

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: Overview and Scrutiny Panel Structure: Changes to the Constitution

Meeting/Date: Corporate Governance Panel – 2 December 2015

Executive Portfolio: Councillor Jason Ablewhite, Executive Leader

Report by: Daniel Buckridge, Policy, Performance & Transformation Manager (Scrutiny)

Ward(s) affected: All

Executive Summary:

For the Panel to approve the change to the Council's Constitution to allow a change to the structure of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Panels, which was endorsed by the existing Panels at their November 2015 meetings.

It is considered that the proposed new structure is a better fit to the organisation's strategic priorities than the current structure as it is aligned to and consistent with the Corporate Plan. The new structure proposed should help balance the workload of Members involved, creating capacity for more in-depth work such as studies by Task and Finish Groups. Amendments to the Constitution to allow us to set up the new structure would also introduce greater flexibility and encourage more joint working between panels.

No changes are proposed to the powers available for Overview and Scrutiny at the Council.

Recommendation(s):

That the Panel recommends to Council that the Constitution be amended to reflect the new structure proposed for the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Panels, as set out in Appendix A.

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 For the Panel to approve the change to the Council's Constitution to allow a change to the structure of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Panels, which was endorsed by the current Panels at their November meetings.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Corporate Governance Panel has responsibility for considering proposals to review the Council's Constitutional arrangements and making appropriate recommendations to the Council. The changes proposed in this report have been considered and endorsed by the Head of Paid Service and Monitoring Officer, as well as the existing Overview and Scrutiny Panels.
- 2.2 At the Scrutiny Away Day in February 2015, the current structure of Overview and Scrutiny panels was questioned. With recent changes to portfolio responsibilities of Cabinet Members, the remit and alignment of panels may not support the best possible opportunity for effective Overview and Scrutiny. There were also concerns about the balance of workload between panels.
- 2.3 Members of Cabinet and the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of the Overview and Scrutiny panels have considered a range of options for a new structure. With consensus in support of a single option, the Chairmen and Vice-Chairman have met with senior officers to explore how this could work in practice and a report on the preferred new structure has been considered by all three panels. The panels endorsed the new structure at their November meetings and are requesting that amendments be made to the Constitution to allow the new structure to be adopted.

3. OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 3.1 Three different options were considered. Each of these proposed a total of three panels to include a 'Finance and Performance' panel. Option 1 proposed that this panel should be accompanied by 'Delivery' and 'Services' panels to reflect the Corporate Director responsibilities. Option 2 proposed 'Economy and Growth' and 'Communities and Customers' panels to align with the strategic priorities in the Corporate Plan and Option 3 proposed 'Internal' and 'External' panels.

4. PROPOSED NEW STRUCTURE

- 4.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Panels have considered and endorsed Option 2, which would establish three new panels based on 'Economy and Growth', 'Communities and Customers' and 'Finance and Performance'. These Panels would have the following links to the Council's Corporate Plan 2014-16.

Economy and Growth	Communities and Customers	Finance and Performance
Links to Corporate Plan Strategic Priorities: 'A strong local economy' 'Enabling sustainable growth'	Links to Corporate Plan Strategic Priorities: 'Working with our communities' 'Ensuring we are a customer focussed and service led Council' (the 'To ensure customer engagement drives service priorities and improvement' objective)	Links to Corporate Plan Strategic Priorities: 'Ensuring we are a customer focussed and service led Council' (the 'To become more business-like and efficient in the way we deliver services' objective)

4.2 This option is considered to have the clearest links to the Corporate Plan's strategic priorities and objectives. Work undertaken has indicated that the preferred option would result in a more balanced workload for the panels and their Members. It should also create capacity for more in-depth work through Task and Finish Groups or similar approaches which the Chairmen/ Vice-Chairmen of the existing panels are keen to make greater use of.

4.3 In amending the Constitution to introduce the new Scrutiny panel structure, it is recommended that this should be less prescriptive with regard to which panel is responsible for each service area. This will help ensure that capacity, links to existing work programmes and the need or potential for cross-panel working are taken into account when allocating new items to panels. Appendix 1 sets out proposed changes to the Constitution, which will allow items to be allocated to panels as appropriate, rather than having to follow the portfolio/service-based approach which is currently required.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The changes to the Overview and Scrutiny panel structure proposed will require relatively minor amendments to the Constitution, as set out in Appendix 1. Setting up new panels will require some changes to our committee minutes system and website and officers will need to work with the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen to establish agenda plans for the new panels.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The proposed change to the Constitution will need to be considered by the Corporate Governance Panel and then approved by full Council. Less prescriptive definitions of the panels and their remits would allow greater flexibility without further changes to the Constitution being required so the changes could be implemented in time for the new year. No changes to powers related to Overview and Scrutiny are proposed.

7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Amendments to the Overview and Scrutiny panel structure would need to be accompanied by clear communication with Members, officers, partners and residents in announcing the changes. This would present a good opportunity to raise awareness of the role of Overview and Scrutiny at the Council.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 The Corporate Governance Panel is invited to:

- Recommend to Council that the Constitution be amended to reflect the new structure proposed for the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Panels, as set out in Appendix A.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

CONTACT OFFICER

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