

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

NOTES OF A MEETING OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY SELECT COMMITTEE FRAMEWORK TASK & FINISH PANEL

**HELD ON MONDAY, 21 JANUARY 2019
IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET, EPPING
AT 7.00 - 8.20 PM**

Members Present:	Councillors P Bolton (Chairman), R Jennings (Vice-Chairman), N Bedford, G Chambers, D Dorrell, A Patel, M Sartin, H Whitbread, J H Whitehouse
Other members present:	Councillors A Lion, G Mohindra
Apologies for Absence:	Councillor H Brady
Officers Present	G Blakemore (Strategic Director), G. Nicholas (Interim Transformation Manager), R Pavey (Service Director (Customer Services)), S Tautz (Democratic Services Manager)

1. CHAIRMAN & VICE-CHAIRMAN

Members noted that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had appointed Councillor P. Bolton as Chairman of the Task and Finish Panel and Councillor R. Jennings as Vice-Chairman of the Panel.

The Democratic Services Manager reported that, since the publication of the agenda for the meeting, Councillors N. Bedford, M. Sartin and H. Whitbread had notified the Chief Executive of their wish to be members of the Panel. Councillor N. Bedford indicated that he understood that Councillor H. Brady also wished to be a member of the Panel and it was recognised that the current chairmen and vice-chairmen of the select committees were well represented amongst the membership of the Panel.

Councillor M. Sartin expressed disappointment at the level of attendance at the meeting from other members that had raised concern to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in relation to the initial proposals for the restructure of the select committee framework, that had been considered by the Committee in October 2019. The Panel requested that an item be included in the next edition of the Council Bulletin encouraging such members to participate in the review process being undertaken by the Panel.

2. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Panel noted its following terms of reference, which had been agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 18 December 2018:

- (a) That the Panel consider the future structure of the select committee framework to ensure that it complements the new executive portfolio and management structure of the Council, taking into consideration the options presented to the Committee at its meeting held on 29 October 2018;
- (b) That the Panel consider:

- (i) the retention of the existing framework of four select committees;
 - (ii) the introduction of an alternative framework of four select committees aligned with the new portfolio and service structure and the responsibilities of each select committee, to present opportunities for increased efficiency and effectiveness in scrutiny activity;
 - (iii) the introduction of an alternative framework of two or three select committees aligned with the new portfolio and service structure. and the responsibilities of each select committee, to present opportunities for increased efficiency and effectiveness in scrutiny activity; and
 - (iv) any other structure arrangement considered appropriate; and
- (c) That the Panel consider arrangements to ensure that reports in respect of the Council's adopted key performance indicators are made to the select committees as soon after the end of the relevant quarter as possible, and how best such reports can be presented to assist members in scrutinising performance against appropriate targets and the financial and resource implications for the authority; and
- (d) That the Panel review the terms of reference of the existing select committees in terms of relevance and consider whether these could be improved.

3. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY SELECT COMMITTEE FRAMEWORK - REVIEW

The Panel considered the scope of its review of the existing select committee framework, having regard to the terms of reference for the review that had been agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in October 2018. The Chairman reminded members that it was important to focus the effort of the Panel on the formulation of recommendations in respect of a future select committee framework, in order to achieve the timescale for the review.

Councillor J. H. Whitehouse suggested that the Council's ongoing scrutiny activity should be more focussed on issues of concern to local residents and that complaint data should be utilised to inform the development of relevant work programme priorities for the select committees. Councillor Whitehouse also reinforced the need to ensure the appropriate use of task and finish panels and innovative methods of scrutiny in the delivery of scrutiny priorities, as recommended in overview and scrutiny training programmes previously provided for members. The Panel noted that very few meetings of the existing select committees were currently webcast.

Councillor R. Jennings drew attention to a report published by the Communities and Local Government (CLG) Committee in 2017, on the effectiveness of local authority overview and scrutiny, which had made a number of recommendations for revision to Government guidance on the operation of overview and scrutiny committees. The Panel noted that the report of the CLG Committee had been considered at a joint meeting of the overview and scrutiny chairmen and vice-chairmen in March 2018 and that the Government had undertaken to publish revised guidance by the end of 2018, although this was still awaited.

Councillor Jennings also suggested that the review of the select committee framework should encompass the role of the Audit and Governance Committee, although it was noted that this did not fall within the scope of the review agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. It was also reported that guidance issued by

the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy required that the Audit and Governance Committee be independent of both the Council's executive and scrutiny functions and be directly accountable to the authority's governing body. The Panel noted that changes to the role and responsibilities of the Audit and Governance Committee were not within the remit of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and would need to be considered by the Council, on the recommendation of the Constitution Working Group.

