North Lanarkshire Council
Report

Policy and Strategy Committee

Does this report require to be approved? ☒ Yes ☐ No

Ref REB **Date** 19/03/26

Review of the Council's Democratic, Committee, and Decision Making Governance Procedures – Phase 1 Update and Programme Framework

From Rachel Blair, Chief Officer (Legal and Democratic)

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Executive Summary

This report provides Policy and Strategy Committee with a comprehensive update on delivery of Phase 1 (Foundations – Governance Systems and Access) of the Review of the Council's Democratic, Committee and Decision-Making Governance Procedures.

The review was approved on 25 September 2025 and is structured as a four-phase programme running to December 2026. It is designed to consolidate recent governance modernisation, strengthen digital capability, enhance transparency and accountability, and establish a resilient, inclusive and future-focused democratic framework.

Phase 1 has delivered substantial foundational progress, including:

(1) Establishment of a documented governance baseline and evidence of incremental improvements since 2018;

(2) Procurement and phased implementation of an integrated electronic voting system;

(3) Introduction of a mobile hybrid/webcasting system to enhance accessibility and community-based democratic engagement; and

(4) Commencement of the Committee Management System (CMIS) successor options appraisal.

The programme remains on schedule. A further report will be presented setting out the CMIS appraisal and confirming completion of Phase 1.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Policy and Strategy Committee:

(1) Acknowledge the progress made in delivering Phase 1 of the governance review;
(2) Acknowledge the establishment of a documented governance baseline;
(3) Acknowledge the implementation of electronic voting and enhanced hybrid/webcasting arrangements;

(4) Acknowledge that a further report will be presented to regarding the Committee Management System options appraisal; and
(5) Acknowledge the proposed scope and delivery approach for Phases two to four of the programme.

The Plan for North Lanarkshire

Priority	All priorities
Ambition statement	All ambition statements
Programme of Work	Statutory / corporate / service requirement

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1. Background

1.1 This report provides Policy and Strategy Committee with a comprehensive update on delivery of Phase 1 (Foundations – Governance Systems and Access) of the Review of the Council's Democratic, Committee and Decision-Making Governance Procedures. The review was approved on 25 September 2025 and is structured as a four-phase programme running to December 2026. It is designed to consolidate recent governance modernisation, strengthen digital capability, enhance transparency and accountability, and establish a resilient, inclusive and future-focused democratic framework.

1.2 Phase 1 has delivered substantial foundational progress, including:

- Establishment of a documented governance baseline and evidence of incremental improvements since 2018;
- Procurement and phased implementation of an integrated electronic voting system;
- Introduction of a mobile hybrid/webcasting system to enhance accessibility and community-based democratic engagement; and
- Commencement of the Committee Management System (CMS) successor options appraisal.

1.3 The programme remains on schedule. A further report will be presented setting out the CMIS appraisal and confirming completion of Phase 1.

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2. Report

2.1 In recent years the Council has modernised its governance arrangements in response to evolving working practices, digital advancements and increasing public expectations for transparency, accountability and accessibility. This review consolidates those improvements and establishes a forward-looking framework that is:

- Legally robust and procedurally fair;
- Digitally capable and resilient;
- Accessible to members, officers and the public;
- Aligned with recognised best practice across local government; and
- Proportionate and strategically aligned with The Plan for North Lanarkshire.

2.2 The overarching aim is to ensure that the Council's democratic and decision-making arrangements remain fit for purpose, support high-quality democratic processes, and

position the Council as a leader in modern, citizen-centred governance. The review aligns with:

- Best Value expectations under the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003;
- CIPFA/SOLACE Delivering Good Governance principles;
- The National Performance Framework; and
- All Council priorities and ambition statements.

2.3 The review seeks to deliver:

- Clear and complementary roles and responsibilities between Members and officers;
- Fair, consistent and transparent decision-making procedures;
- Accessible, plain-language governance documentation;
- Modernised use of technology to support openness and efficiency;
- Proportionate governance structures aligned with long-term organisational priorities.

