

RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET ON 10 JUNE 2015 FROM THE RESOURCES AND PERFORMANCE PANEL AT ITS MEETING ON 2 JUNE 2015

RP10: Cabinet Report: Review of Overview and Scrutiny

The Chief Executive presented the report and informed the Panel that in 2014 a Corporate Peer challenge was undertaken at the Borough Council. One of the issues which emerged quite strongly from the review was a fairly widespread concern amongst the Members who participated that the current Overview on Scrutiny arrangements were not particularly effective. An in depth review of the Council's overview and scrutiny function was subsequently commissioned from the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS). The report summarised the main findings and recommendations arising from the review and recommends a way forward to seek to enhance the effectiveness of the Overview and Scrutiny arrangements.

The Panel was advised that the review, conducted by the CfPS concluded that:

- Overview and Scrutiny arrangements were not working as effectively as they could do in King's Lynn and West Norfolk.
- There were examples of the scrutiny function working well, such as with the development of the Tuesday Market Place Scheme, but that these were the 'exception rather than the rule.'
- There was almost universal dissatisfaction with how the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee operated.
- Panel agendas tended to be dominated by Cabinet Reports and often little value was added by their consideration.
- The scrutiny process had been used for party political purposes on occasion.
- There was positive desire from the Administration and opposition parties to change overview and scrutiny and address these issues.

The Chief Executive outlined the potential improvements put forward by the reviewers as detailed in the report.

Members' attention was drawn to the Summary of Recommendations set out in the report.

The Chief Executive advised that the most radical/fundamental proposal put forward was the abolition of the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee and its replacement with a new Corporate Performance Scrutiny Committee. If adopted this would require some consequential changes to the Terms of Reference for the Resources and Performance and Regeneration, Environment and Community Panels, which might incorporate a rebalancing of the workloads between the two Panels.

The Panel was informed that the proposal to decouple the Audit and Risk Committee from the new Resources and Performance Panel had a clearer and stronger rationale in this context.

Members were advised that in terms of methodology of working, the most significant recommendation was perhaps recommendation 8, which sought to move the Panels from the current practice of primarily focused on pre-Cabinet Scrutiny of Cabinet reports conducted a week or so prior to the Cabinet meeting itself, towards a more self-generated, developmental, work programme. The proposed approach would incorporate some of the positive aspects of the old 'Committee' regime whereby the Panels would be involved in the development of policy and initiatives rather than merely commenting upon fully developed reports a few days before each Cabinet.

In conclusion, the Chief Executive explained that whilst it would be an option to present the recommendations straight to Cabinet and Council for determination, given their significance in terms of the role of Members, in particular in relation to policy formation included in these proposals, it was felt to be more appropriate to take a more measured and individual approach to their consideration.

Under Standing Order 34, Councillor Mrs Mellish addressed the Panel and commented that the briefings prior to full Council were extremely useful and worked well. However, she expressed concern regarding recommendations 2 and 5 set out in the Peer Challenge report and added that it was important to discuss the recommendations in the Working Group to be established. In conclusion, Councillor Mrs Mellish stated that it was a positive report.

Councillor Devereux added that it was a good report, but commented that he was surprised that there would be no personnel, financial or risk implications and there could be significant benefits as yet unquantified. He commented that there could be a potential saving of man hours for both Councillors and officers.

In response to comments from Councillor Morrison, the Chief Executive explained that details relating to financial and personnel implications had not been included at this stage. It was recommended that a Task and Finish Group be established to consider the Centre for Public Scrutiny report and to present proposals and recommendations to Cabinet. At that stage consideration would be given to any implications, both financial and personnel.

Councillor Collop reported that he had taken part in the Corporate Peer Challenge process and that he welcomed the proposal to decouple the Audit and Risk Committee from the new Resources and Performance Panel. Councillor Collop commented that he was content with the proposal for three Panels, less meetings and the opportunity for Members to participate in small working groups and put forward ideas. Councillor Collop stated that there would be opportunities for some Opposition Members to become involved with the process and participate in the Task and Finish Group. Councillor Collop also added that he supported the

recommendation to abolish the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee and replace it with a new Corporate Performance Scrutiny Committee.

The Leader assured Councillor Collop that Members would be involved with the Task and Finish Group and that he was aware that there was talent within the Council that was perhaps being under-utilised. The process would enable Councillors to work constructively together to put forward proposals to Cabinet for consideration.

Councillor Gourlay expressed disappointment that the Opposition Group had not been briefed prior to Annual Council. However, he concurred with the comments made by Councillor Collop.

In response to further comments from Councillor Collop relating to the Centre of Public Scrutiny report being available on line for Members to view, the Chief Executive undertook to forward to the link to the Panel to enable Members to view the report.

The Chairman, Councillor Humphrey added that Cabinet reports considered by the Panels one week prior to the Cabinet meeting was too late and he welcomed the proposal for the Panels to become involved at an earlier stage and input into the report and would therefore have a constructive part to play in the process. He added that he supported the proposed workshop with the Centre of Public Scrutiny and the establishment of a Task and Finish Group.

The Leader added that he had found the comments made by Members to be encouraging and that the Panel had had a good debate and that he looked forward to working together with Members to making the Council more efficient.

A discussion took place on the wording of Recommendation 3 – Task and Finish Council Task Group. It was therefore proposed by the Chairman, Councillor Humphrey and agreed by the Panel that the words “Task and Finish Council Task Group” be replaced with “Working Group.”

“To establish a **Working Group** to consider the CfPS report and the outcome of the Member workshop and make recommendations to Cabinet.”

RESOLVED: The Panel supported the recommendation to Cabinet and Council as set out in the report, subject to amending the wording of Recommendation 3 to read:

Cabinet and Council are recommended to:-

- 1 Received and comment on the findings of the CfPS review.

- 2 Instruct officers to arrange a workshop for Members with the CfPS to consider in more depth their report and examples of good practice from similar authorities
- 3 To establish a **Working Group** to consider the CfPS report and the outcome of the Member workshop and make recommendations to Cabinet.
- 4 To bring a further report to Cabinet to finalise revised arrangements for the performance of the overview and scrutiny process within the Borough Council