

Joint Overview Committee

7 June 2023

Library Strategy

For Recommendation to Cabinet

Portfolio Holder: Cllr L Beddow, Culture and Communities

Local Councillor(s): ALL

Executive Director: J Sellgren, Executive Director of Place

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Report Status: Public

Brief Summary: Our new Dorset Council Library Strategy will guide how we develop and deliver our library service over the next 10 years, delivering services in line with the needs of our residents and Dorset Council's strategic priorities.

The new library strategy was developed following two phases of public consultation. Phase one, Let's Talk Libraries consultation, which took place from October 2021 to January 2022 and phase 2 from September to December 2022. Altogether we heard from over 12,500 Dorset residents, children, communities, partners, employees, councillors, and businesses. The feedback gathered has directly informed the library strategy.

The strategy includes a new operating model which will enable the library service to fulfil the aims of the strategy and provide a more consistent, accessible, offer across all Dorset libraries. The implementation of the strategy is set out in the action plan and will commence following endorsement of the strategy by cabinet. We envisage that the new operating model will begin from April 2024 following a transitional period.

Recommendation: That the Joint Overview Committee:

1. Considers the contents of this report and outcome of phase 2 public consultation and recommends to Cabinet to endorse and adopt the Library Strategy, Operating Model and Action Plan. (Cabinet date: July 2023) (Appendices 1, 9, 10)
2. Considers all proposals within this report and recommends to Cabinet the implementation of the operating model from 2024 by the Library Service following consultation with the workforce and engagement with communities.
3. Notes the consultation and engagement undertaken with our communities, involving residents, children, communities, partners, businesses, councillors, our workforce and all council services. (Appendices 2, 3, 4, 5, 6)

4. Notes the findings and proposals contained within the Equalities Impact Assessment. (Appendix 8)

Reason for Recommendation:

Dorset Council, as a library authority, has a statutory duty under Section 7 of the Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964¹ “to provide a comprehensive and efficient” library service for all those who live, work or study in the authority area.

Our new library strategy 2023 – 2033, reflects the wealth of feedback received during our extensive engagement and consultation exercise.

The strategy has a set of ambitious priorities and aims, strongly endorsed by public consultation, that contribute to the Dorset Council Plan² objectives, national Library Vision³ and the council’s transformation priorities. The strategy was developed following strong engagement with communities and partners during phase 1 and tested and refined by similarly strong engagement in phase 2.

The proposed operating model and action plan support the delivery of the strategy and the aims and actions are also strongly endorsed by public consultation with communities and partners.

1. Report

- 1.1 Local authority library services are a statutory service⁴ and our strategy meets our legal duties and responds directly to the voice of our communities and presents their views and what they have told us they need in the future. The strategy presents aspirational opportunities for the library service, and by using its already successful partnership approach, will deliver continuous positive outcomes for our communities.
- 1.2 The paragraphs and sections that follow detail our consultation approach, research, highlights from the needs analysis and the approach we have taken in developing our strategy following 2 phases of consultation. We will then move to summarising the strategy vision, mission, themes and aims as refined by the second phase of consultation.
- 1.3 Next, we will describe the proposed operating model, the library network, the library services offer for different types of libraries and our proposals for opening hours.
- 1.4 We are committed to working with our partners, services and agencies operating in our communities to deliver shared goals and objectives, delivering value for money whilst meeting community needs.

2. Background

- 2.1 Our phase one consultation approach was to have an open conversation with our communities, stakeholders and partners, exploring what they value about the service, what would make them use the service in the future and identifying new opportunities for collaboration.

