

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL  
NOTES OF A MEETING OF SCRUTINY PANELS REVIEW TASK AND FINISH PANEL  
HELD ON TUESDAY, 25 NOVEMBER 2014  
IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET, EPPING  
AT 7.00 - 8.05 PM**

**Members Present:** Councillors Mrs R Gadsby, Mrs A Grigg, D Stallan, Mrs J H Whitehouse, Ms G Shiell and D Wixley

**Other members present:** Councillors A Lion and G Waller

**Apologies for Absence:** Councillors K. Angold Stephens (Chairman), Mrs. M. Sartin (Vice-Chairman)

**Officers Present** S G Hill (Assistant Director (Governance & Performance Management)), G. Nicholas (National Management Trainee) and S Tautz (Democratic Services Manager)

**13. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN**

In the absence of both the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Panel, it was agreed that Councillor Mrs. A. Grigg act as Chairman for the duration of the meeting.

**14. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

It was reported that Councillor D. Wixley was substituting for Councillor K. Angold-Stephens and that Councillor Mrs. G. Shiell was substituting for Councillor Mrs. M. Sartin.

**15. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were declared in respect of any items on the agenda for the meeting.

**16. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The notes of the meeting of the Panel held on 20 October 2014 were agreed as a correct record.

**17. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL REVIEW - FRAMEWORK OPTIONS**

Following its discussions with various chairmen and vice-chairmen of the current overview and scrutiny panels to gather feedback as part of the information gathering stage of the review, the Task and Finish Panel considered a comprehensive report presenting possible options for the future structure of the scrutiny panel framework. In order to complete the review in accordance with the timescale agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, members were reminded that it was necessary for the Panel to indicate its preferred option at the meeting, in order for this to be taken forward to the consultation phase of the review.

The Panel was advised of the general outcomes arising from the workshop session facilitated by an independent overview and scrutiny advisor on 22 November 2014, and issues arising from consideration of options for the future structure of the scrutiny panel framework by the Audit and Governance Committee at its meeting on 24

November 2014.

It was reported that contribution to and participation in the recent workshop had been good, and that a positive combination of members of the current scrutiny panels, the Task and Finish Panel, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and members of Cabinet had been in attendance. The workshop had sought to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the current scrutiny panel arrangements and members' aspirations for the future provision of effective scrutiny. As part of this exercise, participants at the workshop had sought to apply insights gained from such analysis to the different types of panel framework (the current five panel structure, the four panel directorate-aligned structure, and a 'commissioning' model) that had been identified as possible framework options.

The workshop had also offered an opportunity to present a further option for a scrutiny panel model, based on five thematic 'Select Committees' that broadly reflected the existing panel structure. As with the directorate-aligned proposal, this approach was considered to allow for scrutiny responsibilities to be allocated appropriately, as the current arrangements appeared to have resulted in a situation where not all service areas were subject to scrutiny (if required) or allocated to a particular panel for scrutiny purposes. The establishment of an 'Audit and Standards Select Committee' as part of the select committee approach, had also been suggested, which could act in a cross-cutting role and assume some of the responsibilities previously identified for the responsibility of the Governance Scrutiny Panel in the directorate-aligned model. This option could also allow the existing Audit and Governance and Standards Committees to be absorbed into the new Select Committee.

For each option, it was felt that 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 a new scrutiny panel or select committee.

A note of the findings of the workshop in relation to each framework option was circulated at the meeting and members noted the general consensus preference of the workshop participants that a four-panel structure, aligned by either by service directorate or on a thematic basis, would be the most appropriate future structure. The Panel was mindful however of views arising from the workshop that echoed those expressed at the previous meeting, that the Housing Scrutiny Panel operated efficiently across a wide-ranging work programme and should not be combined with any other service or thematic grouping.

The Panel was advised that each of the structure options generally continued to provide for relevant scrutiny activity to also occur by way of the creation of task and finish panels (as necessary), and ensured that all services had a 'reporting' route for overview and scrutiny and that there was clear scope to the scrutiny activities of each panel or select committee.

