
REPORT TO THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE 6 MARCH 2013

PORTFOLIO: OVERALL STRATEGY & POLICY DIRECTION

REPORT FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

**SUBJECT: PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE COUNCIL'S
GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE**

1 DECISION BEING RECOMMENDED

1.1 Recommended to Full Council that from the next municipal year:-

- i) The membership of the Review Committee is expanded from eight Members to fifteen Members, with the Chairmanship continuing to rest with a Member of the main opposition party.
- ii) The specific functions carried out by the Review Committee are expanded to make clearer reference to its role in both the budget monitoring process and the forward planning around the budget and medium term financial strategy, including in-depth review and analysis of not just policy issues, but also service specific areas of work. Also, to include specific reference to the scope for joint reviews with adjoining Councils.
- iii) The Executive Portfolios and responsibilities be changed as follows:-
Environment to become Environment, Leisure, Arts and Culture.
Leisure, Tourism, Heritage, Arts, Culture and Business to become Economic Development, Regeneration, Business Liaison and Tourism.
Planning and Transportation to become Planning, Transport and Heritage
- iv) Each of the Executive Portfolios allow for a Member to work shadow each of the Portfolio holders; these work shadowing arrangements to be facilitated by the Leader who will make the appropriate appointments.
- v) In light of iv) above, the current two Member champion roles be disbanded.
- vi) The current East and West Community Forums be disbanded and replaced by a more tailored approach, which involves:-
 - 1) The Leader and appropriate Portfolio Holders, plus the Chairman of the Review Committee, meeting with the leaders of the Parish and Town Councils two times a year to discuss matters of common interest across the District.

- 2) Working with the Police and Crime Commissioner and the local Joint Crime and Disorder Partnership to promote two public meetings per year on policing and crime in the District.
 - 3) Working with the local Clinical Commissioning Group and local Joint Health and Wellbeing Board to promote two public meetings per year on health provision in the District.
 - 4) Arranging other topic specific or area specific meetings as appropriate, as agreed by the Leader and relevant Portfolio holders.
- vii) Subject to the agreement to i) to vi) above, the relevant changes be made to the Council's constitution to reflect these decisions.

2 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

Context

- 2.1 This report picks up on some of the suggestions arising from the recent Peer Review of the Council in respect of governance and decision making, as well as political leadership and capacity. In particular, the report focuses on the operation of the Review Committee, the capacity of the Executive and the Council's engagement with the community through community forums and area committees.

The Review Committee

- 2.2 The Peer Review team concluded that it would be appropriate for the Council to re-examine the size of the Review Committee. They consider that there may be merit in increasing the Committee's membership and getting more Members involved, thereby increasing its capacity and ability to undertake more work, particularly in connection with the budget and around performance relative to the budget pressures the Council is facing. The team also felt there was scope to undertake further joint work with other Councils, especially in connection with joint partnership work and joint partnership structures.
- 2.3 The Peer Review team warn of the need to clarify the relationship between Audit and an expanded Review Committee around such issues as finance, but in reality the Audit Committee tends to look retrospectively in terms of budget and service issues, whilst an expanded role for Review would encompass a more forward looking and pro-active approach to the budget process.
- 2.4 In response to the Peer Review team's suggestions, it is therefore proposed that from the 2013/14 municipal year, the size of the Committee is increased from eight to fifteen members and that its functions are expanded to incorporate a more proactive approach to the budget process. For example, through feeding into the Medium Term Financial Strategy and examining future options in terms of expenditure and income generation. It is also

proposed that greater emphasis be placed on the scope for joint working with other authorities around areas of common interest.

The Executive

- 2.5 The Peer Review team saw merit in reinforcing the Council's ambitions around wealth and prosperity and with that in mind, felt that there would be benefit in ensuring that within the Executive, greater emphasis was given to economic regeneration and promotion and development. With that in mind, it is suggested that a specific portfolio is created around Economic Development, Regeneration, Business Liaison and Tourism. That could be done through rationalising the current Leisure, Tourism, Heritage, Arts, Culture and Business portfolio, with Leisure, Arts and Culture moving to Environment and Heritage to Planning and Transportation.
- 2.6 The Peer Review team refer to future political leadership and capacity and in an attempt to develop that aspect, it is proposed that a formal work shadowing arrangement be put in place for the Executive, with each Portfolio Holder being allowed one other Member for work shadowing purposes. As with appointments to the Executive, the Leader would nominate Members for these work shadowing roles, such nominations being made at Annual Council.
- 2.7 If the above changes were put in place, it is felt that there would be no further rationale to retain the current Member Champion positions, whose roles and responsibilities have at times been far from clear.

Community Forums

- 2.8 Whilst the Peer Review team has looked at governance, decision making and political leadership, it did not look specifically at the issue of Community Forums. The Council took the decision to move to Community Forums a couple of years ago, as a successor to Area Committees. However, the Forums have not attracted many public and they have certainly not developed as originally envisaged.
- 2.9 Other than where there are specific issues that readily attract public interest, it does appear that a number of Authorities are struggling with a Community Forum type format, particularly where there are local Parish and Town Councils. As part of the debate around the way forward, it is suggested that rather than continue with the existing arrangements, the opportunity is taken to work with other partner agencies to facilitate specific subject only public meetings. For example, to work with the Essex Police and Crime Commissioner and the local Joint Community Safety Partnership to arrange local public meetings around Police and Crime and to do something similar with the local Clinical Commissioning Group around local health provision. Other local issues can then be picked up as appropriate and where necessary, local public meetings can be arranged.

3 RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The changes outlined above represent both reputational and resource risks for the Council. However, if successful, they would help grow the overall capacity of the Council and in many ways, represent a logical development to the way in which the Council has changed over time.
- 3.2 To not respond to the Peer Review and ignore the Review team's findings could be seen to be damaging in terms of the Council's reputation and the perception of the Authority within the local government community.

4 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The changes outlined in this report would have minimal financial implications, although the deletion of the two remaining champion posts would save £850, which could be set aside for further Member training and development, either for the proposed work shadowing roles or for further Review Committee training. The costs currently allocated for Forum meetings (£500) would be reallocated to the tailored meeting arrangements proposed under recommendation (vi).

SMT Lead Officer Signature: _____

Chief Executive

Background Papers:-

None.

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