

The Bristol Civic Leadership Project

# THE BRISTOL REFERENDUM 2022

## Thinking through the options

David Sweeting, Robin Hambleton and Thom Oliver

March 2022





A publication from The Bristol Civic Leadership Project

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In May 2022 there will be a referendum on Bristol City Council's governance arrangements. The citizens of Bristol will be asked to decide if they wish to retain the mayoral system of decision-making or replace it with a committee system of decision-making.

## **Why is the referendum important?**

Bristol City Council is a large, democratically elected local authority. It is responsible for a range of important public services including education, social care, public health, planning, waste, housing, and transport. In addition, the city council works in partnership with many other stakeholders in the public, private, voluntary and community sectors to improve the quality of life of everyone living in the city. The way Bristol's governance is organised has a major impact not just on whether the city council is able to be effective in meeting the many complex challenges facing the city, but also on the democratic vitality and inclusiveness of decision-making in the city. The referendum is important because it provides the opportunity for all the citizens of Bristol to have a direct say in how they wish to govern themselves.

## **Purpose of this report**

The purpose of this report, prepared by researchers working on the Bristol Civic Leadership Project ([www.bristolcivicleadership.net](http://www.bristolcivicleadership.net)), is to provide a dispassionate analysis of the background to the referendum, and to set out the strengths and weaknesses of the two different governance models that voters will be asked to judge.

The specific aims of this report are to:

- Present the context for the choice to be made in the referendum
- Explain the two models that will be presented to the electorate
- Review the main arguments for and against these two models
- Consider how each model has worked, or could work, in Bristol
- Offer proposals on the design of the system of decision-making at Bristol City Council

## **Background and national context**

We chart Bristol's governance arrangements and developments at the national level since 1995. During this period various Acts of Parliament have required and/or enabled individual local authorities to make changes to their governance arrangements. In Bristol, a committee system operated from 1995-2000; a leader and cabinet system operated from 2000-2012; and a mayoral system has operated from 2012 to the present. As well as outlining the Bristol governance context, we present data from

other local authorities in England that have held referendums on mayoral governance and on the committee system. We note that the national context for local government in England has involved centralisation of power in Whitehall, coupled with severe reductions in central government financial support for locally elected councils, at a time when they are facing rising costs.

## **The options in the 2022 referendum**

Referendums on local authority governance arrangements can only present two options to voters. In the forthcoming referendum, Bristol's citizens will choose between a mayoral option and a committee option. The mayoral option is required by law, but there appears to have been little public debate about why the committee model is being presented to voters, and not the leader and cabinet model. The two options in the referendum are presented, with diagrams, and the leader and cabinet model is presented in Appendix 3.

## **The arguments for and against the models**

The main advantages and disadvantages of the two options that will be included in the 2022 referendum are discussed using four headings, as follows:

- Power, representation, and leadership
- Accountability, visibility, and decision-making
- Stability, vision and working with others
- Political parties, personalities and independent candidates

## **Reviewing the governance systems in Bristol**

Research on how the mayoral model has worked in Bristol has been carried out by the Bristol Civic Leadership Project since 2012. An examination of the effectiveness of the committee model was conducted by the Bristol Democracy Commission in 2001. These two sources provide evidence to inform the current debate.

**The mayoral model.** Research on public and stakeholder opinions carried out in 2012, 2014 and 2018, shows that the mayoral model has delivered an increase in the visibility of city leadership, and that mayoral leadership has led to a more broadly recognised vision for the city. Also, many believe that, when compared with the leader and cabinet model, mayoral governance created more stable leadership. However, survey research also suggests that citizens' views on timeliness of, and trust in, decision-making have not been improved by the introduction of mayoral governance in Bristol, and there are concerns about the over-concentration of powers in the mayor's office.

**The committee model.** Academic analysis of local government in the 1990s supported the view that the committee system enabled multifunctional local authorities to work effectively and democratically. All councillors were able to contribute to decision making, and some chose to specialise in particular areas. However, the Bristol

Democracy Commission criticised the committee system for not delivering clear, accountable leadership, not subjecting decisions to proper scrutiny, and described committee meetings as time-consuming and burdensome for those involved. Using recent election results, we also consider what council leadership might look like under a committee system.

## **Proposals on the design of governance in Bristol**

The final section of this report outlines proposals for improving the quality of governance in Bristol. We take the view that, whatever the outcome of the referendum, there exists an important opportunity now to think carefully about the design of the new governance arrangements. The research presented in this report suggests that the mayoral model of governance has many strengths, but it also has weaknesses. It follows that, if citizens opt to retain the mayoral model, these weaknesses must be addressed. Likewise, this report suggests that the committee model has both strengths and weaknesses. If citizens vote to introduce a committee system, the weaknesses in this model should be studied and arrangements introduced that mitigate these shortcomings. An effective way of developing an inclusive approach to decision making and local democracy in the city would be to set up an independent Bristol Governance Commission to take evidence, to consider experience elsewhere in the world, and to make recommendations on the governance structures of Bristol City Council.



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# 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 On 5<sup>th</sup> May 2022, the citizens of Bristol will make an important choice about the way the city is governed. For the governance arrangements of Bristol City Council, they will be asked to choose between retaining the existing mayoral system of decision-making, or changing to a committee system of decision-making. This follows a referendum held ten years ago on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2012, when the citizens of Bristol voted in favour of the introduction of a mayoral form of decision-making.
- 1.2 Bristol City Council is a unitary authority that has responsibility for the local government functions within the city council area of Bristol. It spends over £425 million a year and has statutory responsibilities in many areas, including education, social care, public health, planning, waste, housing, and transport. As well as providing many important public services itself, the council works in partnership with other arms of the state, such as the health service and the criminal justice system to improve the local quality of life. In addition, Bristol City Council collaborates with other non-state actors in the city – businesses, trade unions, voluntary organisations and community organisations to address the many challenges facing the city. It represents the city in many external contexts and is a major employer. It provides ways for citizens to get involved in the political process, via elections and through other forms of participation. In short, Bristol City Council is a vital organisation for the city; how the organisation is organised and led, and how it relates to its citizens is of huge significance.
- 1.3 The starting point for this publication is that of the two forms of decision-making that are on offer to voters in this referendum, neither is inherently superior. Rather, they provide different ways of delivering effective political leadership, representation, collaboration, and accountability. Any assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of these different models rests on interpretations and value judgements relating to the nature of, and relative importance of, different dimensions of city governance. People have different views about such contested concepts, and it follows that they will think differently about how these values are expressed in either mayoral or committee models of governance.
- 1.4 It is also the case that there is no one mayoral model, or any single committee model of decision-making. Both forms of decision-making are subject to conscious design decisions, legal requirements, local conventions, and informal practices that are a product of the contexts in which they operate. Importantly, there are choices to be made relating to the detailed design of governance within either of these models, and they can be reformed and adapted in order to achieve specific ends.

- 1.5 The authors of this report are members of the Bristol Civic Leadership Project. This is a collaboration between researchers at the University of Bristol, and the University of the West of England, Bristol. Launched in 2012, before the mayoral model was introduced in Bristol, the aims of the project are: to evaluate what difference the mayoral system has made to Bristol's governance, and to offer suggestions on how to improve it. The project has received financial support from Bristol City Council, and from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). The project is, however, entirely independent of those organisations. For more information on the research project visit: [www.bristolcivicleadership.net](http://www.bristolcivicleadership.net).
- 1.6 This new report from the Bristol Civic Leadership Project draws on current and previous public debates about the way the city council makes decisions and is enlightened by experiences gained in studying, observing, and debating models of local government decision-making, both in the UK and internationally. The aims of this report in the following sections are to:
- Present the background and context for the referendum of May 2022
  - Introduce the models that will be presented to the electorate
  - Review the main arguments for and against these two models
  - Consider how each system has worked, or could work in Bristol
  - Offer proposals on the design of the system of decision-making at Bristol City Council.
- 1.7 Our hope is that the citizens of Bristol will find this publication a useful starting point for their deliberations prior to the referendum. In addition, the analysis aims to assist those people actively involved in the systems of local decision making, in the city council and in the broader systems of city governance. Councillors, party members, officers of the council and other public servants, people from the business sector and from trade unions, and the range of people undertaking roles in the voluntary and community organisations all perform important governance functions. We hope this report helps them think through how their interests might best be served by the models on offer, and how they might best contribute to the city's governance under existing or alternative arrangements.
- 1.8 Finally, we hope that this report will prove useful to those who are charged with operating, and perhaps reforming whatever system is chosen. The present public debate shines a light on the strengths and weaknesses of both systems. The desire is that the evidence presented here is used to ensure that, whatever form of decision-making is chosen by the citizens of Bristol, it is implemented in a way that improves the quality of governance in the city.