2.4 Phase 1 activity has been structured to directly support these objectives with the review structured across four phases:

Phase	**Focus Area**	**Completion Target**
Phase 1	Foundations – Governance systems baseline and access improvements	April 2026
Phase 2	Engagement and Accessibility – documentation clarity and public usability	June 2026
Phase 3	Decision-Making Principles – standards, transparency and competency guidance	October 2026
Phase 4	Full Modernisation – Standing Orders and Scheme of Administration/Delegation	December 2026

2.5 This phased approach ensures structured progression from foundational systems to procedural reform and consolidation.

2.6 The review encompasses:

2.6.1 Governance Documentation and Structures
- Modernisation of Standing Orders;
- Review of Scheme of Administration and Delegation; and
- Consolidation of governance documentation into a coherent framework.

2.6.2 Committee Minutes and Reporting
- Enhancement of clarity and accessibility;
- Development of plain-language approaches; and
- Consideration of summary formats.

2.6.3 Scrutiny and Public Participation
- Assessment of the Committee Questions Log; and
- Full review of the Petitions Process, including thresholds, guidance, support and feedback mechanisms.

2.6.4 Decision-Making Principles
- Review of motions and amendments processes; and

- Consistency, fairness and proportionality in procedural application.

2.6.5 Guidance and Competency Frameworks

- Updated guidance for Members and officers on competency of motions and amendments; and
- Clear approaches to non-competent matters.

2.6.6 Technology and Committee Management

- Review and modernisation of the Committee Management System;
- Digital accessibility improvements; and
- Integration with voting and webcasting systems.

Phase 1 Progress Update

2.7 Phase 1 has established a documented governance baseline, including a chronology of governance updates and improvements since 2018 (Appendix A) and a summary of how governance practices have evolved, particularly in digital accessibility and publication standards (Appendix B). These documents provide a structured evidence base demonstrating incremental improvement and supporting external scrutiny.

2.8 An integrated electronic voting system has been procured and piloted. This system enables in-chamber and remote voting, automated recording and display of voting outcomes and creation of auditable digital records. Initial implementation indicates improved clarity, efficiency and transparency. Training and structured support are being provided to Members to ensure confident adoption prior to full roll-out.

2.9 A mobile hybrid/webcasting system has been introduced to enhance technical resilience, improve accessibility for remote participation, enable meetings to be held in community venues with full democratic functionality and strengthen public transparency through improved webcast quality. Appropriate safeguards remain in place for exempt business and data protection compliance.

2.10 An options appraisal for a CMS successor is underway, assessing usability for members and officers, public accessibility, integration capability, records management functionality and long-term sustainability and value for money. A future report will be presented confirming the outcome of the options appraisal.

2.11 Phase 2 will focus on engagement and documentation accessibility, including minutes reform and petitions process review. Phase 3 will establish clearer decision-making standards and updated competency guidance. Phase 4 will deliver a comprehensive modernisation of Standing Orders and the Scheme of Administration and Delegation, consolidating reforms into a single coherent framework.

2.12 Phase 2 (April–June 2026) will focus on strengthening public-facing governance and improving accessibility and engagement. Key areas will include:

- Review of committee minutes to enhance clarity and readability, including consideration of plain-language summaries;
- Assessment of the Committee Questions Log to ensure it strengthens scrutiny and accountability;

- Review of the Petitions Process, including thresholds, clarity of guidance and feedback mechanisms; and

- Consideration of improvements to public-facing publication standards and digital navigation.

2.13 Member engagement sessions and cross-group discussions will be embedded throughout these phases. Member engagement remains central to the governance review. Member engagement remains central to the governance review. The approach that will be applied during Phase 2 includes facilitated workshops, briefings to gather structured feedback, circulation of draft proposals for comment before formal reporting and transparent capture and documentation of member feedback.

Conclusion

2.14 Phase 1 of the governance review has delivered substantial foundational improvements and has established a clear evidence base of governance development since 2018. The procurement and pilot implementation of electronic voting and enhanced hybrid/webcasting capability represent significant modernisation milestones.

2.15 The review remains on schedule, with Phase 1 completion aligned to April 2026 and a further update to follow. The transition to Phase 2 will shift focus toward public accessibility, engagement and usability, ensuring that governance arrangements remain transparent, proportionate and aligned with best practice across Scottish local government.

