

County Council – 15 February 2016

Recommendation from the Standards and Governance Committee meeting held on 25 January 2016

Scrutiny Review 2015 – Task and Finish Group Proposals

8.1 The Committee considered a report outlining the work and recommendations arising from a Task and Finish Group set up to give consideration to future arrangements with regard to overview and scrutiny within the County Council. The report was presented by Councillor Peter Wharf on behalf of the Chairman of the Task and Finish Group. He outlined the recommendations contained in the report in detail.

8.2 Referring to recommendation 3, Councillor Wharf explained that the ability of the overview and scrutiny committees to refer matters for Call in, Call to Account or Councillor Call for Action to the Audit and Governance Committee offered a sensible solution due to the infrequent use of these mechanisms. The Task and Finish Group had therefore considered that this should be the remit of a single committee. In response to a question he gave assurance that this would not result in a time delay in the process as the Audit and Governance Committee would build up expertise in this area and would have the necessary processes in place to deal with matters in a timely manner.

8.3 Clarification was sought on the make-up of a specialist panel to consider unresolved member complaints (recommendation 8) and the Committee was informed the panel would comprise the Chairman of the Council with other members appointed by Group Leaders. There was an outstanding issue about whether the panel would include representation that would be independent of the Council, however, this would not be the role of an “Independent Person”.

8.4 Members considered that there should be further detail with regard to frequency of committee meetings as this could result in additional activity for both members and officers. The Chairman advised that this would be a consideration of the Management Committee (recommendation 4) and noted that a new Audit and Governance Committee could meet on a less frequent basis than the existing Audit and Scrutiny Committee due to the removal of the scrutiny function.

8.5 The Chairman drew attention to the designated statutory Scrutiny Officer (recommendation 12). He asked whether an officer had been formally appointed to this role and how this would operate in practice. Members were informed that no formal appointment had been made and that this would be investigated as part of the support for the new structure.

8.6 Information was circulated at the meeting to illustrate the minimum places needed in order to arrive at an appropriate balance of seats on each committee, assuming political proportionality. It was confirmed that arrangements for health scrutiny would remain unaltered and comment was made that its statutory remit needed to correctly align with the new committee structure. It was subsequently felt that the size of committees should consist of 10 members and that recommendation 13 be amended accordingly.

8.7 The Committee supported an additional 2 recommendations in support of the proposals outlined in the report. These included the nomination of “shadow” chairmen of committees by Group Leaders in the period between County Council meetings in February and April 2016 and a review of the new structure after a period of 18 months.

8.8 The Independent Members of the Committee were supportive of the report recommendations.

Resolved

9. That it be confirmed that the Task and Finish Group for overview and scrutiny had met its terms of reference.

RECOMMENDED

10.1 That the County Council be recommended to consider the Group's proposals (attached as Annexure 1 to these minutes) in order to agree the future placement of audit, overview and scrutiny and the arrangements to support this;

10.2 That the report includes the following additional recommendations:-

13. That the number of elected member representatives on each of the new overview and scrutiny committees and the Audit and Governance Committee be set at 10.
14. That Group Leaders be asked to nominate "shadow" chairmen of the committees to hold a Shadow Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee in advance of the April 2016 County Council meeting.
15. That the committee structure be reviewed after a period of 18 months of operation.

Reason for Recommendation

11. To align with the vision of the Corporate Plan of 'Working together for a strong and successful Dorset'.