

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY – Review of Overview & Scrutiny Functions








Summary of Purpose and Recommendations:

To consider the views of the Corporate and Finance Review Panel in respect of a review of the overview and scrutiny function. These include recommendations on a new title for the Corporate and Finance Review Panel, and increased size of membership, with amended Terms of Reference for all Panels to add greater emphasis to scrutiny of the Corporate Plan and the Performance Management framework.

Cost to Council: Training costs to be quantified

Within existing budget? Yes

Contribution to Corporate Plan (Minor/Moderate/Major/Neutral):

	+		-		+		-
	Moderate			Priorities			
	Minor			Clean Streets and Public Space	Minor		
	Minor			Crime and Disorder	Minor		
	Minor			Housing	Minor		
	Minor			Managing our Finances	Moderate		

Comments on Impacts on Corporate Objectives and Priorities:

The Panel feels the recommendations relating to the change of Terms of Reference for all Panels to scrutinise the Corporate Plan will assist in linking the annual budget with strategic objectives.



Organisation of excellence

Working with public and partners

Economic well being

Social well being

Environmental well being

REVIEW OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY FUNCTION

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 On 2 June 2004 the Corporate and Finance Review Panel formally considered a report on the review of the Council's overview and scrutiny functions and made recommendations to Cabinet.

2. THE PANEL'S DELIBERATIONS

- 2.1 The Panel considered the following reports:-

- (1) The report on the findings of the review by Cllrs Ward and Mrs Robinson on behalf of the Panel
- (2) A report by Marianne Abley of the Audit Commission
- (3) A report by the Leader of the Conservative Group.

- 2.2 Members have received copies of all these reports previously, and all Members are requested to bring these with them to the meeting. Alternatively, copies are available from Democratic Services on request.

3. EVIDENCE

- 3.1 Members noted that some of the conclusions from the questionnaire results and feedback from the focus groups were drawn from individual or minority views.
- 3.2 Some members felt that points (e) ('there was little evidence of members leading the process') and (h) ('there was little evidence of Portfolio Holders using the Panel as a resource to input into decisions or ideas they were developing'), were not fair comment as there were many examples of both these things taking place.

4. OFFICER SUPPORT

- 4.1 The Panel discussed the perceived need for enhanced officer support for the overview and scrutiny function. It was noted that the practice in other authorities was mixed; some larger authorities had gone down the route of having dedicated scrutiny officer support, whilst others, like New Forest, had chosen not to. The Leader of the Council pointed out that certain councils that had experimented with dedicated scrutiny support had found it to be both divisive and expensive. Whilst accepting these points, there was a degree of consensus among members that officer support for scrutiny could be improved. The Chief Executive explained that the whole issue of officer support could be looked at by the Panel at a future date.

5. AUDIT COMMISSION REPORT

5.1 The Panel briefly discussed the report prepared by Marianne Abley of the Audit Commission on the Council's scrutiny system. Among the key elements was the suggested need for the development of a co-ordinating scrutiny function to underpin delivery of corporate objectives and the consideration of proposals for future corporate strategy. There was general acceptance of this point.

6. TITLE OF NEW PANEL

6.1 Members considered and discussed the detailed points raised in the report of the Leader on behalf of the Conservative Group. The Panel discussed the proposed new title of the Panel, "The Corporate Plan and Finance Review Panel". Some members felt the inclusion of the word 'Plan' might lead to some confusion with Planning issues. On balance it was felt that the title was acceptable, but could be reviewed if necessary in the future.

7. MEMBERSHIP

7.1 Members discussed the suggested change to membership of the Corporate Plan and Finance Review Panel to 14 members, and whether it was the intention that all Review Panel Chairmen should sit on the Corporate Plan and Finance Review Panel. The Leader of the Council responded by saying that, as far as possible, it was intended that Chairmen or their nominees should sit on the Panel.

8. ROLE OF PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

8.1 Members discussed the role of Portfolio Holders at Panel meetings. There was a general feeling that Cabinet members should attend their relevant Panel meetings on a standing invitation, although it was acknowledged that there might be occasions when the Panels would prefer that the Portfolio Holder was not present and this should be respected.

9. TRAINING

9.1 Members discussed the need for further scrutiny training. It was pointed out that the Review had found a lack of awareness of the roles, responsibilities and powers of the Review Panels. There was a strong recommendation in the Ward/Robinson report that training for both members and officers should be pursued as a priority, both in terms of roles of Panels and skills required to undertake the function. The majority of members supported this view.

10. CONCLUSION

10.1 There was general support for the recommendations set out in the report of the Leader on behalf of the Conservative Group, subject to amendments to recommendation (g).

10.2 Members requested that the new arrangements as proposed should be reviewed in two years' time.

11. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The cost of operation of the scheme can be contained within existing approved budgets.

12. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

There are no crime and disorder implications to this report.

13. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no environmental implications to this report.

14. PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S COMMENTS

Made at the Panel meeting and incorporated here.

15. RECOMMENDATIONS

- (a) That the Corporate and Finance Review Panel be renamed the "Corporate Plan and Finance Review Panel";
- (b) That the membership of this Panel be increased to 14 (on the basis of the current proportionality of the Council this would mean 8 Conservative and 6 Liberal Democrat places);
- (c) That the terms of reference of all Panels be amended to include a responsibility to scrutinise the Corporate Plan (Heart of the Forest) and to choose which of the aims and topics they wish to examine;
- (d) That the Corporate Plan and Finance Review Panel be given the administrative task of pulling these choices together with a view to assessing whether or not adequate resources were available, to assist in linking the annual budget with the strategic objectives;
- (e) That the Corporate Plan and Finance Review Panel also be tasked with identifying and aims and topics that are:
 - (i) not covered; or
 - (ii) are duplicatedand to request the relevant Panel Chairmen to agree a way forward
(This could be by employing small joint working groups, holding joint meetings, or a simple split of responsibilities);
- (f) That all Panels have responsibility to assist in the development, implementation and monitoring of the Council's Performance Management framework, including the fundamental and annual service plans relating to their functions;
- (g) That Portfolio Holders and Panels continue to work towards constructive relationships;

- (h) That members at all times retain the right to call in or scrutinise any particular issue (on the same basis as present), but that Panels be encouraged to work together with the Portfolio Holder to move issues forward. (Final decision-making will rest with the Cabinet and the Portfolio Holders but the Panels should play a part leading up to the decision);
- (i) That comprehensive training for both members and officers on the roles and responsibilities of overview and scrutiny, and the skills needed to undertake the roles, be implemented;
- (j) That the Corporate Plan and Finance Review Panel undertake a review of officer support for the scrutiny function and identify future areas for improvement which should preferably be cost-neutral and robust;
- (k) That there should be a further review of the scrutiny arrangements in two years' time, in particular to analyse the effectiveness of the new measures.
- (l) That the Head of Legal and Democratic Services be authorised to make the necessary amendments to the Constitution.

Further Information

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Background Papers

Published documents

cb050704/reports/Policy & Strategy