
STAFF REPORT

To: Mayor and Council
Submitted by: Demetri Kachafanas, K.C., CAO
Date: July 30, 2026
Subject: Policy Updates: Council Policy Review Process and Committee

Recommendation

It is recommended that Council establish a special committee to review and provide direction on policies that relate specifically to Council before those policies are advanced to Council for formal debate or decision, and that Council appoint the Deputy Mayor as Chair.

Origin

Staff initiated.

Purpose

To clarify the respective roles of Council and staff in the development, review, and approval of Council policies, and to recommend a process for enhanced Council engagement before such policies proceed to a vote.

Background

Policies fall within the purview and decision making of Council. As such, it is important that Council have a clear and meaningful opportunity to provide feedback on policy direction, intent, scope, and content before these matters are advanced for formal consideration.

Staff serve in a support capacity to Council throughout this process. This includes researching best practices, identifying legislative or procedural considerations, preparing draft language, and providing recommendations for Council's consideration. While staff may author or draft policy documents, Council remains ultimately responsible for the decision-making process and final approval of policies within its authority.

Discussion

Recent information sessions and draft policy discussions have demonstrated that matters relating to Council governance require careful review. In some cases, preliminary drafts or discussion materials

have been interpreted as final positions before Council has had the opportunity to complete its deliberations.

Establishing a dedicated Council-led process for policies that relate specifically to Council would help ensure that elected officials are engaged earlier in the development process. It would also provide a forum for review, discussion, and refinement prior to a policy being presented for debate or decision at a regular meeting of Council.

A special committee of Council, with an appointed Chair, could provide this structure. The committee would review policies that relate specifically to Council, consider staff-prepared research and draft materials, provide direction on revisions, and determine when a policy is ready to be brought forward to Council for formal consideration.

The Deputy Mayor is recommended as Chair because the position provides an appropriate link between the Mayor's leadership role and the authority of Council as a whole. As the Deputy Mayor may be called upon to act in the Mayor's absence and support the continuity of Council leadership, the role is well suited to chair a Council-led policy review process. This approach is also consistent with the updated Deputy Mayor Policy being advanced for Council's consideration, which contemplates the role of Deputy Mayor in supporting Council governance and coordination. Council may appoint the Deputy Mayor or another member of Council as Chair, depending on Council's preference.

To avoid disruption in the advancement of Council-related policies, the Deputy Mayor would work with the Municipal Clerk to prepare draft Terms of Reference and bring forward a proposed committee structure for Council's consideration. Subject to Council's approval, a nominating meeting would then be called to consider committee membership and activate the committee. The proposed timeline for bringing the Terms of Reference and membership process forward is no later than August 2026.

The proposed committee would not replace Council debate or decision-making. Its purpose would be to improve the quality and readiness of Council-related policy materials before they return to Council in public session for consideration.

Proposed Committee Scope and Authority

The committee would be advisory in nature and would not approve Council policies on Council's behalf. Its role would be to review draft materials, provide direction to staff, identify issues requiring further consideration, and make recommendations to Council. Final debate, amendment, and approval of Council policies would remain with Council.

For clarity, Council-related policies may include policies or procedures dealing with Council governance, Council-staff relations, Council remuneration and expenses, meeting procedures, public participation at Council meetings, use of municipal resources by elected officials, councillor communications protocols, and other matters that directly affect Council's governance role. The committee would not normally review purely administrative, operational, human resources, procurement, departmental, or service-delivery policies unless Council determines that the matter directly affects Council governance or Council's statutory responsibilities.

Suggested Process Flow

A staged review process would provide additional clarity and reduce the risk of draft materials being misunderstood as final positions. The process could include: identifying the policy issue or Council direction; staff preparing background research, legislative review, and a jurisdictional scan; committee

review of the draft framework or policy; staff revisions based on committee direction; committee recommendation to Council; and final Council debate and decision.

Council may also wish to determine whether the committee is established for the duration of the policy modernization project, for the remainder of the Council term, or subject to review after a specific period. A review or sunset clause would allow Council to assess whether the process is improving policy development, transparency, and meeting efficiency.

Comparable Municipal Practices

The proposed approach is consistent with practices used in other Canadian municipalities, where committees, governance committees, policy committees, and policy governance frameworks are used to support more detailed review, role clarity, public transparency, and better-prepared recommendations before final Council consideration.

