

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (18 DECEMBER 2018)

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY SELECT COMMITTEE FRAMEWORK – REVIEW

MEMBER CONSULTATION

(1) Response by Councillor N. Bedford

I have looked at the proposals in greater detail and on reflection my recommendation would be to leave the O&S select committees alone for twelve to eighteen months to allow the system to bed in with the new directors etc they may even want to recommend tweaking the process themselves;

The work would be too much for the realigned proposals, and possibly lead to longer meetings or having to cut short agenda items without full scrutiny;

Why not make the proposed changes a project in itself that gets a proper airing with recommendations that come from the panels members themselves;

I think the recommendations and proposals put forward re the possible realignment may be applicable in the future but I do believe the new directors and structure needs a bedding in period, overall, I do think we are working well at the moment and it allows a lot of member involvement I cannot see the benefit of change at this point.

(2) Response by Councillor G. Chambers

Firstly, I take this opportunity to repeat the Standards committee should remain separate. However, I appreciate this is not for consultation at this stage. Members should lead on any future review or proposal. Members have agreed not to change the standards at least three times now but it keeps coming back to full council.

With regards to the officers led proposal I could see some merit to the below committee.

Communities & Neighbourhoods Select Committee

- Housing and Property Services;
- Community and Partnership Services;
- Contracts and Technical Services; and
- Planning Services.

I would prefer to see no change to the select meetings. It's also concerns me that the drivers come from senior officers. It should be in my opinion elected members that drive scrutiny not the officers. Senior Officers need to be more aware it seems that elected members should be driving scrutiny.

The consultation on this was almost non existence and should be investigated further. The cabinet was not even aware which shows in my opinion how some senior officers feel they can act. How can the cabinet not be aware or not consulted on a proposal?

The proposal should be 100 percent scrapped and a members scrutiny working group be formed to look at making a future proposal if its needed.

Officers must not be leading on scrutiny it should be members making the proposal. For example if council passes a motion which a single member puts forward then significant help should be given to support the member in that motion.

I ask a simple question to the reader who will benefit from this new proposal?

*Less members engagement will definitely occur. (This is not scrutiny this is a watering down of involvement. With the recent planning changes the public and the press will see this as a power grab from officers).

*The only people who will benefit are the officers.

- They will have less meetings to arrange and less time to spend with our elected members. Members maybe pleased at first to have less meetings and indirectly less scrutiny. However, I can see many of my colleagues across party who will have real concerns with this proposal.

Therefore, my comments are very clear no change to the current system.

I cannot as a matter of conscious be able to support the current TWO committee proposal without greater members involvement.

(3) Response by Councillor S. Kane

I believe the proposed split between Communities & Neighbourhoods and Governance & Resources is very uneven in terms of workload. My preference would have been to maintain 4 committees

Property Services	
Planning Services	Housing & Property Services
Technical Services	
Commercial & Regulatory Services	Contract & Technical Services
Customer Services	
Community & Partnership Services	Customer Services
Support Services	
Strategy & Member Services	Business Support Services

At most, drop to three committees by combining Customer & Support Services.

I believe this (the use by the Cabinet of the overview and scrutiny framework for policy development and pre-decision scrutiny activity) could and should be a very useful method of enhancing member engagement in policy making. The challenge here is the timing of scrutiny meetings in relation to Cabinet meetings. Increasingly the business of cabinet can be fast-paced (for a council) with Management Board/Cabinet meetings being quickly followed by Cabinet, leaving little time for scrutiny to evaluate/contribute to the process before a decision is required. Should pre-decision activity be incorporated into the work programme I would not want to see the decision process slowed.

Again, this (the use by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee of its existing opportunity for the review of the forward plan of executive key decisions) is an opportunity for scrutiny to take a more pro-active role in the business of the council

Personally, I question the value of such scrutiny of external organisations. Often very informative and valuable but in no way could this be considered a scrutiny function, better to invite external organisations to member briefings and have a presentation with Q&A

(4) Response by Councillor A. Lion

This is a detailed report and suggests that scrutiny is a complex process. The objective is in the title Overview & Scrutiny i.e. having high level and critical visibility of both the Executive policy and officer delivery and then getting into detail of scrutiny and to drill down to a level required. However, I am surprised this didn't seem to have wider member input. In reading though I am trying to understand what problem the report is trying to solve and what the issues are with the current 4 panel grouping. We have the two ends of the spectrum, cut down to 2 panels to align with the new strategic directors (who don't have day to day responsibility) or look to 8 to align with service directorates. I don't see any driver, justification, business case for cutting down to two. With 8 service directorates it's going to be a difficult a job trying to get to an acceptable level of scrutiny. I think it is far too early to do this and there needs to be a balance so keep to the mid ground until there is more experience within the organisation.

If this evolves to two, I see that there is an affinity for a customer facing grouping and a back-office grouping, not sure the proposed groups fully reflect that.

I firmly believe we need to base work programmes on the corporate plan, service area business plans and have recourse to audit teams to provide an independent review where required.

(5) Response by Councillor C. P. Pond

I can see the sense in 2 committees reflecting the new structure but had understood that the 2 Strategic Directors would be concentrating on policy issues rather than being responsible for specific service issues.

Support a balanced work programme but concern that there would be too much work to be achievable unless changes to what comes to the select Committees are made .ie Performance Standards could be sent out for comments on line.