Councillor G. Chambers suggested that the Council's scrutiny activities should be focussed on issues where such activity could make a positive difference to its customers and achieve outcomes, and that it might be appropriate to review the terms of reference of each of the existing select committees to ensure that scrutiny activity remained meaningful. Councillor Chambers also highlighted that it was important that the role and responsibilities of the Standards Committee continue to be independent of the executive and scrutiny functions.

Councillor D. Dorrell highlighted a need for the Panel to be able to understand the roles and responsibilities within the Council's new management structure in order to inform the development of appropriate scrutiny priorities. The Strategic Director advised that the new Leadership Team had adopted a cross-service working approach that was bringing benefits in terms of the reduction in 'silo' based working arrangements and that recruitment to the Service Manager positions was to be completed shortly.

Councillors A. Lion and G. Mohindra drew the attention of the Panel to the distinction between the Council's 'Overview' (policy development) and 'Scrutiny' (decision-making) responsibilities and the need to ensure that adequate resources were directed towards 'overview' activities and the influencing of policy development through appropriate pre-scrutiny where necessary, which may not have routinely been the case in the past. The recent decision of the Cabinet with regard to the Accommodation Strategy and the possible relocation of services to North Weald, which had been subject to call-in, was highlighted as an example of an issue that might have benefitted from increased overview arrangements, although members were reminded that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had an opportunity at each meeting to review the Cabinet's forward plan of key decisions, to identify areas for appropriate pre-scrutiny activity.

The Strategic Director outlined the Council's new cross-working approach and its project and programme management environment, based on the three Corporate Plan themes of 'Stronger Council', 'Stronger Place' and 'Stronger Community', which Leadership Team considered could be adapted to provide a new form of select committee framework focussed on the authority's key priorities and outcomes. The Strategic Director illustrated how key projects, programmes and 'business as usual' activity might be accommodated within a framework of three select committees going forward and how the consideration of performance monitoring information (Corporate Plan and Key Performance Indicators) by a single select committee might best address the concerns of some members that reports should be made as soon after the end of the relevant quarter as possible to assist members in scrutinising performance against appropriate targets. The Panel was advised that service directors had been requested to undertake a review of the existing suite of performance indicators for continued relevance and to ensure that appropriate indicators were developed to bring visibility to key issues not currently subject to appropriate reporting measures. The Strategic Director confirmed that it was intended that, in future, performance reporting against relevant objectives and indicators would be made on an exception basis only.

The Panel considered that proposals for the future structure of the select committee framework on the Corporate Plan themes of 'Council', 'Place' and 'Community', together with appropriate terms of reference and arrangements for the development of work programmes, should be further developed, and that such proposals should also ensure flexibility in terms of unforeseen issues, the continued use of task and finish panels and appropriate methods of scrutiny activity. Members requested that all service areas be aligned to the proposed framework, to ensure that all services continued to have a reporting route for overview and scrutiny activity

Councillor R. Jennings advised the Panel that he had also attended a recent training session on successful overview and scrutiny arrangements facilitated by the Local Government Association (LGA) and that it might be appropriate to consider whether the LGA might be available to make a similar presentation to the Council.

AGREED:

- (1) That the future structure of the select committee framework, based on the Corporate Plan themes of 'Council', 'Place' and 'Community' be supported in principle and be further developed for consideration at the next meeting of the Panel;
- (2) That, subject to (1) above, appropriate terms of reference be developed for the new select committees, for consideration at a future meeting of the Panel;
- (3) That, subject to (1) above, the Panel consider arrangements for the development of flexible work programmes for the new select committees;
- (4) That the proposed consideration of performance monitoring information by a single select committee be supported in principle, subject to the rationalisation of current performance reporting arrangements and a move to exception-based reporting;
- (5) That, in accordance with the scope of its review, the Panel review the terms of reference of the existing select committees at its next meeting;
- (6) That the Service Director (Customer Services) investigate opportunities for the routine webcasting of meetings of the new select committees;
- (7) That, if published during the period of the review of the select committee framework, the Government's revised guidance on the effectiveness of overview and scrutiny committees be considered by the Panel at a future meeting; and
- (8) That the training session on successful overview and scrutiny arrangements facilitated by the Local Government Association be considered for presentation to the Council as part of the Member Development Programme for 2019/20.

4. WORK PROGRAMME 2018/19

The Panel noted its initial work programme, alongside the matters agreed to progress the review of the select committee framework. Members noted that the Chairman would provide an update to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the progress of the review, at its meeting to be held on 26 February 2019.

5. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Panel was to be held at 7.00pm on 31 January 2019.

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