

Report to the Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Scrutiny Panel



Date of meeting: **6 December 2012**

Report of: Assistant to the Chief Executive

Subject: Overview and Scrutiny Review – Scoping Report

Responsible Officer: I Willett (01992 564243)
Assistant to the Chief Executive

Democratic Services Officer: Adrian Hendry (01992 564246)
Democratic Services Officer

Recommendations:

- (1) That the background information circulated with this report be considered in order to agree the scope of the proposed review of Overview and Scrutiny, taking account of the conclusions reached on the review set out in the notes of the meeting between the Chairman of the Panel and other members and officers;**
- (2) That the Panel indicate those areas relating to Cabinet/Overview and Scrutiny Committee relations and Overview and Scrutiny operations generally which should be the subject of further review;**
- (3) To agree a timescale for the completion of the review and notify the Overview & Scrutiny Committee;**
- (4) To seek the views of the Director of Finance & ICT on the role of Overview & Scrutiny in budget monitoring and review; and**
- (4) To consider a request by one member of the Council to discuss his ideas which have been submitted as part of the consultation exercise directly with the Panel.**

Report:

1. Introduction

At its meeting on 7 April 2012 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) decided to establish a new Task and Finish Scrutiny Panel to review Overview and Scrutiny operations generally within the Council with particular reference to relations between the Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny. This decision was made following attendance by a number of members at a joint training session on Overview and Scrutiny convened jointly with Harlow Council.

2. The purpose of this report is to present certain background information to members so as to allow the scope of this review to be agreed by the Panel indicating any issues which should be investigated further.

Background Information:

3. A number of Appendices are attached to this report which are listed below:

- (a) meeting held on 23 July 2012 between the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of this Panel with certain officers;
 - (b) a statement of the 10 principles for Overview and Scrutiny of the Centre for Public Scrutiny;
 - (c) a schedule showing the various statutory powers relating to Overview and Scrutiny and how these are reflected in the Council's Constitution;
 - (d) a schedule showing case summaries for other local authorities who achieved Overview and Scrutiny recognition from the Centre for Public Scrutiny;
 - (e) a schedule showing details of the review of Overview and Scrutiny conducted in 2005 and subsequent developments;
 - (f) a digest of points raised in consultation conducted by the Assistant to the Chief Executive with members and officers of the Council regarding Overview and Scrutiny; and
 - (g) a copy of the current version of the Overview & Scrutiny Procedure Rules.
4. These documents had been provided to the Panel in order that they may review current arrangements and comments from members of the Council as a way of scoping the review which is now to be conducted.

Further Work and Timescale

6. The scope of the review will determine the time required to carry out further consultations and consider any constitutional changes. It would be sensible to aim at completing this review so that any changes sought can be implemented at the commencement of the 2013/14 Council year. To achieve this timetable, it will be necessary to complete the review and report to the Council on 23 April 2012. As no timescale has been set, the preferred deadline should be notified to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

Consultations

7. The digest of comments made on Overview and Scrutiny arise from approximately 15 face-to-face interviews with members and officers and a limited number of returns from a questionnaire which was circulated in the Council Bulletin earlier in the year. In order to assist the progress of the review, a training course is being run by the Assistant to the Chief Executive on 27 November 2012 and it may be that further comments will arise from that session which need to be taken into account.
8. In addition, one member who was interviewed concerning Overview and Scrutiny is particularly interested in attending a future meeting of the Panel to discuss directly his ideas regarding the link between Overview and Scrutiny and the Leader of the Council/Cabinet and also arrangements for questioning Portfolio Holders within the Council on their work programmes and decisions. The Panel may wish to interview further individuals within the Council on the review.
9. One area which has attracted interest is the role of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on budget monitoring. As members will see from the digest, there have been a number of comments about the effectiveness of the current arrangements. It is recommended that the Director of Finance & ICT might be asked to comment on this.

Conclusion

10. The Panel is asked at this meeting:
 - (a) to give an indication of the areas of Overview and Scrutiny activities they wish to pursue in more detail;
 - (b) to ask the Assistant to the Chief Executive to produce a programme for the review designed to achieve the deadline of the April Council meeting; and
 - (c) to seek the views of the Director of Finance & ICT on budget monitoring and to indicate any further consultations to be carried out.

11. The Panel should also consider whether they require any further information on Overview and Scrutiny in order to assist them in the review and in particular whether members themselves should, in any way, be involved in the process of compiling information.