

Future of the GWG

Officers' Recommendations

To support Option 2, set out in the Officers' paper

1. Background

The Authority is committed to having strong governance and procedures in place. It is important that all Members are aware of and have the opportunity to input into the development of key D&S IFCA policy and strategy documentation, and consider if it will be approved and implemented. This will continue regardless of which option is selected by the Authority relating to the continuation of the Governance Working Group (GWG) or disbanding the GWG.

This Officers' paper is to assist Members in determining to what extent Members wish to be involved in D&S IFCA's governance work, in particular during the development of documentation for presentation to the Authority.

The Governance Working Group – History & Function

The GWG was established by the Authority in 2020 and has its own Terms of Reference (last updated June 2024). Dr Pamela Buchan (Vice Chair of the Authority) is the Chair of the GWG. The role of the GWG is to support the work of the Authority and its Officers by undertaking the following tasks:

1. Support the development of the overarching strategies to deliver the Authority's vision
2. Review the Authority's governance structure and procedures
3. Support the production of the Authority's Schemes of Delegation
4. Support the development of the Authority's draft Annual Plans and Reports
5. Support the development of policies on advocacy and communications to improve dialogue with stakeholders

The above broad responsibilities can, and have, translated into specific pieces of work set out in D&S IFCA's Annual Plans. It is important to recognise that the GWG has a supportive role, and has **no delegated powers** for decision making. All work undertaken by the GWG relating to the above functions are reported to/presented to the Authority for approval.

It was envisaged that the GWG could assist Officers, in between Authority meetings to develop documentation for presentation to the Authority with the mixture of skills and background knowledge of Members being utilised. The GWG may also agree to invite external service providers as and when required. Members of the GWG are encouraged to work independently of Officers when this is required. This can include sharing information in emails such as ideas, templates, draft working and communicating via personal interaction, including telephone and video calling. When GWG meetings are required, this can be undertaken virtually, but at least three Members of the GWG must be present for the meeting to be quorate. To date the GWG has supported Officers to deliver a range of outcomes including, the Job Evaluation process, an updated Members' Induction Booklet and the current Schemes of Delegation. Discussion at GWG meetings relating to communications were also the catalyst for development of more visually appealing Annual Plans and Annual Reports.

3. Commitment and Membership the GWG

When the GWG was established a core group of Members, numbering around eight, made up the GWG, with an open invite for any Members of the Authority to join the group. The early initiatives for working included the development of a GWG Catalogue to help share contact details, organise and prioritise workstreams and report on the status of those tasks. A GWG website page (secure area of D&S IFCA's website) was developed and maintained to provide drafts of documents and relevant background information. The Chair of the GWG and Officers experimented with use of an online Miro (ideas) board for GWG Members to use with the link on the GWG website page. Over time some of the original Members of the GWG left the Authority and the initial initiatives for the GWG became unused or were forgotten.

As set out in the GWG Terms of Reference, any Member of the Authority or its Officers may join the GWG. Officers fully appreciate that General Members of the Authority are volunteers and have limited time to support the Authority's work. Elected and Statutory Members are also very busy with other commitments beyond the work of the Authority. In the last two years it has become apparent that most likely time pressure, rather than a lack of interest, has prevented Authority Members being able to commit to active participation as part of the GWG. The position of Vice Chair of the GWG was not filled in 2024 and calls for greater participation in the GWG have received limited feedback. The functionality and vision of what the GWG was intended to be able to achieve has therefore been significantly compromised.

4. Delays in Work and Complications

Some workstreams assigned to the GWG can be complicated to deliver and do take time. Through no fault of the Chair of the GWG, Officers, and Authority Members participating in GWG meetings, the infrequency of the GWG meetings has resulted in some key workstreams being delayed and momentum progressing these tasks has been lost. Other priorities may emerge or potentially too much was expected from the GWG in a given time frame. An example is the review of D&S IFCA's Communication Strategy which began in 2021 but has not been discussed at any GWG meetings in 2024 or 2025.