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## 2 BACKGROUND AND NATIONAL CONTEXT

- 2.1 This section charts the evolution of the governance arrangements of Bristol City Council, and where relevant, outlines developments at the national level. It also gives contextual information about Bristol's political environment. A timeline of key events is contained in Appendix 1.
- 2.2 The governance of Bristol City Council can be thought of as occurring in three phases, as follows:
- The committee phase (1995-2000)
  - The leader and cabinet phase (2000-2012)
  - The mayoral phase (2012–2022)

These phases are charted in a table in Appendix 2, which also lists the political control of the council, and the council's leaders in those years.

- 2.3 When Bristol City Council became a unitary authority in 1995, like all other local authorities in England, it operated a committee system of decision-making. The committee system was used in all English local authorities in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Committees comprised councillors and the composition of these committees would usually reflect the political complexion of the council as a whole. Generally, committees were formed around the services local government provided and there would usually be, for example, a housing committee, an education committee, a social services committee and other service-specific committees to oversee services in those areas. With only a few modifications, this model of local government was left largely untouched by successive governments in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the UK (Copus, 2015). The committee system is described in more detail in section 3.
- 2.4 The Labour government elected in 1997 was committed to reform local government as part of its 'modernisation' agenda (Department for the Environment, Transport, and the Regions (DETR), 1998). It passed the Local Government Act 2000 which required local authorities in England with populations of more than 85,000 to abolish the committee system and adopt one of three new models: a directly elected mayor with a cabinet; a directly elected mayor and council manager; or a leader and cabinet form of decision-making. Local authorities under 85,000 in population could adopt one of these models, or retain the committee system.
- 2.5 Each of these models entails a separation of responsibilities between a political executive, to provide strategic leadership of the local authority, and other elected members, who retain important decision-making powers (in relation to, for example, planning and licensing) but focus most of their efforts on representation, policy development and scrutiny of the executive. In essence, the idea was that executive members would take responsibility for major strategic



decisions (subject to full council approval) while other councillors would oversee and scrutinise the work of the executive, work on policy development, and further develop their ward councillor and neighbourhood civic leadership roles. Following a transitional period in 2000, Bristol City Council switched to a leader and cabinet model of decision-making in 2001. In Appendix 3 the leader and cabinet model is described in more detail.

- 2.6 The Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government elected in 2010 passed the Localism Act 2011 (Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), 2011). It required 10 of the largest English authorities, as measured by population, to each hold a referendum on whether to adopt a directly elected mayor model of decision-making. Bristol was one of the authorities required to do so. In May 2012 the citizens of Bristol voted narrowly in favour of adopting the mayoral system. It was the only city out of the 10 local authorities holding referendums to vote in favour of having a mayor, and the first mayoral election in Bristol took place in November 2012. The mayoral system is described in more detail in section 3.
- 2.7 The Localism Act 2011 also enabled all English local authorities to revert, if they wished, to the committee system. However, where local authorities, like Bristol, had voted in favour of a mayoral system in a referendum they were required to hold under the provisions of the Localism Act 2011, a further provision in the Act prevented them from later holding another referendum to abolish it. This meant that Bristol was, for a period, unable to change to another governance system. An amendment to the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016 removed this constraint (Sandford, 2021). This amendment, introduced by Baroness Janke, former leader of Bristol City Council, meant that councillors could revisit the governance arrangements for their city.
- 2.8 In December 2021, the elected councillors of Bristol City Council passed a motion by 41 votes to 24, to hold a referendum on whether to abolish the mayoral system, and replace it with a committee model of decision-making. The referendum will take place in May 2022 and, if citizens vote for change, the committee system would be reintroduced in May 2024. The Localism Act 2011 contains provisions meaning that a referendum on governance change is restricted by a 10 year moratorium. This means that whatever the outcome of the referendum in May 2022, Bristol will retain the selected model for 10 years unless there is further legislative change by central government.
- 2.9 Nationally since 2001 there has been a total 65 referendums on mayoral governance arrangements in various local authorities across England. There have been 57 referendums to introduce mayoral governance, and 17 of those voted in favour of the mayoral option. The councils that introduced mayoral governance are: Watford, Doncaster, Hartlepool, Lewisham, Middlesbrough, North Tyneside, Newham, Bedford, Hackney, Mansfield, Stoke-on-Trent, Torbay, Salford, Bristol, Copeland, Croydon, and Tower Hamlets (Sandford, 2021).

**Table 1** Local authority referendums on the abolition of mayoral governance

Year	Council	In favour of mayoral option (%)	Against mayoral option (%)	Turnout (%)	Result
2008	Stoke-on-Trent	40.7	59.3	19.2	Change from mayoral to leader and cabinet system
2012	Doncaster	62.0	28.0	30.7	Retention of mayoral system
2012	Hartlepool	41.3	58.7	18.0	Change from mayoral to committee system
2013	Middlesbrough	57.3	42.7	15.1	Retention of mayoral system
2016	North Tyneside	57.5	42.5	36.6	Retention of mayoral system
2016	Torbay	37.5	62.5	25.3	Change from mayoral to leader and cabinet system
2021	Newham	55.8	44.2	37.7	Retention of mayoral system
2021	Tower Hamlets	77.8	22.2	41.8	Retention of mayoral system

**2.10** Eight local authorities (other than Bristol) that voted in favour of introducing mayoral governance have subsequently held referendums on whether it should be abolished – see Table 1. Five retained the mayoral system (Doncaster, Middlesbrough, Newham, North Tyneside, and Tower Hamlets); two adopted a leader and cabinet model (Stoke-on-Trent and Torbay); and one reverted to the committee system (Hartlepool).

**2.11** Additionally, three local authorities have held referendums which resulted in a move from the leader and cabinet model to the committee system (Fylde, West Dorset, and Sheffield). Further details of those referendums are contained in Table 2.

**Table 2** Local authority referendums on the introduction of the committee system of governance

Year	Council	In favour of committee option (%)	Against committee option (%)	Turnout (%)	Result
2014	Fylde	57.8	42.2	34.2	Change from leader and cabinet to committee system
2016	West Dorset	65.2	34.8	32.0	Change from leader and cabinet to committee system
2021	Sheffield	64.8	35.2	Not known	Change from leader and cabinet to committee system

- 2.12** There are two other entirely separate positions in the governing environment of Bristol with the title 'mayor'. As well as the directly elected mayor of Bristol, the city also has a 'Lord Mayor', and there is a West of England Combined Authority (WECA) 'metro mayor'. The Lord Mayor of Bristol has existed since 1899, and is a serving councillor elected by other councillors to perform various civic and ceremonial duties, including chairing city council meetings. The position of Lord Mayor of Bristol is not affected by the referendum outcome.
- 2.13** WECA is a separate organisation from Bristol City Council. WECA was created in 2017 as part of central government's 'devolution agenda'. WECA has responsibilities in strategic planning, employment, and transport, amongst other matters. The directly elected mayor of Bristol currently sits on the WECA committee, alongside the leaders of Bath and North East Somerset and South Gloucestershire Councils, and the metro mayor, who chairs the combined authority. The current WECA mayor is Dan Norris, a Labour Party politician, elected in 2021. He replaced the city region's first metro mayor, Tim Bowles, from the Conservative Party. The position of West of England metro mayor will continue irrespective the May 2022 referendum outcome.
- 2.14** The politics of Bristol can be unpredictable. Both Labour and the Liberal Democrats have had majorities of council seats in the last 20 years. The Green Party now has as many councillors as the Labour Party. While the current incumbent of the mayoralty, Marvin Rees, represents the Labour Party, George Ferguson, Bristol's first directly elected mayor, was an independent.<sup>1</sup> The leadership of the council, has, under different systems, changed hands many times over the years (we have included a table of leaders and directly elected mayors in the city since 1995 in Appendix 2). Bristol has elected Conservative MPs to Westminster, alongside Labour and Liberal Democrat MPs, and the metro mayor has changed hands between the Conservative and Labour parties. The shifting political composition of the council, and of the broader environment, means that there is considerable churn in the people running the city.
- 2.15** Whatever the outcome of the referendum, the national context for local government is one of centralisation and fiscal austerity. England is one of the most centralised states in the world (Hambleton, 2017). Local authorities of all sizes, types, and political persuasions are heavily constrained by ministers in Whitehall in what they can and can't do, how much tax they can generate, and what they can spend it on. Additionally, while it has long been the case that central government has exerted financial control over local government, the austerity related cuts that have taken place in the period since 2010 have added another dimension to the constraints on local authorities. Many authorities, including Bristol, struggle to fulfil the rising costs of their statutory obligations, especially in adult social care and children's services, and have had to cut back severely on discretionary services (Latham, 2017; Lowndes & Gardner, 2016).

