

Full Council	
Meeting Date	2 April 2025
Report Title	Reduction in number of Service 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. 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. 2. Achieve this by the amalgamation of Health and Housing Committee and Community and Leisure Committee from Municipal year 2025/2026. 3. Agree that 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 changes to the Committee System proposed by Policy and Resources Committee on 26 March 2025.

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 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 1)
- 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 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.
- 2.7 The following concerns have been raised in relation to Area Committees:
- They are not all well attended by Parish Councillors or the public
 - They are not all well attended by Borough Councillors, particularly the December meetings
 - 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
- 2.8 Information pertaining to the Committees can be found at Appendix 1.

3.0 Proposals

- 3.1 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). This proposal was amended at Policy and Resources Committee on 26 March 2025 as set out in Recommendation 1 of this report.
- 3.2 The Constitution Working group also 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

3.3 These recommendations were amended at Policy and Resources Committee resulting in the removal of the recommendations to reduce the frequency of Area Committees and the removal of the recommendation to remove the Special Responsibility Allowance for the chairs of Area Committees. Members proposed that a review of Area Committees be undertaken by the Chief Executive as set out in Recommendation 3.

4.0 Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

4.1 There are no alternative options as these are recommendations made by Policy and Resources Committee

5.0 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

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

6.0 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
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	There are no direct safeguarding implications of this proposal

People and Vulnerable Adults	
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

7.0 Appendices

Appendix 1 – Breakdown of Committee information

8.0 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](#)