

Agenda Item 46.

TITLE	Managing the Scrutiny Workload
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on 18 September 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) consider the options set out in the report to manage the Overview and Scrutiny workload for 2019/20 and future years;
- 2) approve a combination of Options 3, 4 and 5 in order to address the workload issues;
- 3) agree to review the Overview and Scrutiny workload situation again during the 2020/21 Municipal Year.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

At its meeting on 17 July 2019, the Committee considered a report which outlined options for managing the Overview and Scrutiny workload in 2019/20. This followed the addition of significant Scrutiny items such as the major review of the Council's Budget development process and the declaration of a Climate Emergency.

The Committee considered a number of options to manage the workload, including:

- Establishing an additional Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
- Setting up additional time-limited Task and Finish Groups;
- Focussing on a smaller number of key priorities during the year;
- Holding additional meetings for the existing Committees;
- Amending the terms of reference of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee agreed to give further consideration to the issues relating to managing the workload at a meeting when all the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chairmen were in attendance.

Background

At its meeting in July 2019 the Committee considered a report which set out options for managing the Overview and Scrutiny workload in 2019/20. The report followed the inclusion of a number of significant Scrutiny items such as the Budget review and the declaration of a Climate Emergency.

The report stated that the current 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) had been 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 2019/20 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, the implications of a potential Climate Emergency declaration which will impact on every public service across the Borough and the establishment of Task and Finish Groups.

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.

Analysis of Issues

At the July meeting the Committee discussed a number of options for addressing the current workload issues. The Options were:

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.

Option 2 – maintain the current Overview and Scrutiny structure and set up more time-limited Task and Finish Groups to tackle specific issues. As an example, a Task and Finish Group has been 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.

Option 4 – linked to Option 3, maintain the current Overview and Scrutiny structure and hold additional meetings. As an example, the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee has set up a number of extraordinary meetings to facilitate scrutiny of the Council's Budget process.

Option 5 – amend the terms of reference of one or more of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees in order to achieve a more reasonable, balanced workload for each Committee. For example, the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee could take on additional issues such as housing, the voluntary sector and community safety.

Analysis of Issues

Establishing another Overview and Scrutiny Committee would require additional resourcing in terms of additional evening meetings, research, report writing, Member and Officer attendance, etc.

Members will also 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 – because of the complexity of undertaking this task any proposed change should wait until the start of the 2020/21 Municipal Year;
- 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.

Currently, support to the Overview and Scrutiny Committees is delivered through the Democratic Services team alongside the support it provides to the Council, Executive and a wide range of other Committees and bodies. The team also manages a wide range of appeal hearings on behalf of the Council and is heavily involved in work relating to local and national elections. The creation of an additional Committee and/or additional meetings will create further pressure on the team to deliver high quality support to the Overview and Scrutiny function within existing resources.

At the July 2019 meeting, the Committee agreed to give further consideration to the workload issues at a subsequent meeting, when all the Overview and Scrutiny Chairmen were in attendance.

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)	0	N/A	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.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2

None

List of Background Papers

Council's Constitution - Section 6

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