<sup>1</sup> In fact George Ferguson formed the 'Bristol 1<sup>st</sup>' party of which he was the only member, in order to distinguish himself from other independent candidates, and to be able to put a logo on the ballot paper. He disbanded the party on being elected.



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## 3 INTRODUCING THE OPTIONS IN THE 2022 REFERENDUM

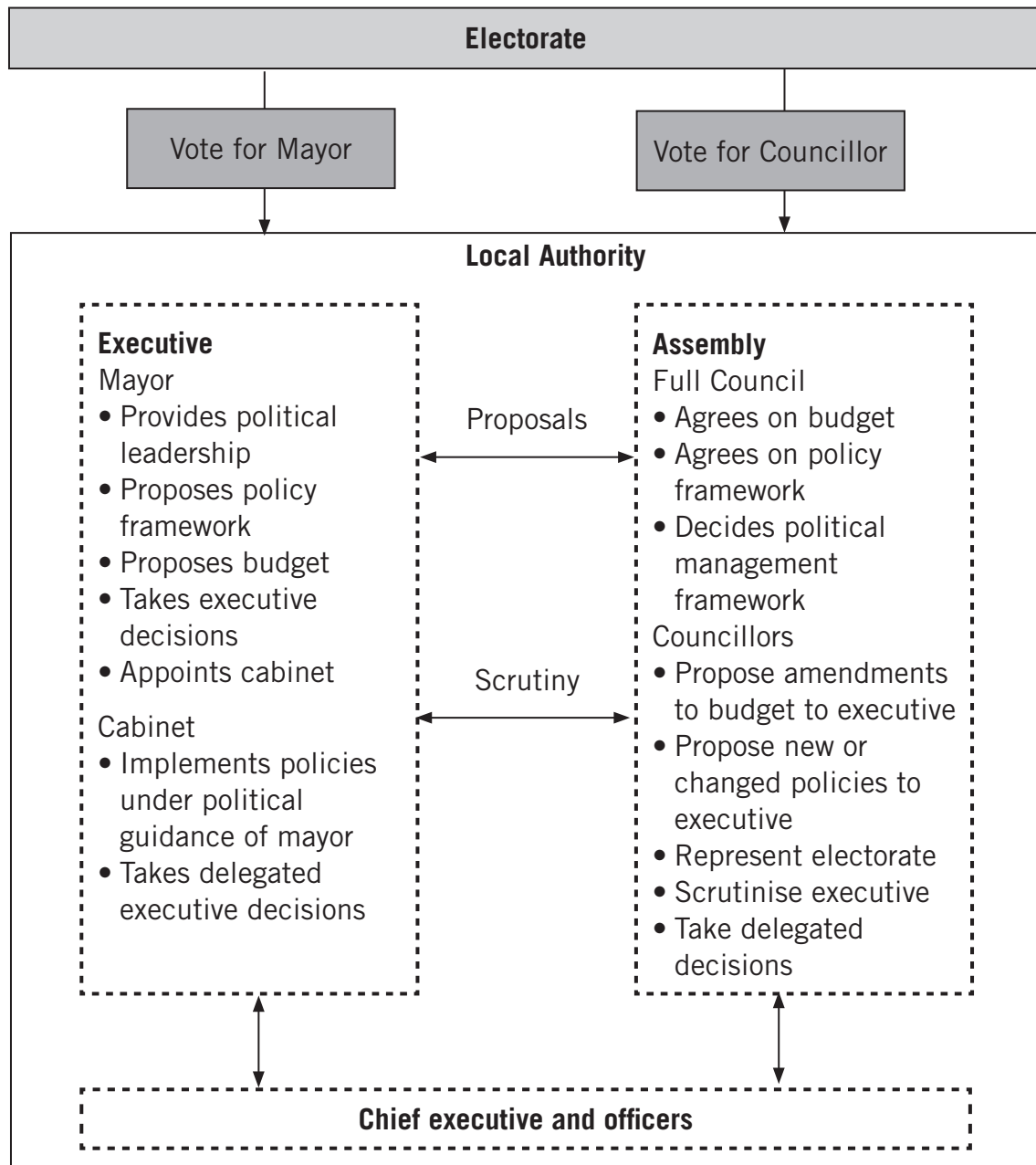
- 3.1 In this section the key features of the models that will be on offer in the Bristol 2022 referendum are presented. These are generic descriptions of the models, and, as we pointed out above, actual practice can vary according to legal requirements and local conventions. Arguments for and against the models are then considered in the next section.
- 3.2 However, before discussing the two models that will be presented to voters in the referendum in May, it is important to refer, albeit briefly, to the leader and cabinet model of local government. This model, which operated in Bristol from 2000 to 2012, will not be an option available to voters in the referendum. This is because a referendum has to present a binary choice to voters – by law there can be only two options. In the case of Bristol, as the mayoral system was created following a referendum, legal requirements dictate it can only be abolished by referendum. Therefore, one of the options has to be the mayoral model, leaving room for only one other choice.
- 3.3 We are aware of no detailed discussion of or rationale for why the committee model is being presented to the citizens of Bristol rather than the leader and cabinet model. The triggering of the referendum process through a successful motion at Full Council has framed a binary debate without a wider public consideration of other options. As a result, the option of returning to the leader and cabinet model has, for the moment, been ruled out. However, we believe that the leader and cabinet option should not be excluded from future thinking on how to improve the governance of Bristol. In Appendix 3 we provide a concise summary of the leader and cabinet model.
- 3.4 The formal powers that a unitary local authority has, whether it has a directly elected mayor or not, remain the same under different models of decision-making. Different models do, however, distribute formal powers at the local level in different ways. Going beyond the distribution of formal powers, it is a matter of considerable debate whether a directly elected mayor carries more informal (or soft) power than a council leader (Fenwick & Johnston, 2020) a point to which we return in section 4.

### The mayoral model

- 3.5 There are many different kinds of mayoral governance in place across the world (Sweeting, 2017), and we focus on the model used in English local government. Figure 1 illustrates the main features of the mayoral model.
- 3.6 In mayoral authorities, voters take part in two elections. Citizens vote in the mayoral election, and they vote for one or more ward councillors. Candidates

for mayor and councillors can represent political parties, but they don't have to. In their vote for the mayor, citizens cast a first and second preference. Should one candidate receive more than 50% of first preference votes, they are elected as mayor. Should no candidate receive more than 50% of first preferences, all except the top two candidates are eliminated. The second preferences of the eliminated candidates are redistributed amongst the first two candidates. The winner is the candidate with the most first and second preference votes.<sup>2</sup> The mayor is normally elected for a period of four years. Mayors cannot be dismissed

**Figure 1** The mayoral model of decision-making



Source: (Hambleton, 2015, p. 185)

<sup>2</sup> The Elections Bill currently going through Parliament would replace this system of preference voting with a first-past-the-post system.

by the municipal council. Unless a mayor behaves in an illegal way – for example, is found to be guilty of misconduct in public office – the mayor cannot be ousted before their term of office is completed.