- **City of Winnipeg:** Winnipeg's Governance Committee of Council reviewed governance-review recommendations and reported back to Council with implementation recommendations. The governance review included a cross-jurisdictional review of other Canadian cities and considered Council roles, public accessibility, meeting information, and decision-making processes. Reference: City of Winnipeg, Governance Committee of Council Recommendations on the Governance Review, March 2025.
- **Municipality of North Middlesex:** North Middlesex has a Municipal Policy Committee Terms of Reference addressing committee composition, quorum, records retention, staff participation, mandate, and policy review responsibilities. Reference: Municipality of North Middlesex, Municipal Policy Committee Terms of Reference.
- **Halifax Regional Municipality:** Halifax uses boards, committees, and commissions to review matters and provide advice to staff, Regional Council, community councils, or standing committees.

Alternatives

Council may wish to consider alternative approaches to support earlier and more fulsome engagement on Council-related policies before they are advanced for decision. Options include:

- **More in-depth information sessions:** Council could receive additional information sessions on proposed policies, including background research, jurisdictional scans, legislative considerations, and key decision points before a draft is brought forward for formal consideration.
- **Staged policy review process:** Policies could be introduced in stages, beginning with a discussion paper or policy framework, followed by a draft policy, and then a final version for Council's consideration.
- **Status quo:** Council could continue with the current process, with staff preparing draft policies for Council's consideration through regular agenda processes; however, this may provide fewer opportunities for early Council input before a matter reaches a vote position.

Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications associated with establishing a Council-led policy review process. Administrative support would be required for agenda preparation, minutes, policy research, legal or procedural review, records management, and follow-up on committee direction; however, this work would be managed within existing staff resources where possible. If Council directs additional work requiring external expertise or significant staff capacity, any related costs would be brought forward for Council's consideration.

Risk Considerations

The recommended process may reduce governance and reputational risk by allowing Council-related policies to be reviewed and refined earlier, before formal debate or decision. This may also reduce the risk of preliminary materials being interpreted as final Council positions. A potential risk is that an additional committee process could lengthen timelines for policy approval; however, this can be managed through clear Terms of Reference, meeting schedules, reporting expectations, and a review or sunset clause.

Legal/Legislative Considerations

Council retains authority over policies within its jurisdiction. Staff would continue to support Council by identifying relevant legislative, procedural, records, privacy, accessibility, and governance considerations and by preparing draft materials for Council's review. Any special committee should be established in accordance with applicable municipal legislative and procedural requirements, including requirements relating to public meetings, closed sessions, records retention, and the Municipal Clerk's role in maintaining official records.

Accessibility and Equity Considerations

The proposed process should support accessible and inclusive participation by ensuring meeting materials are provided in clear language and accessible formats where possible. Where policies may affect public participation, governance access, or Council procedures, accessibility and equity considerations should be reviewed as part of the committee's policy analysis.

Public Engagement/Communications Considerations

Because Council-related policy matters may attract public interest, a defined review process may improve transparency by clarifying when materials are draft, when Council feedback is being sought, and when a policy is ready for formal debate or decision. Agendas and reports should clearly label materials as draft, for discussion, recommended for Council consideration, or final, as applicable. Communications should distinguish clearly between discussion materials, committee recommendations, and final Council-approved policy positions.

Committee agendas, minutes, reports, and recommendations should be maintained through the Office of the Municipal Clerk in accordance with applicable records management requirements. Public-facing updates should be provided where appropriate, while protecting confidential, privileged, personal, or closed-session information.

References

The following sources were reviewed for comparative purposes. They illustrate approaches used in other jurisdictions and do not replace Council's authority to determine the process most appropriate for CBRM.

- City of Winnipeg. *Governance Committee of Council Recommendations on the Governance Review*. March 2025.
<https://dmis.winnipeg.ca/DownloadMeetingDocument/763934/Governance%20Committee%20of%20Council%20Recommendations%20on%20the%20Governance%20Review.pdf>
- Municipality of North Middlesex. *Municipal Policy Committee Terms of Reference*.
<https://www.northmiddlesex.on.ca/sites/default/files/2026-04/Policy%20Committee%20-%20Terms%20of%20Reference.pdf>
- Halifax Regional Municipality. *Boards, Committees and Commissions*.
<https://www.halifax.ca/city-hall/boards-committees-commissions>

- Halifax Regional Municipality. *Agendas, Meetings and Reports*. <https://www.halifax.ca/city-hall/agendas-meetings-reports>

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