New Members joining the GWG part way through the development of work, or those that were active but not able to retain that commitment, may need further background information or explanation of how work had developed to a particular stage if they became actively involved once again. Significant delays developing documentation can amount to the same as beginning the task again from the beginning.

5. An Alternative to the GWG

Officers have a close working relationship with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Authority, and the Chair of the Byelaw and Permitting Sub-Committee (B&PSC). This working relationship covers a range of issues that goes beyond identified governance work, but does include preparing information for presentation to the full Authority, and the B&PSC. There is regular interaction between these Authority Members and D&S IFCA's Senior Management Team, including email correspondence and virtual meetings. This is a dynamic and effective working arrangement.

Regarding governance work, and producing new documentation, these Authority Members are often heavily involved when they have time to support Officers. With this support or not, Officers must progress different workstreams in a timely way to recognise the commitments

agreed by all Authority Members as set out in D&S IFCA's Annual Plans and to meet the expectations of stakeholders for delivery of different work.

There is an administration burden associated with running the GWG, for example the need for formal appointments at the Authority AGM, mass invites to GWG meetings, organising those meetings, circulating drafts, or organising doodle polls. This can be an inefficient use of Officers' time. It is the view of Officers that there is an alternative to retaining the GWG, whilst still achieving good governance and transparency.

The alternative is for the close working relationship with the Chair, Vice Chair and Chair of the B&PSC to continue, but to demonstrate this more formally within the Schemes of Delegation and potentially role profiles for these three Members. Officers will view these Members as first point of support for a range of work, including tasks already identified for the GWG for 2025/2026. Work will still be planned, discussed and examined in depth prior to presentation to the Authority.

Prior to the development of a specific workstream as identified in the Annual Plan, any Member of the Authority can still choose to become actively involved and be included in any related correspondence or drafting work. Members are able to notify Officers of their interest in specific subjects prior to or at the Authority meeting when the Annual Plan is approved. In addition, when documentation is presented to the Full Authority for approval, all Members have the opportunity to scrutinise the presented work and comment. All papers and reports¹ presented to the Authority are published in advance of Authority meetings.

If new documentation, for example the D&S IFCA Communications Strategy, is presented for approval by the Authority, this does not prevent further comment and amendment by Members being achieved at Authority meetings.

6. Amending the Scheme of Delegation

If disbanding the GWG is agreed, parts of the Schemes of Delegation will be amended.

Action / Function	Previous Responsibility (pre-October 2022)	Responsibility (from October 2022)	Policy Reference
Ensuring that the Authority is appropriately represented at local and national relevant meetings.	Chief Officer	Chief Officer	Job Profile
Ensuring that the objectives of the Authority's Communication Strategy & Annual Plans are delivered.	Chief Officer	Chief Officer	Job Profile
Support the development of the overarching strategies to deliver the Authority's vision.	GWG	GWG	GWG Terms of Reference
Reviewing the Authority's governance structure and procedures.	GWG	GWG	GWG Terms of Reference
Support the production of the Authority's Scheme of Delegation.	GWG	GWG	GWG Terms of Reference
Support the development of the Authority's draft Annual Plans and Reports.	GWG	GWG	GWG Terms of Reference
Support the development of policies on advocacy and communications to improve dialogue with stakeholders.	GWG	GWG	GWG Terms of Reference

¹ Other than exempted information under the Local Government Act 1972

The supportive tasks currently allocated to the GWG in the Scheme of Delegations, can be transferred to the Chair, Vice Chair and B&PSC Chair. This would not prevent any Authority Member being able to participate in discussions and input into work as described above.

7. Options

Officers have set out two options below for Members to consider and choose from:

1. **To continue with the GWG, and seek a nomination for the Chair, Vice Chair and identify additional members.**
2. **To transfer the supportive role of the GWG to the Chair, Vice Chair and Chair of the B&PSC and amend the Authority's Scheme of Delegation.**

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

Background Papers

- [GWG Terms of Reference \(2024\)](#)
- [D&S IFCA Schemes of Delegation \(V 1.0 - October 2022\)](#)

End.