asked to reconsider the implementation timetable for the change in governance arrangements, however, officers were instructed to deliver the project by May 2023 - allowing 9 months.	Allow 12-18 months to apply such a significant change to the Governance System. Ensure resources and additional capacity added to the 'Business as Usual' Governance Services to deliver the change
L02	Have an on-going Communications Plan to promote meetings (e.g., Cabinet, Scrutiny, Area Committees, etc.)...which includes key dates of activities	Acts as reminder to Comms Team to publicize the meetings via social media
L03	Need to review the process for Deputations - 1. Revise the timings to be 3 mins to present Deputation; 7 mins to question deputation; 10 mins debate; then decide on action; and 2. To allocate timings (in a balanced way) to political groups for questions and debate so people know who is speaking. The process will be applied to committees too	Apply clear Deputations process to Cabinet and Committee meetings
L04	Suggestion for motions to be shared with CMT in advance	So that CMT can advise and brief members - Already have a process in place for sharing Motions and Amendments with CMT for awareness. Encourage Political support officers to contact the relevant lead officers to get advice on Motions before they are drafted
L05	Cabinet briefing has actually worked well as a strategic discussion rather than just a report clearance meeting. However, the timing of the briefings needs to be reviewed.	Review Cabinet Briefing timings - Done.
L06	Senior Officers stated that they lacked clarity on their role at Cabinet meetings	More work needed on making it clear to officers what their role will be at the Cabinet meetings (e.g. to attend and present reports, answer technical questions only, etc.)
L07	Ability to feed into the revision of templates was good	Important to give SLT opportunity to comment on templates going forward

Lessons Learned Log		
Lesson ID	Lesson Description	Recommendation
L08	Ensure regular comms, but not repetitive	Project tried to get the balance right and generally had good engagement, but it is a technical change and quite difficult to get the comms balance right
L09	Feedback from through the survey found that some officers found it helpful for a governance officer to speak directly with specific teams and go through the timeline in detail rather than a generic presentations	Project has been to all directorate senior management teams to answer questions. Can offer to attend SLT team meetings if requested.
L10	Responsiveness to questions was/is often delayed and therefore not helpful	It is important to respond in a timely way to questions throughout the project
L11	Portfolio holders need to be more involved in the preparation of reports as they are presenting, there's more ownership of the reports	Further work is required at Chief Officer level on how Cabinet Members and Senior Officers work together at the early stages of report writing.
L12	Briefings provided by Governance Team to Senior Leadership Teams were helpful and informative, enabled individual teams to ask questions relevant to their services, and also for the Governance Team to get feedback on the types of queries/concerns services may have in relation to the proposed changes.	The Governance Team will continue to promote these kinds of activities internally
L13	Public consultation on participation options	Reconsider the need/ timing/ resource required vs the number of respondents Consider other forms of engagement rather than former consultation i.e. discussion via focus group, workshop with particular groups (i.e. Mencap) rather than a 'flat' questionnaire
L14	Focused Constitution Review Working sub-group to support the Monitoring Officer with amends to the Constitution	Beneficial to have a politically balanced sub-group focused on reviewing proposed amends to the Constitution, but review whether two groups were required (e.g. one to review overall project progress, and another to review Constitution amendments)
L15	Constitution amends presented to Council in tranches to ensure that these are 'banked' reducing the risk of substantive change requests at Full Council	This ensured that amends were 'banked' throughout the project rather than having the uncertainty and risk that proposed amends would be rejected/queried at Full Council. Also ensure buy-in from Members throughout the process.
L16	Timing of the Leaders Cabinet Briefing	Revise timeline for Cabinet Briefings to ensure that reports have been through clearance first ahead of the briefings

