

# Council

## Changes to Overview and Scrutiny Arrangements

15 May 2013

### Report of Head of Law and Governance

#### PURPOSE OF REPORT

To enable Council to consider proposed changes to the Overview and Scrutiny arrangements at Cherwell District Council

This report is public.

#### Recommendations

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- (1) That the Overview and Scrutiny arrangements be amended to a single Overview and Scrutiny Committee, with responsibility all for Overview and Scrutiny arrangements as set out in Appendix 1.
- (2) That a Budget Planning Committee be created as a committee of council as set out in Appendix 2.
- (3) That formal Resources and Performance Scrutiny Board, Finance Scrutiny Working group (informal) and Performance Scrutiny Working Group (informal) be disbanded.
- (4) That both the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Budget Planning Committee should have 12 members each with casual substitution permitted.
- (5) That the Head of Law and Governance be authorised to make consequential amendments to the constitution and revisions to the calendar of meetings in light of the above changes.

#### Details

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- 1.1 It is now over four years since the Council reviewed its overview and scrutiny arrangements. Whilst the Overview and Scrutiny process has delivered some good quality work, it is timely to review its operation in light of the development of the council, the successes and areas for improvement, the challenges the council faces in terms of operating in an environment of diminishing resources, the principles of the Localism Act and the all year round focus that there is now on budget planning and preparation.

- 1.2 The current scrutiny arrangements were designed to provide a specific focus for budget and performance management. With these elements firmly embedded in the organisation the need to maintain this specific focus within scrutiny is no longer necessary. Additionally there was some jurisdictional overlap between the two committees and in the current challenging financial environment it would be difficult to justify the resources needed to operate two scrutiny committees at a district Council level. Therefore it is proposed to reduce the scrutiny arrangements to a single Overview and Scrutiny Committee, run on a select committee basis. This will deliver the following benefits:
- A consolidated approach to scrutiny, removing jurisdictional uncertainty and duplication
  - Use of performance Management by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to inform work programme
  - The adoption of a select committee approach by Overview and Scrutiny, with different meetings dedicated to separate subjects, receiving witnesses and producing reports with quick turnaround times to Executive and Council as appropriate.
- 1.3 At the same time, it is acknowledged that budget planning has become an increasingly important process for the Council. At Cherwell, there is now a year round focus on budget planning and monitoring. Budget planning has evolved in to a whole Council responsibility with positive involvement and dialogue across party lines as has been evidenced by the acceptance of a consensus budget.
- 1.4 With this in mind it is proposed to create a Budget Planning Committee, This will be a committee of council and include members from all political groups. It is believed that this committee will assist with the dissemination of information and enable the Council to shape budget considerations at a strategic level, feeding through proposals to the Executive. The role of the Executive in formulating and proposing the final budget to Council remains unchanged. The new committee:
- Will enable year round focus on budget planning and monitoring, which has become the 'new norm'
  - Mainstreams budget planning work
  - Removes duplication between Executive and Scrutiny
- 1.5 Subject to the agreement of the proposed new arrangements, a revised calendar of meetings will be circulated to all Members.
- 1.6 The system of named substitutes currently operated by the Overview and Scrutiny arrangements is unhelpful to members and the efficient running of the committee and consequently it is proposed both new committees will have 12 members each with casual substitutions permitted.

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## **Key Issues for Consideration/Reasons for Decision and Options**

2.1 The following options have been identified. The approach in the recommendation is believed to be the best way forward.

- Option One** To accept the recommendation.
- Option Two** To amend the recommendations.
- Option Three** To reject the recommendations.

## Consultations

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The Leader of the Council has consulted the leaders of the other political groups.

## Implications

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- Financial:** There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.  
Comments checked by James Doble, Democratic and Elections Manager,  
james.doble@cherwellandsouthnorthants.gov.uk
- Legal:** The proposals outlined in this report are consistent with the Local Government Acts 1972 and 2000, and reflect the spirit of flexible working as set out in the Localism Act  
Comments checked by James Doble, Democratic and Elections Manager,  
james.doble@cherwellandsouthnorthants.gov.uk
- Risk Management:** There are no risk implications directly arising from this report, however robust scrutiny and budget planning arrangements as proposed mitigate risk to the authority  
Comments checked by James Doble, Democratic and Elections Manager,  
james.doble@cherwellandsouthnorthants.gov.uk

## Document Information

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| Appendix No         | Title  |
|---------------------|--|
| 1                   | Overview and Scrutiny Committee Proposed Terms of Reference    |
| 2                   | Budget Planning Committee Proposed Terms of Reference          |
| Background Papers   |  |
| None                |  |
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