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3. Measures of success

3.1 Phase 1 will be considered successful where:

- A clear documented governance baseline is established;
- Electronic voting operates securely and reliably across committees;
- Hybrid/webcasting arrangements demonstrate improved resilience and accessibility;
- The CMIS/MARS options appraisal provides a clear strategic direction; and
- Elected members confirm that governance systems are clearer, more accessible and more transparent than prior to commencement of the review.

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4. Supporting documentation

Appendix A – Chronology of Governance Improvements Since 2018
Appendix B – Evolution of Governance Practice and Digital Accessibility

Rachel Blair
Chief Officer (Legal and Democratic)

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5. Impacts

5.1	**Public Sector Equality Duty and Fairer Scotland Duty** Does the report contain information that has an impact as a result of the Public Sector Equality Duty and/or Fairer Scotland Duty? Yes ☐ No ☒ If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact? If Yes, has an assessment been carried out and published on the council's website? https://www.northlanarkshire.gov.uk/your-community/equalities/equality-and-fairer-scotland-duty-impact-assessments Yes ☐ No ☐
5.2	**Financial impact** Does the report contain any financial impacts? Yes ☐ No ☒ If Yes, have all relevant financial impacts been discussed and agreed with Finance? Yes ☐ No ☐ If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact?
5.3	**HR policy impact** Does the report contain any HR policy or procedure impacts? Yes ☐ No ☒ If Yes, have all relevant HR impacts been discussed and agreed with People Resources? Yes ☐ No ☐ If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact?
5.4	**Legal impact** Does the report contain any legal impacts (such as general legal matters, statutory considerations (including employment law considerations), or new legislation)? Yes ☒ No ☐ If Yes, have all relevant legal impacts been discussed and agreed with Legal and Democratic? Yes ☒ No ☐ If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact? The review supports compliance with statutory governance obligations, including Best Value duties and administrative law principles. Modernisation of Standing Orders and delegation schemes will ensure decisions remain within statutory competence and reduce exposure to procedural challenge.
5.5	**Data protection impact** Does the report / project / practice contain or involve the processing of personal data? Yes ☐ No ☒ If Yes, is the processing of this personal data likely to result in a high risk to the data subject? Yes ☐ No ☐ If Yes, has a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) been carried out and e-mailed to dataprotection@northlan.gov.uk Yes ☐ No ☐
5.6	**Technology / Digital impact**

Does the report contain information that has an impact on either technology, digital transformation, service redesign / business change processes, data management, or connectivity / broadband / Wi-Fi?

Yes ☐ No ☒

If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact?

Where the impact identifies a requirement for significant technology change, has an assessment been carried out (or is scheduled to be carried out) by the Enterprise Architecture Governance Group (EAGG)?

Yes ☐ No ☐

5.7 Environmental / Carbon impact

Does the report / project / practice contain information that has an impact on any environmental or carbon matters?

Yes ☐ No ☒

If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact?

5.8 Communications impact

Does the report contain any information that has an impact on the council's communications activities?

Yes ☒ No ☐

If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact?

The review carries a positive communications impact by demonstrating proactive governance strengthening. Implementation of electronic voting and improved webcasting enhances public visibility of decision-making. Future phases will require structured communication to Members, stakeholders and the public regarding documentation changes and accessibility improvements.

5.9 Risk impact

Is there a risk impact?

Yes ☒ No ☐

If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the key risks and potential impacts, highlighting where the risk(s) are assessed and recorded (e.g. Corporate or Service or Project Risk Registers), and how they are managed?

Key risks include:

- Reputational risk if governance arrangements are perceived as outdated;
- Technological obsolescence risk without system modernisation;
- Procedural inconsistency risk absent consolidated documentation;
- Engagement risk if reforms are not clearly communicated.

These risks are managed through structured programme governance and the Project Risk Register.

5.10 Armed Forces Covenant Duty

Does the report require to take due regard of the Armed Forces Covenant Duty (i.e. does it relate to healthcare, housing, or education services for in-Service or ex-Service personnel, or their families, or widow(er)s)?

Yes ☐ No ☒

If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the provision which has been made to ensure there has been appropriate consideration of the particular needs of the Armed Forces community to make sure that they do not face disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public services.

