

Report to Audit and Governance Committee

Report Reference: AGC-014-2014/15
Date of Meeting: 24 November 2014



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Leader

Subject: Overview and Scrutiny Panel Framework - Review

Responsible Officer: Stephen Tautz (01992 564180)

Democratic Services: Gary Woodhall (01992 564470)

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

(1) That the Committee considers the operation of the current overview and scrutiny panel framework and options for a future panel structure.

Executive Summary

This report provides details of possible options for the future structure of the Council's overview and scrutiny panel framework, as part of a review being undertaken by a Task and Finish Panel during 2014/15.

Reasons for proposed decision:

Future scrutiny arrangements for certain functions within the responsibility of the Governance Directorate, may have implications for audit and governance matters.

Other options for action:

None. This report is presented at the specific request of the Chairman of the Audit and Governance Committee.

Report

1. At its meeting on 25 February 2014, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee established a new Task and Finish Panel to review the existing framework of the Council's scrutiny panels and make recommendations for how the structure could best complement the new management structure of the Council. The remit of the Task and Finish Panel is only to address the future structure of the scrutiny panel framework, and wider constitutional aspects or the operation of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee itself, are excluded from the scope of the review exercise.

2. The Task and Finish Panel has met on two occasions so far, to agree the terms of reference for the review and to receive feedback from some of the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of the existing panels, service directors and lead officers, regarding the operation of the current panel structure.

3. At the time of the establishment of the Panel by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Chairman of the Audit and Governance Committee expressed reservation in

respect of future scrutiny arrangements for certain functions within the responsibility of the Governance Directorate, including audit and standards matters. It is understood that the Chairman was particularly concerned as to how these such arrangements would interrelate with the work of the Audit and Governance and Standards Committees, if the scrutiny panel framework was aligned with the management structure in future

4. The Chairman of the Committee has been unavailable to attend meetings of the Task and Finish Panel to present his views in respect of a possible directorate-aligned panel arrangement, but has requested that an item be placed on this agenda to enable the Committee to formally participate in the review process and make appropriate comment to the Task and Finish Panel as part of the evidence gathering phase of its review. It is hoped that the Vice-Chairman of the Task and Finish Panel, Councillor M. Sartin, will be able to attend the meeting to present this item on behalf of the Chairman, Councillor K. Angold-Stephens.

5. Details of the current panel arrangement and a possible framework aligned with the management structure, as originally considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in February 2014 is attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

6. This report also presents a further option for a scrutiny panel model based on five thematic 'Select Committees' that broadly reflect the existing panel structure. This approach allows for scrutiny responsibilities to be allocated appropriately, as the current arrangements appear to have resulted in a situation where not all service areas are subject to scrutiny (if required) or allocated to a particular panel for scrutiny purposes. An indicative illustration of this option is attached as Appendix 2.

7. Both of these options would continue to provide for relevant scrutiny activity to also occur by way of the creation of task and finish panels (as necessary), would ensure that all services have a 'reporting' route for overview and scrutiny and that there is clear scope to the scrutiny activities of each Committee. Both of these options are supported by Management Board.

8. The establishment of an 'Audit and Standards Select Committee' as part of the thematic approach, would allow this body to act in a cross-cutting role and assume some of the responsibilities previously identified for the responsibility of the Governance Scrutiny Panel in the earlier proposed directorate-aligned model. This option could allow the existing Audit and Governance and Standards Committees to be absorbed into the new 'Audit and Standards Select Committee. Under this option, the existing Constitution and Member Services Scrutiny Panel could be re-established as a task and finish panel, in order to complete the ongoing review of the Constitution. At this point it could then be disbanded and any future related workload transferred to the new Audit and Standards Select Committee.

9. The Committee is requested to consider the operation of the current overview and scrutiny panel framework and the options for a future panel structure identified within this report, and to comment to the Task and Finish Panel as part of its review, as appropriate.

10. The views of the Committee in this respect will be presented to the Task and Finish Panel at its meeting on 25 November 2014, when all options for the future framework of the overview and scrutiny panels, including the adoption of a 'commissioning' model and the retention of the existing framework, will be considered

Resource Implications:

Resource requirements arising from revisions to the future structure of the Council's overview and scrutiny panel framework will need to be identified.

Legal and Governance Implications:

There are no legal implications or Human Rights Act issues arising from the recommendations of this report.

Safer, Cleaner, Greener Implications:

There are no implications arising from the recommendations of this report in respect of the Council's commitment to the Climate Local Agreement, the corporate Safer, Cleaner, Greener initiative, or any crime and disorder issues within the district.

Consultation Undertaken:

This report is presented at the specific request of the Chairman of the Audit and Governance Committee. Consultation on a preferred option for the future structure of the Council's overview and scrutiny panel framework will be undertaken with all members and relevant stakeholders

Background Papers:

None

Riak Management:

Failure to consider best practice in terms of audit and governance matters could have negative implications for the Council's reputation and for judgements made about the progress or governance of the authority.

Equality:

There are no equality issues arising from the recommendations of this report.