Members of the Panel reconfirmed earlier hesitancy about the possible adoption of a commissioning model of scrutiny, as it was considered that this approach would provide no security for the existing Panels to remain in being and might therefore limit development of chairmanship skills and of expertise in particular fields. It was also felt that this model would not reflect the operational requirements of the authority, as a lot of existing panel work was cyclical in nature and would therefore mean that panels could continue to be established after completion of their commissioned

activity, and essentially therefore have the same status as the existing 'standing' scrutiny panels.

Members noted that, at the time of the establishment of the Panel by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, some reservation had been expressed in respect of future scrutiny arrangements for certain functions within the responsibility of the Governance Directorate, including audit and standards matters. The possible structure options had therefore been considered by the Audit and Governance Committee at its meeting on 24 November 2014, to enable the Committee to formally participate in the review process and make appropriate comment to the Task and Finish Panel. The Vice-Chairman of the Panel, Councillor M. Sartin, had presented the review to the Committee on behalf of the Panel and it was reported that the Committee had asked the Panel to specifically consider the following issues in relation to the ongoing review:

- the possible conflict of interest if audit issues and standards matters are considered by the same body;
- the importance of ensuring that members of the Audit and Governance Committee are separate from any involvement in Cabinet decision-making to uphold their monitoring role;
- the importance of the difference between an audit committee and a standards committee, and why these should be maintained as separate bodies; and
- guidance issued by CIPFA regarding the relationship between audit and scrutiny and why these matters might best be kept separate.

In recognising the value of the comments of the Committee, it was accepted that more detailed work would need to be undertaken on how any Audit and Standards Select Committee would operate, than had so far been possible. Several members of the Task and Finish Panel expressed reservation about the possible combination of the Audit and Governance and Standards Committees, in terms of ensuring continued independence from the Council's executive and scrutiny functions.

The Panel was reminded that it would be necessary to engage all members in the review of the existing framework of the Council's scrutiny panels as far as possible, particularly in terms of the preferred option for any future structure. Appropriate consultation would need to be undertaken quickly during the remainder of 2014, in order to achieve the timescale for the completion of the review exercise.

#### **AGREED**

- (1) That the outcomes arising from the facilitated overview and scrutiny workshop, in terms of the identification of options for the future structure of the Council's overview and scrutiny panel framework, be noted;
- (2) That feedback received from the Audit and Governance Committee as a result of its consideration of options for the future structure of the scrutiny panel framework, be noted;
- (3) That the Panel's preferred option for the future structure of the scrutiny panel framework be a four-panel 'select committee' structure aligned with the directorate management framework, except that the community services and community safety responsibilities of the Communities Directorate be transferred to the select committee covering the responsibilities of the Neighbourhoods Directorate (possibly to be known as the 'Environment Select Committee');

- (4) That consultation in respect of the Panel's preferred option be undertaken with all members of the Council and relevant officers, and that the results of such consultation activity be reported to the Panel at its next meeting;
- (5) That the possible combination of the Audit and Governance and Standards Committees not be pursued as part of the current review of the scrutiny panel framework, but that the general view of members to this approach be canvassed through the consultation exercise to be undertaken in respect of the Panel's preferred structure option;
- (6) That consideration be given to the re-establishment of the existing Constitution and Member Services Scrutiny Panel as a task and finish panel or working group, as a result of the implementation of any new scrutiny panel framework;
- (7) That the outcomes from the consultation exercise and the Panel's preferred approach, be reported to the meeting of the Audit and Governance Committee to be held on 5 February 2015;
- (8) That focused work programmes are developed for the scrutiny panels/select committees in future, drawing on service/Portfolio Holder priorities and relevant Member and community issues;
- (9) That current induction arrangements for councillors in respect of overview and scrutiny be reviewed and enhanced as appropriate; and
- (10) That the use of a variety of techniques and methodologies be encouraged in undertaken scrutiny and service review activity in future.

**18. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was reported that the next meeting of the Panel was to be held at 7.00pm on 15 January 2015, rather than 20 January 2015 as incorrectly stated in the agenda.