- 3.7 In their vote for councillors, voters elect one, two or three councillors for the ward in which they live, depending on how many councillors represent their ward. Councillors with the most votes in their constituencies are elected, also for four years. Together, councillors plus the mayor comprise the full council.
- 3.8 In the mayoral model, most powers of decision-making are vested in the mayor. The mayor takes key decisions, and sets the budget (which is subject to approval by full council). The mayor appoints a cabinet, members of which may also have decision-making powers delegated to them, or may be advisory, according to the preference of the mayor. There must be at least one 'overview and scrutiny' committee on which councillors sit to oversee the work of the mayor, cabinet members, and the council more generally. Overview and scrutiny committees do not make decisions. Rather, they are charged with policy development and performance review. Committees can focus on specific services or departments, or be cross-cutting.
- 3.9 For some 'quasi-judicial' matters, such as planning and licensing, councils are required by law to have decision-making committees. These committees comprise a politically balanced membership according to the proportion of councillors on the full council. They do not include the mayor.

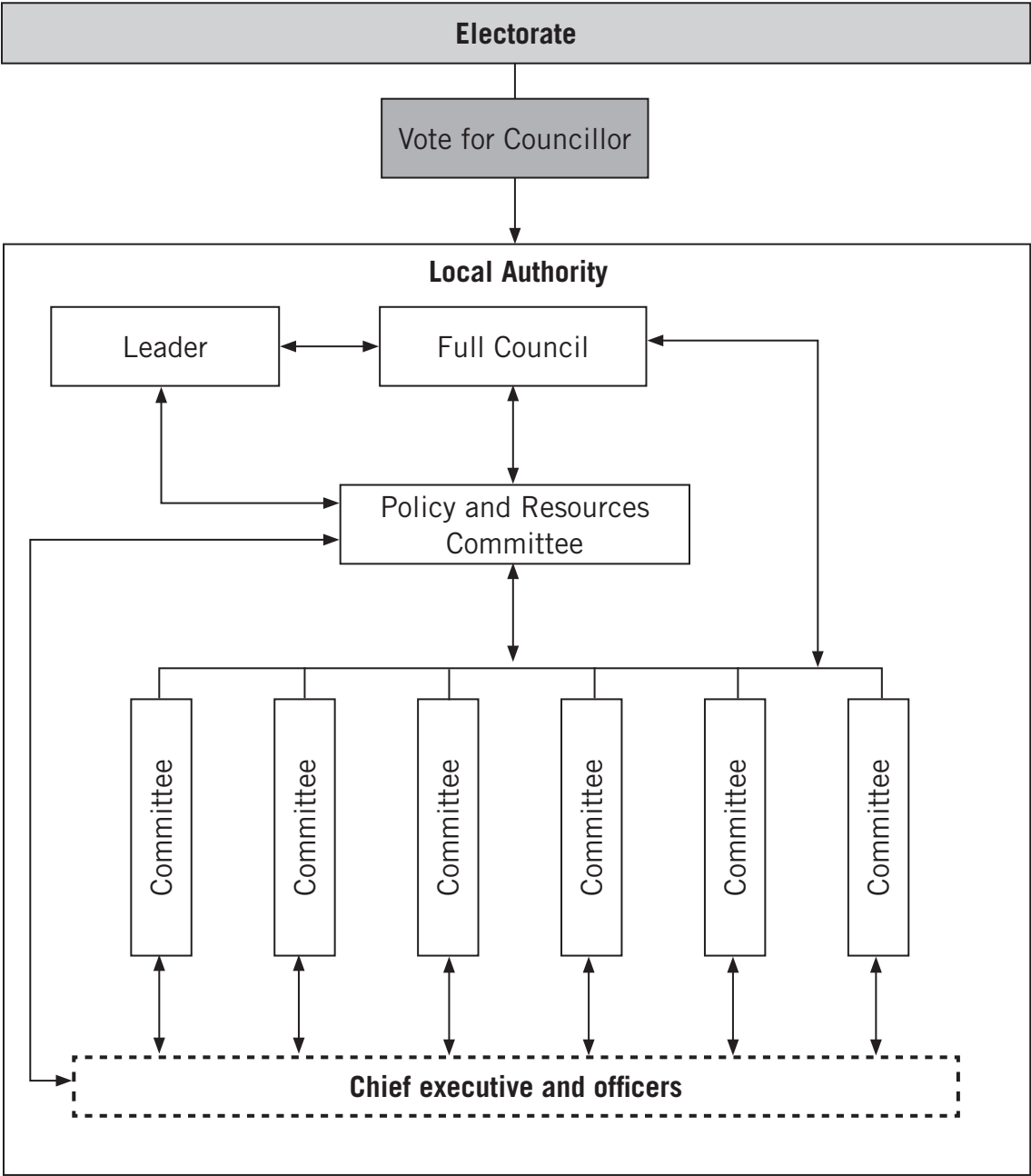
### **The committee model**

- 3.10 For a committee system of decision-making, councillors are elected in the same way as under the mayoral model i.e. on a ward basis, for four years, in single or multi-member constituencies where candidates with the most votes are elected. Candidates wishing to stand for election as councillors can and often do represent a political party, but they don't have to.
- 3.11 Once elected, councillors elect from amongst their number a leader of the council. This person is normally the leader of the largest party, where there is a majority party in the full council. Where there is a coalition, the leader is typically the leader of the largest party in the coalition.
- 3.12 Decisions are made in committees with each committee comprising a politically balanced number of councillors, corresponding to the number of councillors in the full council – see Figure 2. Committees may be aligned to services, departments, be cross-cutting or be area based. There is usually an over-arching committee designed to oversee the work of the local authority, often called a Policy and Resources Committee or similar. This central committee normally sets the council budget (which, as with the mayoral model, is subject to full council approval). Outside of the committee structure, there may be an informal 'cabinet' of senior councillors, perhaps comprising the committee chairs of council committees and other senior councillors.



**3.13** Councils operating a committee system are required to have the same quasi-judicial committees that are required under the mayoral model, relating to planning and licensing. Additionally, they can have one or more overview and scrutiny committees, but are not required to.

**Figure 2** The committee model of decision-making



Source: Authors

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## 4 REVIEWING THE ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST THE MODELS

- 4.1 This section presents the main arguments for and against the mayoral model and the committee model. It is not possible to review all the arguments here. Rather the aim is to identify key themes by drawing on the debates that took place prior to the Bristol referendum of 2012; a review of the Bristol City Council debate of 7/12/21; and study of the operation of these models in a range of local authorities in the UK and elsewhere. Whilst care has been taken to give a balanced and thorough perspective, this is written with an awareness that there is both much more to say, and that other arguments can be made.
- 4.2 To give structure to the discussion, the advantages and disadvantages are presented under the following four headings:
- Power, representation, and leadership
  - Accountability, visibility, and decision-making
  - Stability, vision, and working with others
  - Political parties, personalities, and independent candidates

### **Power, representation, and leadership**

- 4.3 Supporters of the mayoral model argue that by virtue of direct election, and the concentration of powers in the office, a powerful and high-profile political leader is created who is instantly recognisable as the leader of the city. This person, chosen in a public election and backed by a direct mandate from the citizens is an outward facing city leader who wields the hard powers of decision-making as well as the soft powers of influence. A directly elected mayor has, they argue, the legitimacy to speak for the entire city and can use this legitimacy to bring different stakeholders together to address the complex challenges facing the city. Mayors can, they argue, represent the city externally in a way that other leaders find difficult, because of the legitimacy provided by the direct election process. The mayor, having gained the support of citizens, and needing it for re-election, is likely to be sensitive to citizen preferences. Citizens become more interested in elections as they get to choose the leader, and they may become more interested in public issues more generally. As the mayor doesn't need to rely on the day-to-day support of councillors for their position, directly elected mayors can negotiate with external partners in governmental, business and international arenas, and can make quick decisions without necessarily checking back with council colleagues. For all these reasons supporters of the mayoral model claim that it enables the city to 'get things done' (Barber, 2013).
- 4.4 Critics of the mayoral model argue that it is not possible for an individual to represent the city effectively. As well as being geographically diverse, cities

are comprised of a variety of different groups that can't be represented by any individual. Mayoral candidates tend to be male (Giovannini, 2021), and white. Opponents of the model argue that there is an over-concentration of powers in the office of the mayor, leading to overload on the individual serving as mayor. A single person can't keep track of all the matters that need attending to in running a city. Instead, they are likely to concentrate on a few favoured projects while other matters are left to officers, or don't get onto the mayoral agenda at all. A mayor can ignore councillors, passing up the opportunity to draw on their expertise and their knowledge of what citizens think. Councillors, shut out of the decision-making process, find it more difficult to facilitate greater public participation in the decision-making process. This can lead to poor, ill-conceived decisions, often negotiated with interests outside city hall.

