



Final Report: Norfolk County Council Council Governance Effectiveness Review

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Introduction

Dave Bennett Consulting completed a governance review for Norfolk County Council to assess the council's decision-making process, council's productivity at meetings, the roles of the mayor and council members for meeting effectiveness, the dynamics of members of council, and the effectiveness of council's decision-making during meetings.

Following the review and analysis, a training workshop was conducted to cover:

- a summary of the results of the governance review,
- best practices in conducting effective meetings,
- the recommended role of the Chair and council members at meetings,
- how to conduct successful meetings as required by the organization's Procedural By-law, and Robert's Rules of Order - Latest Edition, and
- Provide tools and methods to deal with conflicts & disputes at meetings.

Method Used

The study was conducted in 3 phases and was designed to ensure all council members and senior staff had full input into the process.

Data Collection

Phase I had two parts: the first, to observe and analyze numerous past meetings of Council, and the second, to develop and conduct an on-line survey to determine the effectiveness of Council's current decision-making process and assess how council interacts at meetings, individually and as a team.

Phase II involved independent telephone interviews with all councilors, the mayor, and Norfolk County senior staff, including the previous Chief Administrative Officer. This phase obtained feedback on meeting context and solicited opinions about council effectiveness, meeting effectiveness, the decision-making process, and the desired training deliverables.

The results of the individual responses to the online survey and individual interviews are confidential and were not discussed during training and are not outlined in this report. The results of Phase I and Phase II were analyzed to determine the actual needs and focus of the training workshop.

Training Workshop

Phase III consisted of a 3–4-hour interactive training workshop, followed by a question-and-answer session with the consultant parliamentarian.

Strengths and Limitations

All councilors, the mayor and senior staff were prepared to discuss the issues and willingly participated in the process. All participants were open and candid in providing the consultant with information needed to complete a thorough analysis and the determine training needs.

Many concerns were raised in the survey and interviews which could not be addressed by the consultant, as they were outside the scope of the contract terms. However, they are covered in the Key Findings and Recommendations outlined below for Council's information and consideration.

Key Findings

1. All council members and staff are committed to doing their best on behalf of the County and its constituents.
2. Many members of Council have little or no previous experience on committees, boards of directors, or councils, and are therefore unfamiliar with parliamentary processes and rules of procedure, including the Council Code of Conduct.
3. Most council members are concerned with the frequent changeover of senior staff during this Council's term.
4. Observations made at meetings and consensus from interviews indicates there is a strong need for better and consistent application of parliamentary rules of order and procedure during meetings.
5. Meeting time is sometimes wasted reviewing agenda items with a few councilors, indicating a possible lack of preparation, or councilors not seeking clarification of questions prior to the meeting.
6. There is a tendency in council meetings to get off topic, discuss past issues or events, and rehash points that have already been voted on.
7. Many councilors stressed feeling bullied and had a lack of confidence in current council leadership.
8. Interpersonal conflicts are evident during meetings, often leading to inappropriate comments, arguments and wasted productive meeting time.
9. Many councilors fear speaking up during debate, or when necessary, for fear of immediate or post-meeting retaliation. This prevents open discussion and new ideas from being

considered.

10. There is a perceived lack of buy-in to decisions from some councilors who voted against a decision that was adopted by council. This destroys trust and council team effectiveness.
11. Conducting virtual meetings during Covid-19 is a factor in reducing both meeting effectiveness and team building.

Summary

- All council members are committed. They desire to do their best for Norfolk County and are seeking improvement to the current system.
- The consultant conducted a three-phase governance review process to assess Council effectiveness from all perspectives.
- Effectiveness of council has been hampered by frequent staff turnover, interpersonal conflict that is not addressed, and absence of and adherence to formal process that would improve efficiency and effectiveness.
- The consultant has prepared 5 recommendations that address key findings for Council to consider.

Recommendations

1. Apply parliamentary rules of order and procedure consistently during all council meetings, including closed meetings.
2. Instruct Council on the use and implementation of Robert's Rules of Order and parliamentary procedure, immediately following an election. This should also be conducted with new members that are elected in between official election periods.
3. Provide coaching to the Mayor and Committee Chairs on tactics for chairing meetings effectively.
4. Conduct regular assessments of the following activities as follows:
 - a. Council meeting effectiveness following each meeting.
 - b. Council performance and effectiveness evaluated annually.
 - c. Self-assessment by councilors annually.
5. Consider introducing conflict resolution remediation to address interpersonal conflicts that hamper council effectiveness.