¹ The Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964 [Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1964/59)

² DC Plan: [Dorset Council's Plan - Dorset Council](#)

³ DCMS, 2018: [Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016-2021](#)

⁴ The Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964 [Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1964/59)

- 2.2 Phase 1 #LetsTalkLibraries consultation was very effective, generating more than 7,500 survey responses. In addition, engagement workshops and interviews were commissioned to compliment the survey data, to ensure that we engaged with those in our community who are traditionally underrepresented during library consultations. Our contracted research agency facilitated 15 engagement workshops, 6 workshops with schoolchildren and 40 research interviews with non-users.
- 2.3 Analysis from the surveys, engagement workshops and interviews, together with data around local need, was used to draft the library strategy and equalities impact assessment, to propose an operating model and to suggest actions to support implementation of the strategy.
- 2.4 Overview Committee met in June 2022 to review the report on phase 1 consultation. The Committee supported the draft documentation and agreed that the draft library strategy and accompanying Strategic Needs Assessment and Equalities Impact Assessment be publicly consulted on, as part of a phase 2 Let's Talk Libraries consultation.
- 2.5 Overview Committee agreed that a further report be brought back to the Committee following phase 2 consultation, to present the phase 2 consultation feedback, recommended refinements to the library strategy, implementation plan, updated equalities impact assessment and any associated financial implications.
- 2.6 Phase 2 #LetsTalkLibraries consultation focused on:
- the draft library strategy core themes and aims
 - proposed actions to support the implementation of the strategy
 - proposals for a tiered library model
 - proposals for core library services offer, defining which services are available in each type of library.
- 2.7 We also consulted on standard opening hours for libraries. We asked respondents to tell us when they would most value a library being open and their preferences for library opening hours and times. We also asked respondents to tell us about any impacts for them if we were unable to deliver their preferred opening hours.

3. Phase 2 Consultation and Data Analysis

- 3.1 Phase 2 #LetsTalkLibraries consultation took place between September and December 2022. We conducted 3 consultation surveys: one for children up to age 15; one for everyone over 16 and one for employees, partners and business. We received over 4,800 responses. The survey analysis reports are included in Appendices 2,3,4,5.
- 3.2 In addition, our contracted research agency facilitated 6 engagement workshops and 2 workshops with schoolchildren. The workshops aimed to understand attendees' views on the draft library strategy and any potential impact of the proposed operating model. The report is included as Appendix 6.

Strategic Needs Assessment

- 3.3 Dorset Council is committed to working in partnership with communities and stakeholders to design and deliver services around local need. Allowing our services to be shaped by local needs is a key design principle when developing Dorset Council's library service, this approach is supported by Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport's (DCMS) Library Strategy for England⁵.

⁵ DCMS, 2018 [Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016 to 2021 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/744222/libraries-deliver-ambition-for-public-libraries-in-england-2016-to-2021.pdf)

- 3.4 During phase 1 of the consultation, we looked at a series of measures to determine where need is greatest. In recognition of the broad range of interventions which a library service can help support, we have taken a range of measures which indicate need across the breadth of society and an individual's life course. The data was refreshed and updated during phase 2 of the consultation to reflect the latest available datasets. The revised report is presented within our Strategic Needs Analysis Appendix 7.

Headline insight, data and research that inform our strategy

- 3.5 We estimate from data for the southwest region that library users make up around 27% of the 16+ population and around 38% of the 5–15-year-old population.⁶
- 3.6 We know from our own Dorset library demand data that behaviours and trends have changed significantly over the past 7 years which will have been impacted by the pandemic but also in terms of customer preferences.
- 3.7 Physical library use has declined since 2016 by between 16% – 44%, when we consider active users and physical items borrowed. Comparatively, usage of online resources for e-books and audio books has increased by over 470% as more items are available to loan in this format and customer behaviour changed, during and post pandemic. (Appendix 7).
- 3.8 We have seen new trends in accessing content, events and activities online and although people have returned to preferred “in-person” activities and events, we remain aware that the online library requirement must be embedded in our future thinking.
- 3.9 Our CIPFA value for money indicators (2019/20) provides graphs that show we operate with more libraries, per 100,000 population, than the average. (Appendix 7).
- 3.10 Overall, the wide range of indicators that were tested across our needs assessment identified a great number of areas where library services, delivering at the heart of our communities, could improve life outcomes for the people of Dorset.
- 3.11 Analysis of phase two consultation survey responses have been brought together with the findings from engagement workshops and evidence around local need, to inform the library strategy.