5.11 Children's rights and wellbeing impact

Does the report contain any information regarding any council activity, service delivery, policy, or plan that has an impact on children and young people up to the age of 18, or on a specific group of these?

Yes ☐ No ☒

If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact and the provision that has been made to ensure there has been appropriate consideration of the relevant Articles from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

If Yes, has a Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment (CRWIA) been carried out?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Appendix A
Review of the Council's Democratic, Committee and Decision-Making Governance Procedures
Chronology of Incremental Updates and Evidence of Existing Improvements Since 2018

4 October 2018 – Comprehensive Review of Standing Orders

Following the local government elections in May 2017, which resulted in over 30 newly elected members and the most significant political change since reorganisation in 1995, a structured review of Standing Orders was undertaken. The review was conducted collaboratively by the Business Managers of the three political groups and was designed to modernise procedures, improve clarity, and support members in balancing civic duties with professional and personal commitments.

Key enhancements included:

- Motions and Amendments
  - Clarification of procedural requirements, including submission deadlines, timescales, competency and affordability criteria.
  - Formal inclusion within Standing Orders of the process for publication of Notices of Motion and Amendments.
  - Requirement to provide written reasons where a Notice of Motion or Amendment was deemed not competent.
  - Introduction of a formal definition of a "C Paragraph".
  - Provision allowing the mover of an Amendment to sum up, with the mover of the substantive Motion retaining the right of final summation.
  - Discretion for the Chair to permit members to speak more than once during debate.
  - Explicit permission for members to read from prepared written speeches.
  - Requirement for members raising a Point of Order to provide a clear explanation of the alleged breach of Standing Orders.

- Questions
  - Agreement that questions would be placed on the agenda in the order received, removing the previous ballot system and strengthening procedural fairness.

- Notice of Agenda Papers
  - Extension of the publication period for committee agendas and reports to six clear days prior to meetings, enhancing transparency and preparation time.

- Substitute Membership
  - Political groups permitted to appoint up to three named substitute members on non–quasi-judicial committees, providing flexibility and improving attendance management.

3 October 2019 – Procedural Streamlining

Further refinements were agreed to enhance operational efficiency and clarity:

- Streamlining of the process for issuing and approving the Volume of Minutes.
- Formal agreement of the order of business for Ordinary Council meetings.
- Clarification of the process and timescales for publishing Motions and Amendments.
- Introduction of a defined process for resubmitting Motions and Amendments previously ruled not competent.

- Clarification regarding the compositing of Motions and Amendments prior to and during meetings.
- Update to the procedure for issuing Committee Agenda Packs to provide greater clarity and consistency.

6 October 2022 – Timetable Rationalisation

Council approved a revised timetable of meetings covering the period to May 2027. The timetable was refined to better align with members' availability and to improve scheduling coherence across the civic calendar.

15 December 2022 – Strengthening Competency and Affordability Requirements

Standing Order 31 was amended to require that any Motion, Amendment or Composite Motion must:

- Meet the criteria of competency, relevancy, and affordability; and
- Provide full details of associated financial implications and funding sources.

This change reinforced budgetary discipline and strengthened governance by ensuring financial transparency and alignment with the Council's fixed annual budget framework.

21 December 2023 – Governance and Scrutiny Enhancements

To maintain alignment with *CIPFA's Audit Committees: Practical Guidance for Local Authorities (2018)* and to support the Council's Best Value obligations:

- Substitute members were removed from the Audit and Scrutiny Panel to ensure consistency, appropriate training, and institutional knowledge.
- All Planning, quasi-judicial and regulatory committees and sub-committees were required to meet in person.
- The previous requirement to nominate three substitutes per committee was removed, providing increased flexibility for political groups while maintaining governance standards.

19 December 2024 – Procedural Modernisation and Clarity

A further package of amendments was approved to enhance interpretability and transparency:

- Revision of several Standing Orders to improve clarity and usability.
- Authority granted to the Chair to adjourn meetings for up to 30 minutes.
- Streamlining of the amendment submission process.
- Introduction of a deadline requiring Amendments to be submitted no later than 24 hours prior to committee meetings.
- Extension of substitute member arrangements to all Committees and Working Groups, except the Audit and Scrutiny Panel and the Licensing Board.
- Agreement that Planning Committee meetings be held in hybrid format.

