

Committees and Working Groups – Definitions and powers.

Committees with delegated powers can make decisions on behalf of the full council, as set out in Terms of Reference. This means that the relevant skills and experience of individual councillors can be employed for the Council's benefit in a particular areas, speeding up council business by avoiding duplication of decision-making and creating more focused discussion. However, committees require formal agendas and minutes, which can increase the workload of the clerk considerably, as these need to be prepared, approved and made available to the public.¹ There is a potential for loss of control by the full council and a dilution of the democratic process if major decisions are taken at committee level. Such committees can be useful with larger councils in order to share the workload for councillors and promote efficient use of council time, but they are less useful for smaller councils with less than ten members; in these circumstances it is helpful to give individual councillors a 'portfolio' which relates to their particular interest; they can then report back to full council. Committees with delegated powers cannot approve the precept, borrow money or carry out some other financial activities. They also cannot appoint a clerk. They must have Terms of Reference, and are bound by several of the Council's statutory Standing Orders, including the fact that proper notice must be given of the meetings, and the public may attend.

Advisory committees and working groups are usually created by the Council for particular task, and all or some of the members, appointed by the Council, may be non-members; these committees or groups do not have delegated powers. They therefore have no power to make decisions on behalf of the council, but can make recommendations to full Council. Members may appointed to the group from within or outside the Council, with expertise or skills relevant to a particular topic to be researched. All recommendations have to be referred back to Council, which takes longer. The activities of these groups do not require formal agendas, minutes or public notice of meetings, nor is it necessary for members of the public to be invited to attend.

The LMPC Clerk has the delegated power to spend small sums of money, amount as previously agreed by the Council: this must be reported to the Council and recorded, as any other expenditure. The Clerk may represent the Council's minuted views at other public meetings if invited to do so by the Council.

Mary Sparks, CiLCA 2018.

¹ Local Government Act 1972, s.12, paragraphs 41 and 44.