4. Refining Our Draft Strategy and Operating Model

Vision, mission, themes and aims

- 4.1 We consulted on our vision, mission, themes and aims as worded below:

- **Vision:** “Trusted community spaces for everyone, with services to inspire your future”
- **Mission:** “To Inspire, Connect and Enable our communities through our services”

Strategic Themes and aims:

- 4.2 We consulted on our strategic themes and aims as presented below:

⁶ Shared Intelligence 2022 [Research to inform a new library strategy for Dorset Council](#) quoting the DCMS report [Taking Part 2019/20 - Libraries - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Theme 1: Inspire - To enrich lives through universal access to information, knowledge, learning and literacy

- Support language and literacy for everyone through lifelong learning; acquiring knowledge; developing skills and pursuing personal goals
- Host and deliver events & activities to inspire cultural connection and new experiences
- Support people to develop digital skills, removing digital barriers and building confidence
- Support an innovative and thriving Micro and Small Medium Enterprise business network
- Inspire, inform and facilitate climate and ecologically positive actions and decisions

Theme 2: Connect - To connect with and meet the needs of our communities

- Residents and partners are aware of everything the library service has to offer
- Our service is designed to meet customer needs and supports community connection
- Local libraries thrive as part of a co-ordinated network of libraries including Dorset's Community Managed Libraries
- Our open and inclusive service will ensure access is barrier free
- Libraries are at the heart of delivering council services to communities, acting as the council's front door

Theme 3a: Enable our communities: to create accessible, inclusive spaces for our communities to share and use

- Create inviting, flexible, well used spaces
- Provide safe trusted spaces
- Sustainable buildings which keep pace with community growth
- Library services form part of community hubs
- Provide space where residents can connect with health and wellbeing opportunities

Theme 3b: Enable our library teams: to invest in the development of our workforce and volunteers to deliver services that meet future community needs and exceed customer expectations

- Each employee feels valued and empowered, with career opportunities in the library service and Dorset Council more broadly
- Flexible resourcing across our library network, allows employees to develop a range of skills and experience
- We offer inclusive routes to employment and development opportunities via apprenticeship programmes
- We have a strong partnership with, and wholly value the contribution of, our volunteers to the library service. We have a framework in place for supporting future partnerships to build on their success.

Consultation Headlines: You said, we did

4.3 We received very high levels of support for our vision, mission, three main themes, tiered library model and the core library offer for the library service.

- Mission: 91% of respondents agreed
- Inspire: 91% of respondents agreed that the theme and aims are relevant
- Connect: 95% of respondents agreed that theme and aims are relevant
- Enable: 95% of respondents agreed that the theme and aims are relevant

- 4.4 **Feedback** indicated that respondents would like more of an emphasis on the cultural aspects of Inspire and the importance of 'reading for pleasure'. Some respondents struggled to understand the relevance of 3 specific aims: support for businesses, acting as the council's front door and supporting health and wellbeing opportunities. Some respondents and workshop participants asked for language to be simplified and made clearer, particularly in relation to the wording of aims and actions.
- 4.5 **Action:** We have amended the theme to: "Inspire: To enrich lives through universal access to information, knowledge, learning, literacy and *culture*" and amended sub aim 1.1 to: "Support language, literacy and *reading for pleasure* for everyone through lifelong learning; acquiring knowledge; developing skills and pursuing personal goals"
- 4.6 **Action:** We will use the feedback about specific aims to inform our marketing and promotional campaigns so that we can emphasise the benefits to the library service of working with partners and better explain the role of the library service as a source of information, directing customers to services offering help and support.
- 4.7 **Action:** We have carried out a plain English review of the strategy and intend to publish an easy access version following adoption of the strategy by the cabinet. We have also prepared a 'plan on a page' as requested by Overview committee in 2022.