Lessons Learned Log		
Lesson ID	Lesson Description	Recommendation
L17	Weekly Officer meetings on Friday's to review and revise the Constitution in detail was very helpful. It was beneficial to keep the group small and to invite others as needed i.e. Procurement, Finance, etc.	Similar arrangement would be instituted for another governance review of this nature
L18	Did not have a Service Manager in post to bounce off the Constitution amends at the formative stage.	To have the Service Manager attend the weekly Constitution Review meetings and to bring the Governance Team along in the process of drafting the Constitution to enable their input and to understand the proposed changes.
L19	Level of Member engagement varied within the Constitution Review Working Group, not all Members were engaged in reviewing the detailed changes and the level of challenge to proposed changes was not as expected.	Useful to have the Constitution Review Working Group to focus on the review of detailed proposed changes.
L20	The Cross-Party Working Group did not proactively feedback to their respective political groups and were not very engaged in the meetings.	To not have two separate Working Groups.
L21	The task of harmonising the new Constitution and the Schemes of Delegation is complex and was made further difficult with the transition of Re services in-house, which required more substantial changes to the Schemes of Delegation.	To allocate a lead officer from the Governance Team to undertake this complex and technical work
L22	Did not recruit externally (i.e. consultant) to deliver the project and it was beneficial to have internal experienced Officers involved in the project and delivering the changes that they will also be affected by.	Senior and experienced staff who have been with the organisation for a long period of time to lead/be involved in project delivery
L23	It was challenging to restructure the Governance team at the same time as project delivery. The team was unable to recruit to vacancies due to the restructure. This also negatively impacted on the well-being of team members (additional work pressure, anxiety about the restructure, impact on team and individual morale).	Consider delaying the restructure of the Governance Team to after the implementation of the new governance system and use secondments to backfill the posts temporarily.

Lessons Learned Log		
Lesson ID	Lesson Description	Recommendation
L24	HR guidance during the restructure was not consistent i.e. about whose role was 'at risk'	Helpful to have more support for Managers to deliver restructures, not just based on HR advise but actual reference to corporate policy.
L25	There were too many project meetings which led to repetition and time taken away to complete actions. Also, on reflection need to review who is involved in the meetings.	Consider more agile methods of project management, with weekly scrum meetings for progress updates. Reduce repetitive meetings and review who is involved in the meetings.
L26	Culture workstream was time consuming at the start of the project and felt disjointed from the rest of the project.	Focus on the real cultural change effected by the implementation of new governance arrangements – single Member decision-making; working with Portfolio holders; overview & scrutiny and call-in; how CMT work with Cabinet Members; etc – impact of operations changes rather than wider organisational cultural change.
L27	Helpful to engage with Senior Leadership Team through workshops.	Should be done through the engagement workstream
L28	Beneficial to have a Corporate Comms person on the project with their skill to draft content for, and understand how to, reach external audiences.	Require a dedicated corporate comms person on the project and a dedicated comms resource from the Service (which for this project was not available)
L29	Effective project management provided structure, organisation and co-ordination to the project	Requires a robust project management approach and dedicated resource for project management
L30	Some of the communications deliverables were only identified quite late in the process, as were training materials and target audience identification. This meant that around March/April, a lot of work had to be done to ensure that training opportunities were put in place.	Would be good to have an understanding of the specifics of training needs well in advance of the actual schedule going out
L31	From a service perspective, the communications liaison contact changed during the review process, which led to potential inconsistency.	Going forward, and to ensure that meetings and key dates are scheduled into the communications forward plan, it would be good to put in place monthly catch-ups between the corporate communications team and the service communications liaison to ensure that the good work done during the review is not lost as we move forward

Lessons Learned Log		
Lesson ID	Lesson Description	Recommendation
L32	A dedicated communications budget was not set, or was not clearly clarified, with the corporate communications team representative, which led to some delays in producing certain products (ie. local democracy video).	It would have been useful to have been able to spend more money on communications, marketing and promotion throughout the programme (ie. on paid social media when we engaged residents on the changes, on developing assets to promote the various key milestones)
L33	Communications input was integral to achieving this, especially around the various forms of engagement internally that took place from March to May 2023 (breakfast briefings, lunch and learns, presentations to senior management conference calls etc.)	Develop a clear comms plan early on and identify key stakeholders, key touch points in the project and consider innovative ways to communicate via multiple mediums. Ensure messaging is regular and succinct - sometimes can be too much information.