

Agenda Item 34.

TITLE	Managing the Scrutiny Workload
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on 17 July 2019
WARD	None Specific
DIRECTOR	Andrew Moulton, Assistant Director, Governance

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

Developing an efficient and effective Overview and Scrutiny function which can hold the Executive to account and ensure that residents' concerns and priorities are addressed.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee:

- 1) considers the options in the report to manage the Overview and Scrutiny workload for 2019/20;
- 2) receive a further report at the next meeting, if necessary, with detailed proposals including any implications for political balance arrangements.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

Between 2013 and 2015, the Council's Scrutiny function comprised the Management Committee and four Overview and Scrutiny Committees, viz:

- Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Community Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

In 2015, after a review of Committee workloads, the Management Committee recommended to Council that the Community Partnerships and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committees be merged to form the current Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

At the Management Committee meeting on 19 June 2019, Members considered the current workloads of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees and noted that a number of significant issues would be considered over the coming year. These included the major Scrutiny review of the Council's Budget process and the potential declaration of a Climate Emergency.

In order to manage the Scrutiny workloads effectively Members requested a report setting out potential options for addressing the additional workload in 2019/20 and future years.

Background

The present Overview and Scrutiny Committee structure of an overarching Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and three Overview and Scrutiny Committees, (Children's Services, Community and Corporate Services and Health) was agreed by the Council in July 2015.

Between 2013 and 2015 the Scrutiny structure had comprised the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and four Overview and Scrutiny Committees: Children's Services, Community Partnerships, Corporate Services and Health. In 2015, the remit of the Community Partnerships and Corporate Services Committees was merged into one.

The situation in 2019 is that a number of major Scrutiny issues have arisen which will put the existing structure under pressure. These include the detailed Scrutiny review of the Council's Budget and the implications of a potential Climate Emergency declaration which will impact on every public service across the Borough.

The Management Committee is able, under its Terms of Reference, to propose amendments to the composition and Terms of Reference of Overview and Scrutiny Committees to the Council on the basis of political proportionality, (Para 6.1.4(a) of the Council's Constitution.

Chapter 1.1.4 of the Council's Constitution also states that the Monitoring Officer will monitor and review the operation of the Constitution to ensure that its aims and principles are given full effect.

Analysis of Issues

In light of the Overview and Scrutiny workload issues, highlighted above, there appear to be three options to address the current situation.

Option 1 – establish an additional Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This may be achieved by splitting the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee back into its constituent parts, i.e. reverting back to a Community Partnerships and a Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The current 2019/20 Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programmes are appended to the report. As an example, the workload of the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee has been divided into two sections to give an indication of the responsibilities and workload of two Committees rather than one.

Option 2 – maintain the current Overview and Scrutiny structure and set up more time-limited Task and Finish Groups to tackle specific issues. A report, elsewhere on the Agenda, gives an example of a Task and Finish Group which could be established to look at the issues relating to the adoption of roads and open spaces following the completion of new housing development.

Option 3 – maintain the current Overview and Scrutiny structure and rigorously review the work programmes to ensure that the Committees focus on a smaller number of key priorities during the year and in future years.

Analysis of Issues

Establishing another Overview and Scrutiny Committee would require additional resourcing in terms of additional meetings, research, report writing, etc. Members will recall the discussion relating to the Government's Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in relation to resourcing. The guidance stated that: "ultimately it is up to each authority to decide on the resource it provides, but every authority should recognise that creating and sustaining an effective Scrutiny function requires them to allocate resources to it".

Other implications relating to setting up another Committee include:

- further work on adjusting the political balance arrangements across all Committees;
- reference to the Constitution Review Working Group in relation to updating the Council's Constitution;
- additional costs relating to the Chairman's annual Special Responsibility Allowance (£2.5k) and the costs of arranging and servicing additional meetings.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£2,500	No	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£2,500	No	Revenue
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£2,500	No	Revenue

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

The Chairmen of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees receive a Special Responsibility Allowance of £2,500 per annum. There would also be additional costs in printing Agenda, Member expenses, staffing, etc. These costs would be absorbed within existing budgets.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2

None

List of Background Papers

Council's Constitution - Section 6

Contact Neil Carr	Service Democratic and Electoral Services
Telephone No 0118 974 6058	Email neil.carr@wokingham.gov.uk
Date 8 July 2019	Version No. 1

This page is intentionally left blank