Our Library Network

- 4.8 We consulted on a new library model which proposed three types of library and a core list of services available at the different types of library:
- **Library:** a library which delivers our core library offer
 - **Library plus:** a library which delivers an enhanced core library offer
 - **Library Connect:** a library hub which delivers an enhanced core library offer including co-located partner services
- 4.9 81% of respondents agreed with the proposed library model and core library services model. 73% agreed with the proposed names. 68% of children said that the names make sense.
- 4.10 **Feedback** from adults and children showed that the word 'library' is what is important to customers and that all libraries are libraries. Feedback also indicated confusion from some respondents around the use of the + symbol. A small number of respondents were not in favour of the word Connect, but there was no clear consensus for a different name. Many children suggested using small, medium and large to distinguish between library types, as well as offering some creative suggestions for library names, emphasising the importance of books such as including 'book heaven', 'book of imagination' and 'world of books'.
- 4.11 Some customers interpreted the list of services very literally and were concerned that some libraries would no longer be able to offer some services which are currently available, such as adult learning classes or customer access points. The concept of a 'hub and spoke' or geographical 'cluster' model was suggested as a way to share services between the network of different types of libraries to mitigate against concerns that not all services would be available in every library.
- 4.12 **Action:** We have replaced '+' with 'plus'. We have amended the way that the core list of services is described in the strategy to clarify the core offer for each type of library. We have also clarified that there is no intention to remove existing services, for example, autism friendly rooms will continue to be available at Dorchester and Gillingham.

- 4.13 **Action:** We have designed an organisational model to manage libraries based on geographical clusters. Each cluster will share resources locally between different types of libraries, which should enable all communities to access the range of services.

Individual Libraries

- 4.14 **Feedback** about the classification of individual libraries showed that over 70% of customers either agreed or strongly agreed with the classification of 19 of the 23 libraries, a net agreement of 59% and above. Gillingham, Upton and Verwood had lower levels of net agreement at 33%, 46% and 19% respectively. Shaftesbury had a negative net agreement of -22%.
- 4.15 **Action:** We have reviewed the classification of the 4 libraries with levels of net agreement below 46%. We have changed the classification of Shaftesbury from library to library plus. Having reviewed consultation and engagement feedback and the needs assessment for Gillingham and Blandford, we conclude that Blandford is the preferred location for a Library Connect. Gillingham will continue to offer the services currently available.
- 4.16 **Action:** Having reviewed consultation and engagement feedback and the needs assessment for Upton and Verwood, we do not propose to change the classification of these libraries. Instead, we will take time to talk to communities, to listen to concerns and to explore potential options to reduce the impact on communities, which may need further support, within the financial constraints of the service.

5. Library Opening Hours Proposals

- 5.1 We consulted on a range of opening hours per type of library:

- **Library:** 15-22 hours (includes volunteer support hours), open 4 to 5 days a week
- **Library Plus:** 25-32 hours, open 5 days a week
- **Library Connect:** 40 to 48 hours, open 6 days a week

- 5.2 Following analysis of the consultation and engagement responses and financial modelling of a range of different hours, we advise a Dorset Council funded offer which can be delivered within a balanced budget:

- **Library:** 18 hours (including volunteer support hours) open 5 days a week
- **Library Plus:** 30 hours, open 5 days a week
- **Library Connect:** 42 hours, open 6 days a week

- 5.3 The proposed library operating model and allocation of hours to each type of library, aims to ensure that our service delivery is targeted to our communities with the greatest need, in line and in accordance with our strategic needs assessment.

- 5.4 The number of Dorset Council funded proposed hours provided across the network equals the same number of Dorset Council funded hours previously delivered minus one hour in total. (630 hours)

Granular Pattern of opening hours

- 5.5 We propose a granular pattern of opening hours which aims to meet the priorities described to us in the consultation and engagement feedback:

- standard hours so that customers know when the library is open
 - opening hours throughout the week Monday to Saturday
 - mornings for pre-school children and their carers, retirees, those who do not work and those who work from home / remotely
 - Saturdays and afternoon opening, for school age children and young people
 - Saturdays, lunchtimes and evenings for those who work
 - a spread of hours amongst a geographical group of libraries, so that not all libraries are closed on the same weekdays
 - times when the library is closed and can be hired in its entirety by partners or community groups
- 5.6 We have designed a pattern of 'standard' shifts per type of library to meet the priorities listed in 4.19. We have also tried to ensure that libraries within the same geographical cluster (see 4.12) have different late nights and different closed days to enable customers to access a library in their area 6 days a week.
- 5.7 A granular pattern of proposed opening hours per weekday is available via the [Dorset Council website](#).

