

Policy and Resources Committee	
Meeting Date	26 March 2025
Report Title	Reduction in number of Service Committees and reduction in frequency of Area Committees
EMT Lead	Larissa Reed – Chief Executive
Head of Service	Larissa Reed – Chief Executive
Lead Officer	Larissa Reed – Chief Executive
Classification	Open
Recommendations	<p>That Council:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reduces the number of Committees of Swale Borough Council from Policy and Resources and four Service Committees to Policy and Resources and two Service Committees from the Municipal year 2025/26 2. To agree the configuration of the Committees from the options at Appendix 1 3. To reduce the frequency of Area Committee meetings from 4 per annum to 3 per annum (losing the December Committee) from the Municipal Year 25/26 4. To remove the Special Responsibility Allowance for the Chairs of Area Committees from the Municipal Year 25/26. 5. To request the Chief Executive undertakes a full review of the effectiveness of Area Committees, working with Area Committees, Parish Councils and the public and report back to Policy and Resources Committee in the Municipal Year 2025/2026

1.0 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to set out the proposal made by Constitutional Working Group to change the number of Service Committees and reduce the frequency of Area Committees, whilst a review of the effectiveness of Area Committees is undertaken.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Swale Borough Council moved from the Cabinet System to the Committee System in May 2022. A cross-party working group was set up to agree the numbers and functions of the committees. This group (Constitutional Working Group) considered a number of options in relation to the number of committees

and the size of committees and proposed the current Policy and Resources and four Service Committee model to Full Council, which was accepted.

- 2.2 In March 2023, the Council undertook a Local Government Association Peer Challenge which resulted in a recommendation that the council should consider reducing the number of committees or the frequency of the committees (or both)
- 2.3 In May 2024, Members voted to reduce the frequency of the Service Committees but chose to keep the numbers of Committees the same.
- 2.4 There has been concern raised that the cost of Policy and Resources and four Service Committees does not provide value for money for the tax payer due to the number of decisions made at each meeting (a breakdown of information pertaining to each committee can be found at appendix 2)
- 2.5 There has also been concerns raised that the number of Service Committees results in matters overlapping between committees which negatively impacts joined up decision making.
- 2.6 A paper was considered by the Constitutional Working Group who proposed that the numbers of Committees be reduced to Policy and Resources and two Service Committees (Place and Communities). Options for the functions for the committees can be found in appendix 1.
- 2.7 Area Committees have been operational in Swale Borough Council since 2020. There are currently four area committees. (Western, Eastern, Sittingbourne and Sheppey). These area Committees meet four times per year. They are Committees of the Council and have decision making powers. Initially the Area Committees had a budget which could be allocated. This ceased in 2023.
- 2.8 The following concerns have been raised in relation to Area Committees
 - They are not all well attended by Parish Councillors or the public
 - The December meetings are not well attended by Borough Councillors
 - There is a repetitive nature to the agendas, with often matters being discussed which have no practical solution.
 - The cost of hiring halls for meetings with low attendance is not cost effective
 - Officers are struggling to resource the meetings or find items for the agendas
- 2.9 Information pertaining to the Committees can be found at Appendix 2.
- 2.10 The Constitution Working Group have proposed the following changes to the Area Committee Structure
 - To reduce the frequency of Area Committee meetings from 4 per annum to 3 per annum (losing the December Committee).

- To remove the Special Responsibility Allowance for the Chairs of Area Committees.
- To request the Chief Executive undertakes a full review of the effectiveness of Area Committees, working with Area Committees, Parish Councils and the public and report back to Policy and Resources Committee in the Municipal Year 2025/2026

3.0 Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

3.1 Option 1

To take a two stage approach to reduce the service committees from Policy and Resources committee and 4 service committees to Policy and Resource and 2 service committees by reducing the service committees by one in the municipal year 25/26 and by a further reduction of one in the municipal year 26/27. This is not recommended as it takes time for a service committee to work well and there could be issues with the committee not achieving its potential due to the view that the change is temporary.

3.2 Option 2

To reduce the Service Committees from Policy and Resources and 4 Committees to Policy and Resources and three Committees. This change would result in an amalgamation of Health and Housing and Communities Committees. This is not recommended for two reasons. Firstly, when this was discussed at Constitutional Working Group, it was not the decision of the working group to recommend this. The more technical reason this is not recommended is that there is still an overlap in items coming to different committees.

3.3 Option 3

Not to reduce the frequency of Area Committees. This is not recommended due to the fact that the Constitution Working Group did not support this as an option.

3.4 Option 4

Not to remove Special Responsibility Allowances from the Chairs of the Area Committees. This is not proposed for two reasons. Firstly it was not supported by the Constitutional Working Group and secondly there is not evidence to support the level of responsibility of the chairs of Area Committees which would make a clear case for the payment.

4.0 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

- 4.1 The items were first raised at Council on 21 February 2025 and were subsequently discussed at Constitutional Working Group on 18 March 2025

5.0 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	The Corporate Plan can be delivered with the reduced number of Committees.
Financial, Resource and Property	The Special Responsibility Allowances for Chairs of Service Committees are £5,938 per annum and for Area Committees is £2,036. A reduction of 2 Service Committees and 4 Area Committees will result in a saving of £20,020 PA There will be an additional saving from not hiring halls for the December meeting of Area Committee
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	There is no legal requirement to have Area Committees or a set number of Service Committees
Crime and Disorder	There are no direct crime and disorder implications of this proposal
Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	There are no direct Environmental Emergency implications of this proposal
Health and Wellbeing	Although there is not direct Health and Wellbeing impact of this decision, fewer evening meetings will be of benefit to staff of the council.
Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults	There are no direct safeguarding implications of this proposal
Risk Management and Health and Safety	There are no direct health and safety implications of this proposal
Equality and Diversity	There are no direct Equality and Diversity implications of this proposal
Privacy and Data Protection	There are no direct privacy or data protection implications of this proposal

6.0 Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Options for Policy and Resource and two Service Committees
- Appendix 2 – Breakdown of Committee information

7.0 Background Papers

Report to Full Council on the Committee System [Report on Governance Model Change October 2021](#)

Revised Constitution agreed 27 April 2022 -[Constitution 27 April 2022](#)