Thoughts on Governing Body Committees

1. Committees may subvert the principle that all governing body members should receive the same information at the same time. No member or group of members should have access to information that is not equally available to the entire governing body.

2. Committees can undermine the principle that the Board or Council operates as a single entity, acting by majority vote. A minority group should not assume or appear to assume decision-making authority.

3. Committees impose administrative burdens on staff, including the need to prepare agendas, take minutes or notes, comply with FOIA requirements, and attend multiple meetings.

4. Committees may stray into operational areas, such as personnel management, that are the responsibility of the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO).

5. Some issues are multi-faceted and may fall under the jurisdiction of more than one committee. In such cases, it is often more efficient to bring the matter directly to the full governing body for consideration.

6. Committees or individual committee members may assume responsibilities that rightly belong to staff. While members are free to explore issues independently, staff should be tasked with outlining issues, providing background, offering alternative actions, and defining expected outcomes. These materials should be shared with all governing body members simultaneously.

7. Clearly defining each committee's responsibilities and authority improves efficiency. Issues that are thoroughly discussed in committee should not be rehashed at the full Board or Council meeting. Broad matters, such as the budget, are best handled by the full governing body.

8. Committees can be valuable in certain contexts, but they should operate under a clearly defined charter. This charter should specify the committee's purpose, scope, roles, responsibilities, and authority. Generally, committees should only provide recommendations to the full governing body and should not be empowered to make policy or allocate resources.