Collectively, these measures strengthened procedural transparency, improved member participation, and enhanced operational flexibility.

Appendix B
Review of the Council's Democratic, Committee and Decision-Making Governance Procedures
Evolution of Council Practices in Terms of Digital Accessibility and Publication Standards

4 October 2018 – Audio-Visual Recording

Council agreed that audio-visual recording of meetings would be conducted in accordance with the Council's Media Policy, formalising arrangements for public access and transparency.

3 October 2019 – Digital Accessibility Improvements

To enhance accessibility and reduce reliance on paper-based systems:

- The Volume of Minutes was issued electronically only.
- The process for approving committee minutes was simplified.
- Introduction of electronic meeting requests and electronic links to agenda packs, enabling immediate access upon publication.
- Hard copy agenda packs remained available upon request, ensuring inclusivity.

13 August 2020 – Remote Meeting Protocol

In response to operational challenges and to strengthen resilience:

- Remote meetings were introduced.
- A formal Protocol for Remote Council and Committee Meetings was implemented to facilitate structured hybrid operation.
- Comprehensive member training was delivered on the Webex platform.
- The protocol set out detailed procedures covering:
    - Issuing of agenda packs;
    - Submission of Amendments;
    - Declaration of interests;
    - Use of chat functions;
    - Points of order; and
    - Electronic voting processes.

These measures ensured governance integrity while maintaining decision-making continuity.

7 October 2021 – Introduction of Hybrid Meetings

Council formally introduced the capacity to host hybrid meetings, enhancing flexibility and broadening participation opportunities for elected members.

6 October 2022 – Commitment to Hybrid Working

Council approved a Notice of Motion recognising that hybrid working:

- Enhances participation, capacity and empowerment;
- Reduces barriers faced by individuals from marginalised backgrounds;
- Reflects contemporary workplace practices; and
- Promotes inclusion and equality.

Standing Orders and the Remote Meetings Protocol were amended to embed a commitment to hybrid arrangements for appropriate meetings.

1 July 2023 – Committee Management Information System

Implementation of a new Committee Management Information System delivered enhanced functionality, including:

- Publication of member attendance records;
- Logging of declarations of interest;
- Publication of committee membership and appointments to outside bodies;
- Support for the organisation of Councillor surgeries.

These improvements materially strengthened transparency and public access to governance information.

22 October 2023 – Access to Exempt Business

Council agreed that exempt items of business be recorded and made available to elected members, individually or by political group, upon request, thereby strengthening oversight and informed participation.

21 December 2023 – Minute Recording and Accessibility Enhancements

- Committee minutes were amended to formally record questions asked where follow-up actions were committed.
- Agenda packs ceased to be routinely posted to members' home addresses, subject to Equality Act 2010 considerations assessed on a case-by-case basis.

These changes reinforced accessibility while supporting environmental and efficiency objectives.

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19 December 2024 – Electronic Voting and Question Logging

- Introduction of electronic voting for members present in the chamber to improve meeting efficiency and transparency.
- Refinement of the process for recording member questions.
- Distribution of responses to all committee members and circulation of a consolidated question-and-response log at the end of each meeting cycle.

18 December 2025 – Award of Electronic Voting and Hybrid Meeting System Contract

Council received confirmation that the contract for an integrated electronic voting and mobile hybrid meeting system had been awarded.

The project forms a central component of the Council's democratic modernisation programme and aligns with:

- The Review of Democratic, Committee and Decision-Making Governance Procedures; and
- The Digital North Lanarkshire Programme of Work.

System capabilities include:

- Secure voting via:
    - In-chamber microphone consoles; and
    - Council-issued laptops or mobile devices through a Microsoft Teams plug-in.
- Automatic recording, tallying and display of voting outcomes.
- Mobile capability allowing meetings to be held in community venues with full webcast and voting functionality.

Key benefits:

- Webcasting capability across Committee Rooms and designated community locations;
- Facilitation of hybrid Community Board meetings;
- Enhanced community participation and empowerment;
- Strengthened resilience and business continuity through portable systems; and
- Integrated microphone, video and hybrid control systems reducing technical risk.