- 4.5 Advocates of the committee model argue that the leader of the council draws on a reservoir of support from the elected councillors, and the leaders are often delivered on the basis of broad party consensus. The leader is chosen by full council, making them a powerful leader. Also the diverse interests of the city are much better reflected by a diverse group of councillors. Needing to maintain the support of councillors, perhaps from more than one party, means that a council leader needs to exercise a persuasive and consensual style of leadership. Moreover, they are just as able to wield soft (and hard) powers as their directly elected counterparts. Additionally, under a committee model, there are more routes into the decision-making process via individual councillors, and the committees on which they sit, and much greater public involvement in decision-making is the result. Supporters of the committee system argue that local government in Bristol, and across the country, under the guidance of the committee system for over a century, was responsible for huge developments in housing, infrastructure, and education; it is just as able to 'get things done' as the mayoral system.
- 4.6 Critics of the committee model argue that political attention becomes focussed on the internal politics of city hall rather than the needs of the city as a whole. This is because the council leader needs to be constantly looking over their shoulder, in fear of falling foul of some party faction or inter-party dispute. The leader's insecurity of office undermines efforts to engage in outgoing civic leadership. The choice of leader, rather than being decided by citizens in an open election, is left to a small number of councillors either behind closed doors in a party group meeting or is part of a deal between competing parties on a hung council. Decisions become highly politicised because the leader has to keep in mind at all times the potentially sectional views of and within the party group, rather than the broader interests of the city. They are therefore less interested in getting the views of members of the public in decision-making and more interested in ensuring the views of their party group members are represented. In addition, the committee structure can produce silo thinking rather than holistic consideration of challenges that require a cross-sectional approach. Finally, critics of the committee system note that councillors are not socially representative of citizens or of society either – for example, women, young

adults and ethnic minorities are all under-represented in councils (Communities and Local Government Committee, 2012).

### **Accountability, visibility, and decision-making**

- 4.7** Enthusiasts for the mayoral model argue that accountability is ensured primarily through the electoral process. The directly elected mayor is held to account for their actions by citizens via the ballot box. If citizens don't like what the mayor has been doing, they can remove them from office and replace them with someone else. Moreover, councillors acting on overview and scrutiny committees, and sitting in the full council, can require the mayor to give an account of their actions. In addition, the direct election process ensures that a directly elected mayor is far more visible than a council leader and people know who the mayor is. It is clear who is in charge and who is making decisions, and the visibility of the mayor also ensures considerable media scrutiny, giving a further avenue to hold the mayor to account. In addition, cabinet meetings chaired by the mayor are open to the public.
- 4.8** Detractors of the mayoral model argue that accountability needs to happen more often than once every four years. Councillors' key role in holding the mayor to account in overview and scrutiny committees, and at the full council meetings, are hamstrung as the mayor can, aside from decisions relating to the city budget (which requires full council approval) ignore councillor views. Councillors have no way of removing the mayor from their post. While the mayor might have a high profile and be very well known this doesn't equate to accountability. Further, if the mayor decides not to stand for re-election, there is no way for voters to hold them to account for their final term of office. A further concern is that decision making can become deadlocked. For example, if the mayor represents one party and the full council is dominated by another, it may prove very difficult to agree the city budget.
- 4.9** Proponents of the committee system argue that accountability is secured through the activities of councillors. Accountability is a continuous process and as councillors appoint, and are able to remove, the council leader, they are able to hold the leader of the council to account without needing to wait up to four years for the next election. Moreover, the threat of removal from office is usually enough to bring a council leader into line. Further, issues are debated, and decisions are made by councillors in committee meetings that are open to the public. Councillors hold each other to account in committee meetings. If citizens don't like what their councillor is doing, they can vote to replace them at the next election.
- 4.10** Critics of the committee system argue that the leader of the council inevitably becomes accountable to the small group of councillors that elected them, rather than to citizens of the city as a whole. Decisions are routinely made in private party group meetings prior to committee meetings, rather than the open committee meetings themselves, where councillors are obliged to toe the party line. Moreover, few people know who the council leader is or can name them.



Therefore, it is often unclear who is making decisions and on what basis, and this hinders accountability. Further, without specific structures for overview and scrutiny, decision-makers in committees are not required to give an account of their decisions, and no real scrutiny of decisions or decision-makers takes place.

### **Stability, vision, and working with others**

- 4.11** Those who promote the mayoral system argue that electing a mayor for four years gives stability to city leadership. This stability enables the leader to work with other actors to develop a long-term vision and strategy for the future of the city and, also, provides the leader with sufficient time to start mobilising actors and interests to put this vision into effect. Interests inside and outside the council are likely to benefit from such stability. Officers in the city administration will be able to work towards long term goals. Businesses, voluntary organisations, trade unions and other local and public authorities all benefit from a stable political environment within which collaborative planning and decision-making can grow.
- 4.12** Critics of the mayoral system argue that electing a mayor for four years risks several years of poor governance if a poor leader is elected. Any long-term vision that the mayor develops could be partial, and might give too much priority to their own individual experiences and preferences. The result is a system that commits to a specific governing course which may take several years for a succeeding administration to correct. Loading considerable amounts of responsibility onto an individual for such a long period of time leaves the system vulnerable to the poor performance of that individual and their lapses of judgement. Moreover, when the mayor changes, there could be an abrupt change of policy, leading to discontinuity rather than stability, and working relationships, both inside and outside the council, will need to start from scratch.
- 4.13** Champions of the committee system argue that a leader could also be elected by councillors for a period of four years, giving a degree of stability to their leadership, but with the advantage that the leader could be removed should councillors desire it. The political balance of the council is much more stable now that councillor elections are 'all out' once every four years, rather than by 'thirds', when elections used to occur in three out of every four years. At election time, with all council seats up for election, some councillors will change while others will be re-elected, giving a balance between experienced and new perspectives, and continuity and change. A vision for the city is likely to be much more grounded if it draws on the inputs of a body of councillors, each with their own areas of expertise and specific geographic focus. More people will be involved in decision-making, and there will be more people to work with interests outside the local authority, fostering a more open and collaborative system of governance.
- 4.14** Critics of the committee system argue that it can be plagued by instability, or conversely, too much stability. While the leader might be elected for a period of four years, there is nothing to stop councillors from removing the leader and

electing another leader multiple times during the four-year period between councillor elections. Leadership change can happen under majority party control, but is much more likely to occur when no party is in overall control, as inter-party disagreements can fracture coalition arrangements. Such fragility is not conducive to long-term vision or strategy. The opposite can occur in a single-party dominated council where a similar group of councillors is elected on multiple occasions. In those circumstances a leader in control of their party group might be re-elected as leader of the council over many years, potentially for decades, without citizens having any direct say in the choice of their city leader. Working with interests outside the local authority and accommodating different interests can take second place to working to ensure that the interests of the party group of the leader, or their coalition partners, are satisfied.