Next Steps re proposed changes to opening hours

- 5.8 Although we hope that most communities will be satisfied by our proposals, we anticipate that some will want to continue to discuss with us. We propose to engage with communities on a 1:1 basis, to take the time to talk to communities, to explore the proposed hours together and to listen to concerns. There may be potential options, to reduce the impact on communities that may need further support, within the financial constraints of the service.
- 5.9 In addition, as part of the strategy action plan, we are exploring the potential to use technology to extend library opening hours in the absence of employees and volunteers. Please see a link in the list of background papers to the successful use of technology in South Gloucestershire council. Such technology would enable us to extend library opening hours beyond the Dorset Council offer.

Routes for communities to offer additional support to Dorset Council funded hours

- 5.10 At present 2 town and parish councils provide a financial contribution towards staffing and running costs to enhance Dorset Council funded opening hours at Sherborne and Lytchett Matravers. Dorset Council also recruits and trains volunteers to provide volunteer run library hours at 3 libraries (Beaminster, Crossways and Sturminster Newton), as part of the standard opening hours.
- 5.11 During the strategy consultation process we have received high levels of support from communities and organisations. We wish to offer a route for organisations to approach us, to express an interest in enhancing the proposed Dorset Council funded library opening hours. We are not asking communities and organisations for contributions; however, we wish to offer a route to those who *may* wish to provide additional local support to the library service. Options include:
- providing a financial contribution towards additional staff hours and running costs, similar to Lytchett Matravers Parish Council and Sherborne Town Council
 - following the volunteering model used at Beaminster, Crossways and Sturminster Newton to identify whether there is a desire to volunteer amongst the local community to enhance

the Dorset Council funded opening hours. If there is sufficient local interest, to work with the Library Service to identify a volunteer co-ordinator and volunteers and to train volunteers.

- offering financial support for Dorset Council to supplement a bid to purchase and install the extended access technology described in 5.7 which enables customers to access libraries in a safe, secure way when buildings are unstaffed.

6. Implementation of the Strategy

6.1 A draft action plan and draft plan on a page are provided as part of the background papers to illustrate how we propose to implement the strategy over the next few years.

6.2 We anticipate implementing the new operating model and opening hours from April 2024.

7. Financial Implications

7.1 Financial modelling demonstrates that the Library Service can deliver a balanced budget for 2024-25, based on the following hours which are within the range of opening hours on which we consulted:

- Library – 18 hours
- Library Plus – 30 hours
- Library Connect – 42 hours

7.2 The strategic aims and actions identified in the Library Strategy create potential for efficiencies and increased income. It is not possible to specify financial impacts at this stage but is anticipated that from 2024/25, and over the duration of the strategy, efficiencies will be delivered. These will be achieved by working together with council services, communities, and partners.

7.3 Any future proposals that alter the operating model, including any further amendments to hours, will be considered in line with local need, impact and evidence as consulted upon and considered during this strategy development. Any significant changes would be subject to further public consultation.

7.4 Implementation of our new operational service will include a reorganisation of the current operational structure. The reorganisation will include a refresh and review of roles. Whilst our change management process will avoid compulsory redundancies wherever possible, we acknowledge this may not be mitigated in every case and therefore redundancy costs may be incurred during implementation.

7.5 Existing library budgets, improvement funds, grant funds and business cases for investment will be used to deliver the overall library strategy.

8. Environmental Implications and Sustainability

8.1 The draft strategy includes a strategic aim which proposes that libraries have a role in inspiring, informing and facilitating climate and ecologically positive actions and decisions which would have a positive impact on our unique environment and carbon footprint reductions. The service is also committed to increasing the number of solar and low carbon solutions on our libraries network.

9. Well-being and Health Implications

- 9.1 The draft strategy includes a strategic aim which proposes that libraries provide space where residents can connect with health and wellbeing opportunities which would have a positive impact in terms of improved accessibility and improved health outcomes in our communities.

