

**OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY
REVIEW OF OPERATION**
(Report by Head of Administration)

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 At an informal meeting of Members of both Overview & Scrutiny Panels held on 28th July 2005, the attached report (Annex A) was considered to comply with the requirements of the CPA Improvement Plan for the Panels to implement their development plan and integrate the corporate performance management framework into the scrutiny process.
- 1.2 Work on the latter is ongoing and the informal meeting concentrated on reviewing the development plan and the working practices of the Panels, together with the preparation of a new Action Plan.

2. REVIEW OF OPERATION

- 2.1 In reviewing their existing development plan, Members acknowledged that the working practices of the two panels had diverged somewhat in the past 18 months with some of the ideas previously approved having been trialled and proving successful in the case of one or other of the panels only. The discussion also had regard to the outcome of a visit to Maidstone earlier in the year by a number of Members to observe that authority's scrutiny arrangements.
- 2.2 On the whole, Members felt that scrutiny was operating well in Huntingdonshire with many of the measures contained in the development plan being welcomed and valued. However there remained concern over the capacity of two panels to undertake the workload of overview and scrutiny and Members were conscious of the remarks of CPA inspectors that panel agenda were 'congested'. There was an acknowledgement that the panels need to avoid duplication and overlap and that there has been a growing prevalence for joint meetings of the panels to be held to discuss issues of major significance. Nevertheless, Members also were aware that the Council has consistently rejected the establishment of a third panel.
- 2.3 To address the dilemma, Members propose a change to the size and terms of reference of the existing panels and the replacement of the present joint meetings by a new panel with membership drawn from the two existing panels. The new format would be:

Service Delivery Panel

Service Support Panel

Cabinet portfolios of –

Environment & Transport
Leisure
Housing & Public Health
Planning Strategy

Finance
Resources & Policy
Operations & Information
Technology

Management Team have invited the Panels to adopt a variation in the allocation of portfolios by transferring Planning Strategy to the Service Delivery Panel and Operations to Service Support. This would entail Service Delivery scrutinising four portfolios and Service Support three. While some synergy might be achieved by aligning Planning Strategy with Environment and Transport, others would be lost by moving Operations to Service Support.

The constitution currently provides for a maximum membership of each panel of 16 and it is proposed that 15 be appointed to each panel compared with the current number of 12. All other aspects of the present arrangements will remain unchanged.

- 2.4 In addition, Members suggest that a third panel be formed, again with a membership of 15 and the title of 'Corporate and Strategic Framework', to deal with matters of a corporate nature, the strategic and financial framework of the Council and issues of major significance, including the budget and financial strategy, community strategy, corporate plan and replacement office accommodation project. Membership will comprise 5 Members nominated by each panel, including the chairmen and vice-chairmen, plus an additional 5 Members co-opted on a meeting by meeting basis from either of the other two panels. Meetings of the new panel will be held on an ad hoc basis, potentially on the same evening as one of the other panels. The chairmanship of the new panel will be shared by the two existing chairmen, dependent upon the subject area under discussion. Chairmanship will therefore fluctuate between and possibly within meetings, thereby avoiding the necessity for the payment of an additional Special Responsibility Allowance.
- 2.5 Agenda for the Corporate and Strategic Framework Panel will be sent to the full membership of the other panels and any Member wishing to attend a meeting (other than those permanently appointed) will need to notify the Democratic Services Section not less than 48 hours prior to the meeting. It will be necessary to give delegated authority to the Head of Administration to co-opt those Members wishing to sit on the panel on a meeting by meeting basis, after consultation with one or other of the chairmen. Any additional Member wishing to attend will have the opportunity provided for in the constitution to attend and speak with the consent of the chairman. Call-in will be exercised in the normal way by any three of the Members forming the panel.
- 2.6 The approval of the Corporate Governance Panel and the Council will be required for the establishment of the additional panel and, if the proposals are accepted, the Council will need to appoint an additional three Members to each of the Service Delivery and Service Support Panels.

3. ACTION PLAN

- 3.1 Members also agreed upon an action plan to continue those elements of the existing development plan which were thought to be working well and to incorporate additional measures with the intention of building upon the successful implementation of overview and scrutiny arrangements in Huntingdonshire. These have been grouped into a timescale for implementation over the next 2 years as explained in the attached annex (Annex B).

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

- 4.1 Overview and scrutiny needs to continuously evolve and learn from best practice elsewhere. The comments of the CPA inspectors were largely supportive following the last review as reflected in the CPA improvement plan. Following the discussion at the informal Member meeting, the panels are now invited to consider the conclusions set out in this report and the attached action plan.
- 4.2 It is therefore

RECOMMENDED

- (a) that the Panels approve the proposals contained in the attached action plan, as expanded upon in this report;
- (b) that the Corporate Governance Panel be recommended to endorse the establishment of a Corporate and Strategic Framework Panel with the terms of reference set out in this report for submission to the Council for approval;
- (c) that subject to the approval by the Council of the creation of a new panel, the Head of Administration be authorised to appoint up to 5 Members to the panel on a meeting by meeting basis from the membership of the Service Delivery and Service Support Panels, after consultation with one of the panel chairmen; and
- (d) that the Council be recommended to appoint an additional three Members to each of the Service Delivery and Service Support Panels and to approve the consequential amendments to the constitution to implement the above measures.

Background Papers

As set out in Annex A

Contact

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