### **Political parties, personalities, and independent candidates**

- 4.15** Backers of the mayoral model argue that it puts people in political leadership positions who might not otherwise countenance entering politics. These include people who can be elected as independents, outside the normal party channels. Therefore, the range of people who can be elected as mayor is much wider than those who might be elected as council leader. Moreover, while mayors usually rely on their party for their nomination, they don't rely on the approval of a party group to remain in office. Therefore mayors, both independents and party members, can put the interests of the city ahead of the interests of their party.
- 4.16** Critics of the mayoral model argue that the system of direct election runs the risk of wholly unsuitable people being elected as mayor. Independent candidates without a background in local politics will have little idea how to run a local authority or to govern a city. Once in office, rather than being supported by experienced politicians, independent mayors could surround themselves with like-minded advisers. Cabinet members who are appointed by the mayor, whether or not they belong to the same political party, are unlikely to want to challenge them, for fear of losing their position. The result is a mayor surrounded by people looking to please the mayor and an absence of dissenting voices. The election of an individual inevitably puts the focus on the personalities of those standing, rather than their policies, and gives an advantage to media-friendly politicians.
- 4.17** Defenders of the committee system argue that it is much more likely to deliver an experienced and trustworthy politician to lead the city. Councillors can ensure that only serious politicians are able to be council leader. In order to gain councillor support, prospective leaders are much more likely to have a background in local politics, and have served time on committees, gaining know-how about what community needs are and how local government works. The emphasis is much less on the individual or their media profile, and much more on their background, knowledge, and experience in local politics.
- 4.18** Some argue that a weakness of the committee system is that it only likely to put into leadership positions councillors who are popular with local political

party groups. These people will be trusted party politicians, and the system does not provide opportunities for inventive people from outside a small group of professionalised politicians who have 'served their time'. It is difficult to see how any individual from outside the closed circles of local government and politics would have any chance of being elected as council leader.

## 5 REVIEWING EXPERIENCE WITH THE MAYORAL SYSTEM AND THE COMMITTEE SYSTEM IN BRISTOL

- 5.1** This section reviews how each of the systems of governance function, or might function, in Bristol. In the case of the mayoral model, the discussion considers how the system has operated between 2012 and the present. We draw on the reports of the Bristol Civic Leadership Project ([www.bristolcivicleadership.net](http://www.bristolcivicleadership.net)) to review mayoral governance in Bristol. This project collected data before and after the introduction of mayoral governance in Bristol in 2012. However, the data we collected before the introduction of the mayoral system relates to the period when Bristol operated a leader and cabinet system, between 2000 and 2012, not to the committee system. Indeed, as explained in section two, Bristol City Council has not operated a committee system since 2000, well before the start of the Bristol Civic Leadership Project in 2012. Unlike the mayoral system, there is, then, no recent history of committee working in the city to review. However, in the text below it has been possible to draw on a report published by the Bristol Democracy Commission in 2001, which did review the effectiveness of the committee system in Bristol (Bristol Democracy Commission, 2001). It is also possible to illustrate what the structure of decision-making might look like under the committee system in Bristol, by considering the current and recent party political balance of councillors on the council.
- 5.2** In councillor elections, up to and including 2015, councillors were elected by 'thirds' i.e. one third of the seats were up for election each year, and there were no elections in the fourth year. From 2016, all seats were contested once in a four-year cycle,<sup>3</sup> and elected at the same time as the mayor. There were no councillor elections in 2012, the year that George Ferguson was elected as Mayor. In 2016, the year Marvin Rees was elected as Mayor, all council seats were contested. Table 3 below shows the distribution of seats in 2012, at the time Mayor Ferguson was elected, and the distribution of seats following the councillor elections which coincided with the election of Mayor Rees in 2016 and 2021.

**Table 3** Distribution of seats in 2012, 2016, and 2021 at Bristol City Council

Political party/Year	2012	2016	2021
Conservative	14	14	14
Green	2	11	24
Labour	21	37	24
Liberal Democrat	33	8	8

<sup>3</sup> The 2020 council elections were delayed by one year as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

## Mayoral governance in Bristol

- 5.3 In all three mayoral elections in Bristol, in 2012 (which elected Ferguson) and 2016 and 2021 (which elected Rees) the election went to the second round of counting. Many mayoral candidates, and most of those standing to be councillors represented political parties. However, while the current mayor, Marvin Rees represents the Labour Party, George Ferguson, Bristol's first directly elected mayor, was an independent candidate. In 2012, the year Ferguson was elected, there was no party that held a majority of council seats. In 2016, the elections yielded a Labour mayor with a Labour majority in the council. In 2021, a Labour mayor was again elected, but this time the council was hung, with no party in overall control, and with Labour and the Greens forming the largest parties on the council, at 24 seats each.
- 5.4 Mayor Ferguson introduced a 'rainbow cabinet' which included members from each of the political parties in his cabinet. Mayor Rees initially followed this approach, though has since opted for an all-Labour cabinet. In both cases the cabinet has been advisory, and decision-making has ultimately remained with the mayor (with some decisions, notably the city budget, subject to confirmation by full council).
- 5.5 There are several overview and scrutiny committees (called scrutiny commissions) in Bristol. Some of these are standing committees which exist on a continuous basis, whereas others are tasked with examining a specific area or develop policy in relation to a particular issue.
- 5.6 The Bristol Civic Leadership Project, in its 2015 report, published three years after the introduction of mayoral governance in the city, based its findings on surveys of the public; surveys of people in different realms of the city; and on interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders, each conducted in 2012 and 2014 (Hambleton & Sweeting, 2015). As stated above, comparison was made with the leader and cabinet system which preceded the introduction of the mayoral system in the city.
- 5.7 The research recorded considerable improvements in perceptions of leadership in the city following the introduction of mayoral governance. Across the board, people were much more inclined to agree that Bristol had much more visible leadership under the mayoral system than under the leader and cabinet system. This included members of the public, councillors, people working in the state sector, and people working outside the state. Many commented that mayoral governance had created more stable leadership that enabled decisions to be made that would not have been made under the previous system of decision-making.
- 5.8 In the main, survey data showed people were much more inclined to agree that the leadership of the council had a vision for the city than had previously been the case, and that the introduction of mayoral governance ensured that the interests of Bristol were better represented in national and international settings. However, it was notable that for both having a vision for the city, and for



representing the city, councillors were less inclined than those in other realms of governance to think that mayoral governance had improved matters. Indeed, in many of the elements covered in the research, councillors perceived the introduction of mayoral governance more negatively than others (Hambleton & Sweeting, 2015, p. 7).

- 5.9** The research found areas where various actors felt less positive about the introduction of the mayoral system. In areas such as the representation of views in the city, levels of trust in the decision-making system, and timeliness of decision-making, the introduction of mayoral governance appeared to have had little impact, or impacted negatively on perceptions on these matters. There was also evidence that people in the less well-off parts of Bristol saw the move to mayoral governance more negatively than those in other parts of the city. Many were also concerned about the concentration of powers in the office of the mayor.
- 5.10** In a later analysis, drawing on data collected in 2018, and published in 2020 (Sweeting, et al., 2020), similar findings were presented. The visibility of leadership was again widely recognised, but with mixed results in other areas. Members of the public were more positive about there being a vision for the city than prior to the introduction of mayoral governance. People working in the state sector, and those from outside the state sector were more positive about the representation of the city in external contexts than councillors and members of the public. Very low levels of public confidence were reported in relation to timeliness of and trust in decision-making. Tellingly, given recent events, only 22% of councillors reported that they were able to provide an effective check on council leadership in 2018 – down from a figure of 47% in 2014, and 51% in 2012, prior to the introduction of mayoral governance.

### **A committee system in Bristol**

- 5.11** As stated above, Bristol has not operated a committee system since 2000. The Bristol Democracy Commission's report, published in 2001, did not provide a detailed evaluation of the work of the committee system. Rather, it was a review of several aspects of local democracy in the city, and was written at a time when Bristol City Council, along with many other English local authorities, was obliged to replace the committee system with one of the options contained in the Local Government Act 2000 (see section 2 of this report). The new legislation meant that retaining the committee system wasn't an option.
- 5.12** It is important to note that, at the time, many in local government, and many commentators on local government, saw considerable benefits associated with the committee system. For example, David Wilson and Chris Game, two long standing supporters of local government and local democracy stated:
- 'It is the committee system that enables multifunctional authorities to work efficiently and effectively, and at the same time democratically' (Wilson & Game, 1998, p. 71).

Amongst other matters, it was argued that committees allowed the full council to work on strategy, while committees could work on detail; they enabled matters to be dealt with simultaneously by different committees, speeding up the decision-making process; they allowed councillors to specialise in a particular area; and they provided a forum in which council officers could be called to account (Byrne, 2000).