Support more use of Task and Finish panels. Councillors not on the main committees could be encouraged to join these. Specific work on a single topic with a deadline is often more satisfying. As councillors we should suggest relevant topics. O and S and Cabinet should consider the findings seriously.

It is a shame that 30 spaces would be lost if only 15 are on each one. However, they would be very difficult to work with more than 15. Hopefully would be more T and F.

Bear in mind there would be less time when reducing to 2. Cabinet could be proactive in suggesting current and new policy areas. O and S would add to work programme if suitable.

Forward Plan for the council - maybe a session with O and S rather than splitting into 2.

7 Reports on external bodies. Good to receive reports from EFDC reps but would not be enough time for Select Committees to consider. Keep in full council.

Training - needs to stress importance of effective Scrutiny and give help in suggesting topics.

(6) Response by Councillor P. Stalker

As a member of O&S and vice chair of Resources I have been involved in discussions about the proposed framework from the beginning. I fully support Cllr Sartin's paper on this and have no reservations about the move to two Select committees. I still see ample opportunities for Councillor representation and development under the new framework.

(7) Response by Councillor H. Whitbread

I currently sit on two select Committees, Communities and Governance. I Chair the Communities Select Committee. I have substituted for the other two committees on a number of occasions and I have an understanding of their work programmes.

I largely support these proposals, because I feel that sometimes the committees, particularly Governance, can be very light on business. It must be noted that the last Governance meeting I attended was under 30 minutes long. To me this does not seem a good use of officers or members time, when perhaps the substantive agenda item could have been added to the work programme of another committee.

Also, there is a great deal of overlap between committees, particularly communities and neighbourhoods. Placing them together in one committee would avoid this.

Scrutiny is of vital importance to the democratic workings of the council. Through the re-working of the scrutiny committees I believe that there is the opportunity to deliver more effective and in-depth scrutiny. Committees can take a more focused approach. It would be sensible to have a greater focus on reports before they are made policy rather than regularly analysis reports for noting.

In addition, I believe that there needs to be a different approach to how we analyse KPIs. Members who sit on committee may require more information about interpretation and it may be helpful to have more detailed indexes.

The makeup of the agenda of the committee should be reviewed - with a focus on priority items at members discretion.

It is clear that a committee's program must be not balanced and achievable. It should reflect the objectives and interests of members, which are reflective of community priorities and public interest.

A more focused approach to scrutiny may help to keep members engaged - it may also encourage furthermore in-depth scrutiny, potentially with the formation of more task and finish panels - or break out groups.

I believe that the current number of members, when in full attendance works reasonably well for a select committee. However, I think the new committees could facilitate a few additional members. I believe that subject to work load, the meetings should be held with the same regularity. Perhaps also the scrutiny meetings should be webcast more regularly, especially when discussing issues of particular public interest, to make scrutiny more transparent.

With the changing shape of the council, I believe that the committee should reflect this. It seems sensible to have the two strategic officers as a lead officer for each committee.

Overall, I believe that from my experience it would be a sensible proposition to reduce the number of select committees. This will help make the business of the committees over clear and minimise overlap. If correctly harnessed, this is also an opportunity for a greater level and detail of scrutiny.

(8) Response by Councillor J. H. Whitehouse

The current scrutiny system isn't working well but I don't agree with the proposed arrangements. In the Cabinet form of governance, scrutiny needs to be strong and these proposals reduce scrutiny by 50%.

I agree with the comments of the joint meeting of Overview and Scrutiny chairmen that scrutiny needs to cover the whole range of the Council's business but this cannot be done with so few scrutiny meetings. The proposed two Select Committees are unbalanced. Communities and Neighbourhoods SC has much more to scrutinise than Governance and Resources SC. The Community and Neighbourhoods SC services also impact more on residents.

Now that the new structure with seven services has been published I suggest we need to look at the responsibilities within each and consider which it is reasonable to put together. I think three select committees are the minimum that are needed and that more time should be given to select committees that scrutinise services that directly affect the public than to internal support services.

Members need more knowledge of council services/teams in order to scrutinize. This used to be gained through information evenings or presentations before Council or, in the days of the committee system, by being a member of a committee. (I am referring to individual services within the overall service as 'teams'.) Since it's unrealistic to have a presentation from each at the select committee, an information pack outlining what each team does and its aims and current priorities should be provided to members when they join a select committee and should be updated for all members as these change.

With regard to Task and Finish panels a quicker process for setting them up is needed and more awareness of the varied ways of organising them (e.g.: one full day). It was agreed that the recommendations of the Task and Finish Panels would be reviewed after (I think) 3 months to ensure that action was happening and again after 12 months. This isn't happening. The reports from past Task and Finish Panels should be easily available as a library on the website, along with the annual report of Overview and Scrutiny.

I agree that more use should be made of OSC and the select committees for policy development, pre-decision scrutiny and the review of the forward plan.

Training about scrutiny is important for members and especially the difference in questioning, but this only works if the chairmen are also trained in the difference between chairing a scrutiny committee compared to other council committees. A very good training session on asking questions for scrutiny was provided several years ago.

Members' views are asked on the requirement to report to Council on outside organisations 'in order that such matters do not unnecessarily congest the work programmes of the select committees'. I'm not aware how the reports affect the select committees. These reports to Council are the only feedback members get of what is happening on the bodies to which Council appoints representatives. They don't take long and I think they should continue.