10. Other Implications

Property and assets

- 10.1 Dorset Council Assets and Regeneration team are a key partner in the Library Strategy, in particular the aim to create inviting, flexible and well used spaces. Joint actions are highlighted within the draft action plan including:
- ongoing engagement between the library service, assets and regeneration, other services and partners to identify opportunities in relation to relocation or colocation of services and in regard to 'one public estate'
 - working together with assets and regeneration to develop an asset improvement plan for the library network, including Blandford and Ferndown libraries, which require review and potential investment to become successful Library Connect locations
 - jointly pursuing local capital receipt, grant funding and national funding opportunities to invest in building improvements as a council and community asset
 - working together to engage in community, service, health and family hub initiatives

Voluntary organisations

- 10.2 This draft strategy seeks to deepen our connection with our communities, including voluntary organisations. We propose a business partner model to work more strategically with partners and clearly define the delivery of shared priorities. [action plan]

Community Safety

- 10.3 Not applicable. Nothing to report

Safeguarding Children and Adults

- 10.4 Not applicable. Nothing to report.

Human Resources

- 10.5 Library employee views and ideas have directly helped to shape the draft strategy including the "Enable" [our teams] strategic theme. Employees have contributed via employee surveys, workshops and strategy development task and finish groups.
- 10.6 Regular whole service meetings, include strategy development updates, are held and we are supporting any employees who may feel this is an uncertain time, signposting to the support available via the Council's wellbeing offer.
- 10.7 The draft strategy commits to develop our workforce and will continue to work with our HR & Organisational Development colleagues to support current and future workforce development plans which reflects the wishes of employee feedback received throughout consultation.

- 10.8 The Library Strategy and Action plan 2023 – 2033 sets out the new tiered operating model for our network of 23 libraries to operate within. Our employee and partner consultation provided confidence, with support in the new operating model at over 80%.
- 10.9 Implementation of our new operating model will require us to reshape and review the roles of our current workforce. Proposals will result in a new operational model in the service with refreshed roles that are aligned to the new strategic aims of the service. Employees and trade unions will be consulted on the proposals and our workforce will be supported in accordance with the Council's change management policies and procedures. Every effort will be made to avoid compulsory redundancies and support will be provided through the council's wellbeing offer.
- 10.10 The service will continue to engage and consult with trade unions throughout the strategy development and implementation process.

11. Risk Assessment

- 11.1 There are no risks associated with this report as there is no decision required. However, it should be noted that by developing the library strategy across two phases of public consultation, this helps to mitigate the risk of failing to effectively engage with our communities.
- 11.2 The level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Medium

Residual Risk: Accepted. Tolerate- monitor the risk with contingency planning in place.

12. Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA)

- 12.1 The draft Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) was refined in the light of feedback received during phase 2 consultation and engagement process. A draft was submitted to the Dorset Council Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) group for review in April 2023 and has been further refined following feedback from the group and the Dorset Council Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer. The current draft is available at Appendix 8.
- 12.2 Actions from the EqIA are incorporated into the strategy action plan. Feedback from the EDI group has directly influenced the prioritisation of some of the actions and also the way that the strategy is structured. The action plan seeks to minimise any negative impacts on groups with protected characteristics and to promote the many opportunities for positive impacts afforded by the strategy. The EqIA will continue to be updated as action plans are developed.

13. Appendices

- [Appendix 1 Library Strategy](#)
- [Appendix 2 #LetsTalkLibraries - Children's Survey Phase 2 Public Consultation Response Report](#)
- [Appendix 3 16years+ \(Main\) public survey phase 2 consultation analysis report](#)
- [Appendix 4 Employee, partner and business survey phase 2 consultation analysis report](#)
- [Appendix 5 Appendix containing copies of questionnaires used](#)
- [Appendix 6 Shared Intelligence Report: Dorset Library Strategy Phase 2 Engagement Report 2023](#)
- [Appendix 7 Strategic Needs Assessment](#)
- [Appendix 8 Equalities Impact Assessment](#)

- [Appendix 9 Draft Plan on a Page](#)
- [Appendix 10 Draft Action Plan](#)

14. **Background Papers**

- [Joint Overview Committee 29th June 2022: Libraries Strategy Review Agenda Reports Pack and Minutes](#)
- [Dorset Council Web Page detailing Proposed Opening Hours](#)
- [South Gloucestershire Libraries Web Site explaining the use of Open Access technology to extend library opening hours.](#)
- Informal Presentation to Joint Overview Committee