- 5.13** Throughout the 1990s, the citizens of Bristol delivered stable Labour majorities at Bristol City Council. This in turn led to stable leadership, with two Labour leaders in that period (Graham Robertson and George Micklewright). However, the Bristol Democracy Commission raised several problems with the committee system, and we quote their report directly here:

'It is possible to identify at least three major criticisms of the committee system:

- 1) There was no clear and accountable leadership. It was often not clear whether responsibility for a particular decision lay with the chair of that committee, all of its members, the full Council, the majority group or the leader of the Council;
- 2) Important policy decisions were not subject to proper and effective scrutiny. Members of committees might accept responsibility for taking a decision, but then be called upon to scrutinise it in the future;
- 3) A lot of time and effort was absorbed to no great effect in committee. Members would often be swamped with papers and receive little support in identifying key issues for debate rather than party point scoring' (Bristol Democracy Commission, 2001, p. 28).

- 5.14** In a similar vein to the Bristol Civic Leadership Project, the Bristol Democracy Commission observed that councillors tended to oppose the idea of mayoral governance. The report stated 'The strongest defence of the committee system typically comes from councillors. Many argue that under this system all councillors have the opportunity in principle to be directly involved in making decisions...' (Bristol Democracy Commission, 2001, p. 28). While the public, as measured by the Citizens' Panel and other surveys, preferred the option of being able to directly elect a mayor, councillors preferred to have the ruling party select the leader and cabinet (Bristol Democracy Commission, 2001, p. 39). The report, recommended by a majority (rather than unanimous) view the adoption of a mayor and cabinet system, subject to a referendum. This recommendation of the Bristol Democracy Commission was not accepted by Bristol City Council and no referendum was held.

- 5.15** It is clear that the debate about the benefits or otherwise of the committee system, and the benefits or otherwise of the mayoral model, has been going on for many years in Bristol, at least since 2000. It is also the case that the broader governance environment, and the political context of Bristol has changed and moved on in that time, and some may argue that arguments made over 20 years are less relevant today.

- 5.16** With that in mind, and with a view to illustrating what the governance of Bristol might have looked like under a committee system, the two most recent whole council election results from 2021 and 2016 are used to consider what council leadership might look like under a committee system. There are dangers in this approach. It is conceivable that, if a committee system were introduced, citizens would vote in a different way than they would in a mayoral election. Moreover, party negotiations are difficult to predict. What follows is, therefore, inevitably to some extent speculative. We hope, however, that it gives an impression of how such a committee system could work if it were introduced in 2024.
- 5.17** There are 70 councillors in all at Bristol City Council. A political party therefore needs 36 councillors to form a ruling group without the support of other parties.
- 5.18** In 2016, as shown in Table 3, the situation was very clear. Labour won 37 seats, and under the committee system, would have formed the ruling group. They would have chosen their party leader as leader of the council and committee chairs would have been allocated to ruling group members. Each committee would have had a Labour majority with other committee members allocated on a proportional basis. There would have been an informal cabinet of senior Labour councillors.
- 5.19** Taking the 2021 distribution of seats – see Table 3 - as no party had 36 councillors, no party had enough seats to form a majority group. In that situation there are two likely scenarios for the way the committee system would have operated.
- 5.20** The first option is that two or more parties would have formed a coalition to form a majority on the council. As the largest parties, any coalition would be likely to involve one or both of the Labour and/or Green Parties. While formally elected by the full council, the leader of the council would likely be the group leader of the largest party in that coalition. Interestingly, both Labour and Green parties won the same number of seats in 2021. In the event that those two parties agreed to form a coalition, the council leader would have emerged from a negotiation between coalition partners, and be confirmed by the full council.
- 5.21** Another scenario would have been that a minority administration is formed. It would be likely to involve one of either the Labour Party or the Green Party, plus one of the smaller parties. Again, while formally ratified by the full council, the leader would likely emerge from negotiations between those coalition partners and would probably be the leader of the largest party.
- 5.22** In either case, council committees would be formed that reflected the political balance of the council. Committee chairs would be distributed between the ruling party or coalition parties. In addition, councillors could decide to create an informal cabinet of senior councillors, again comprising senior members of coalition party members.

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## 6 DESIGNING AN APPROPRIATE GOVERNANCE SYSTEM FOR BRISTOL

- 6.1** On 5<sup>th</sup> May 2022 the citizens of Bristol will face a binary choice on the governance system for Bristol City Council. This decision is significant. The way that decisions are made in public authorities, and by whom, has impacts on such matters as the development of services and the allocation of resources, as well as on matters relating to representation, accountability, civic participation and the development of the collaborative problem-solving capacity of the city.
- 6.2** Moving directly to a referendum without prior and detailed consideration of all other options, as will now happen in Bristol, has restricted the debate about the reform of our system of city governance. Referendums can be useful in any democratic society, but the binary choice put to citizens should stem from a careful consideration of what that binary choice should be. In our view it would have been preferable to have set up a Bristol Governance Commission (or similar) to gather evidence on the strengths and weaknesses of alternative models, including the leader and cabinet model, before moving to a referendum. This would have enabled a wide-ranging examination of the strengths and weaknesses of different ways of improving city leadership and local democracy in Bristol. This participatory approach to governance reform has been used to good effect elsewhere – for example, by the Newham Democracy and Civic Participation Commission (Newham Democracy Commission, 2020).
- 6.3** However, the referendum still presents a huge opportunity for positive reform. The choice for policy-makers is much more nuanced than the binary presentation of two options in a referendum. Each system can be developed in various ways – ways that could strengthen and refresh local democracy or ways that could weaken the democratic vitality of the city and the effectiveness of city governance. As we have explained in this report both models have benefits and shortcomings. These pros and cons arise not only in relation to the models as they exist in abstract terms, they also arise in the way in which the chosen system of governance is designed, developed, and practiced in Bristol. There is an opportunity, legal provisions permitting, for Bristol to design a governance system, not just one that is well suited to fit its environment and political context, but also one that enhances the capacity of the city to take on current and future public policy challenges relating to, for example, post COVID-19 recovery, developing an inclusive economy, responding to the climate change crisis, and tackling growing social inequality. There is still, then, in our view, a role for a Bristol Governance Commission to help develop such a system.

- 6.4** The reports from the Bristol Civic Leadership Project identified several areas where there is scope for the improving the mayoral system of governance (Hambleton & Sweeting, 2015; Sweeting, et al, 2020). Topics where improvements could be made were identified including:
- Dispersing some power away from the mayoral office
  - Strengthening the roles of councillors
  - Revitalising neighbourhood governance
  - Inventing new ways of including more voices in urban governance
- 6.5** Our view is that these areas still offer ways for those involved in the design of mayoral governance to respond to criticisms of it. To take one example, in order to reduce the concentration of powers in the mayoral office, and to strengthen the roles of councillors, decision-making powers could be vested in cabinet members. Further roles of assistant mayor could also be created in order to spread leadership responsibilities amongst councillors.
- 6.6** A similar opportunity exists should the citizens of Bristol opt for a committee system. It was noted above how the Bristol Democracy Commission of 2001 pinpointed several problems with the committee system, including a lack of clear leadership and ability to identify decision-makers, and a lack of scrutiny of decisions. However, much has changed in the twenty years or so since the committee system was replaced in Bristol. Therefore, the opportunity exists not to 'go back' to a 20<sup>th</sup> century committee system, but rather to co-create a new kind of committee system which is designed specifically to respond to the needs of Bristol and the local political context of the present day.
- 6.7** The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny presents an array of potential options and innovations for the operation of the committee system, as well as for the leader and cabinet and mayoral systems (Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, 2021). Some innovations under the committee model include having streamlined committee systems rather than a conventional structure of service specific committees. Other innovations might create more identifiable leadership positions and swifter decision-making structures, countering criticisms that the committee system inevitably slows down decision-making, and that decision-makers are invisible. There is also an opportunity to learn from other councils who have adopted versions of the committee system in recent years, such as Reading, Brighton and Hove, Sheffield and Kingston upon Thames. Should citizens opt for the committee system in the referendum, there will be two years in which to consider how best to make the model work for Bristol when it is introduced in 2024.
- 6.8** In either case, the debate on how Bristol should be governed will not be brought to a close by the referendum in May. Rather, instead of closing down discussion it is helpful to view the period before and after the referendum as an opportunity to explore new possibilities. Those charged with developing an improved system of decision-making at Bristol City Council should be encouraged to widen the conversation and encourage fresh thinking. In our view a positive way of



developing an inclusive approach to improving the quality of civic leadership and local democracy in Bristol would be to set up an independent Bristol Governance Commission charged with the task of taking evidence, considering experience of city governance elsewhere in the world, and making recommendations to Bristol City Council.

