



GOVERNANCE IN ACTION

STRENGTHENING DELIBERATION Through Empowered Committee Systems in City Governments

Why committees matter in city governments?

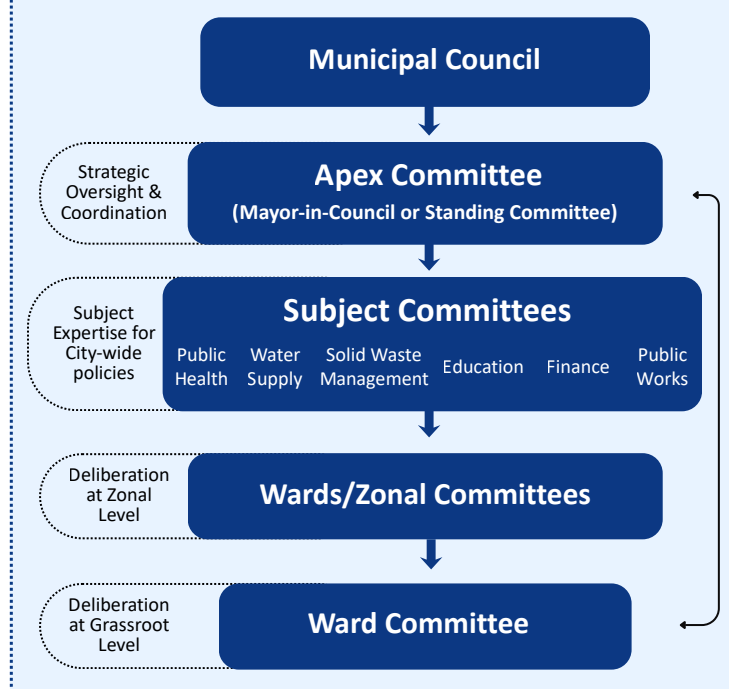
City governments make hundreds of decisions every year on water supply, sanitation, roads, public health, education, transport and municipal finances. While the Municipal Council is the highest decision-making body, it cannot examine every issue in detail. Committees are the engine of municipal deliberation. They enable elected representatives to:

- ✓ Study issues in detail
- ✓ Review proposals
- ✓ Monitor implementation
- ✓ Hold administration accountable
- ✓ Build consensus
- ✓ Bring local issues into city-level decision making

Without active committees, council meetings often become platforms for only approving proposals rather than informed discussion. Good deliberation leads to better decisions. Better decisions lead to better public services.

An Ideal Committee System

A strong city government requires deliberation at both city-wide and neighbourhood levels.



This structure ensures that:

- city-wide policies are discussed by subject experts,
- local issues are deliberated close to citizens,
- decisions move efficiently from discussion to implementation.

While serving as the Member of Parliament for Westminster, John Stuart Mill during an 1866 parliamentary debate on reform, addressed the misconception that politicians should only be "delegates" bound to specific local demands. He famously declared that he did not go to Parliament to merely represent a specific demographic, but rather to speak for the broader principles of truth and justice.

"A representative assembly exists not merely to decide, but to deliberate."

— John Stuart Mill, Considerations on Representative Government (1861)

The same principle applies to City Governments today.





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Key Features of an Effective Committee system



Regular meetings at least once every month



Decentralised local deliberation through **Wards/Zonal committees**



Subject-based committees for Finance, Public Health, Water Supply, Sanitation, Environment, Etc.



Active participation of councillors in **at least one committee**



Good Practices from Indian Cities

Examples of city governments in strengthening committee systems to improve deliberation.



Bhopal, Raipur, Kolkata, Patna, Guwahati

Mayor-in-Council system where subject committees deliberate on sectoral issues and the Mayor-in-Council takes collective executive decisions.

Mumbai & Ahmedabad

Standing Committee constituted based on proportional political representation. Meets regularly and exercises important financial powers including scrutiny of municipal budgets.

Kochi

Every councillor serves on at least one standing committee. Working Groups include officials, experts, civil society organisations and citizens, enabling collaborative decision making.



Recommendations for Stronger Committee Systems

To strengthen municipal deliberation, State Municipal Acts should ensure:



01

Mandatory constitution of subject committees*



04

Clearly defined roles and powers



02

Mandatory constitution of Wards/Zonal committees*



05

Ensuring the participation of every councillor in at least one committee.



03

Regular committee meetings: Weekly Standing Committee meetings and Monthly Council meetings*



06

Strong linkage between committees and council decision making



*as per State Municipal Corporation Act

Conclusion

Stronger committee systems strengthen municipal deliberation, encourage wider participation, and make decision-making more transparent and accountable. They ensure that policies are examined thoroughly, local priorities are reflected, and elected representatives play a meaningful role in shaping outcomes. In doing so, they create more inclusive, responsive, and effective City Governments.