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# APPENDIX 1

## RECENT TIMELINE AND IMPORTANT DATES

There have been three main eras in the governance of Bristol since 1995. These are presented in this timeline.

### **The committee model (1995-2000)**

**1995** Bristol City Council becomes a unitary authority and takes on all the local government functions in the area of Bristol City Council. Like other UK local authorities, it operates a committee system of decision-making

### **The leader and cabinet model (2000-2012)**

**2000** In keeping with the Labour Government of the day's modernisation agenda, Bristol City Council adopts a transitional leader and cabinet system of decision-making

**2001** Following the Local Government Act 2000, Bristol formally adopts a leader and cabinet system of decision-making

**2011** Under the Localism Act 2011, Bristol, like other large local authorities in England, is required to hold a referendum on whether to adopt a mayoral system of decision-making

### **The mayoral model (2012-present)**

**May 2012** Bristol votes yes in referendum to adopt a mayoral system for Bristol City Council

**Nov 2012** First directly elected mayor of Bristol takes office

**2016** Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016 passed, paving the way for creation of West of England Combined Authority (WECA) mayor, and enabling Bristol to hold another referendum on mayoral governance for Bristol City Council in the future should the city council decide to do so.

**2017** WECA is created, including the election of the first West of England metro mayor

**Dec 2021** Bristol City Council passes a resolution to hold a referendum on whether to replace the mayoral system with a committee system

**May 2022** Referendum on whether to retain the mayoral system, or to revert to a committee system

**May 2024** Depending on the outcome of the 2022 referendum the mayoral model will be retained or the committee system will be reintroduced.

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## APPENDIX 2

# THE EVOLUTION OF CITY GOVERNANCE AND POLITICAL CONTROL IN BRISTOL (1995-2022)

In this appendix we detail political control of the city council during its three governance phases. We have examined these changes in city leadership with considerable care and an augmented version of this table is available on the Bristol Civic Leadership Project website: [www.bristolcivicleadership.net](http://www.bristolcivicleadership.net).

With solid Labour majorities, there was one leader under the committee system from 1995 until 2000. When the council changed to a leader and cabinet system in 2000, with councillor elections in three years out of four, and changes in the political complexion of the council, there was instability in the political leadership of the city. There were seven changes of leadership in the ten years from 2002-2012. Following the introduction of a mayoral system in 2012, there have been two city leaders.



**Table 4** Governance phase, political control and leaders and directly elected mayors of Bristol City Council since 1995

Date	Governance phase	Political control of council	Leader
1995	Committee	Labour majority	George Micklewright (Labour)
1996			
1997			
1998			
1999			
2000	Leader and cabinet	Labour majority	Diane Bunyan (Labour)
2001			
2002			
May 2003			
June 2003			
Nov 2004		No overall control	No Leader
May 2005			
May 2006			
May 2007			
2008			
Feb 2009		No overall control	Barbara Janke (Liberal Democrat)
May 2009			
May 2010			
May 2011			
May 2012			
Nov 2012	Liberal Democrat majority	Helen Holland (Labour)	
2013			
2014			
2015			
2016			
2017	Liberal Democrat majority	Barbara Janke (Liberal Democrat)	
2018			
2019			
2020			
2021			
2022	Directly elected mayor	Simon Cook (Liberal Democrat)	
	No overall control	George Ferguson (Independent)	
	Labour majority	Marvin Rees (Labour)	
	No overall control		

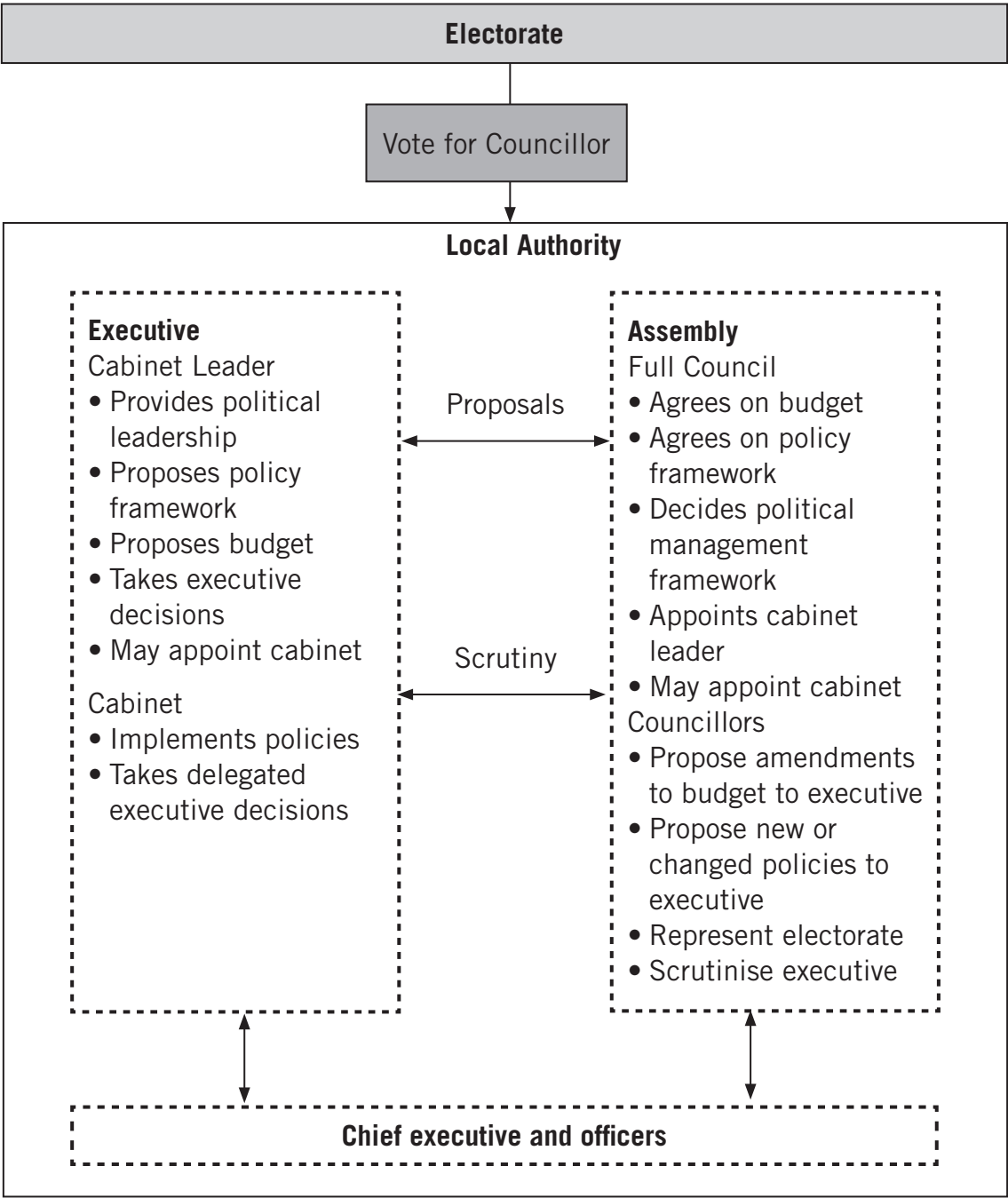
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## APPENDIX 3

### THE LEADER AND CABINET MODEL

In the leader and cabinet model, citizens vote for their ward councillor or councillors. The elected councillors then, in turn, choose who will be leader and who will serve in the cabinet. The leader and the cabinet form the executive of the city council. If there is a majority ruling group on the council, the leader and the cabinet would normally be from the majority party. If there is no majority, the leader would normally be from the largest party on the council. Cabinet posts would be filled with elected members from coalition parties, or from a single party if there was a minority administration. Councillors not appointed to the cabinet serve their communities by acting as ward representatives and they scrutinise the work of the executive, work on policy development and stimulate local civic activism in their ward.

**Figure 3** The leader and cabinet model of decision-making



Source: (Hambleton, 2015, p. 184)

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