

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

A meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board was held on Tuesday 18 April 2023.

PRESENT: Councillors M Saunders (Chair), T Mawston (Vice-Chair), B Hubbard, D Jones, D McCabe, J Platt, M Storey and J Thompson

OFFICERS: S Bonner and A Wilson

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillors R Arundale, C Cooke - Elected Mayor, D Davison, C Hobson and C McIntyre

22/181 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest received at this point in the meeting.

22/182 **MINUTES - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD - 28 MARCH 2023**

ORDERED: That the minutes of the OSB meeting held on 28 March 2023 would be submitted to the next meeting of OSB after the local elections of 2023.

22/183 **FUTURE SCRUTINY PANEL STRUCTURE**

The Head of Democratic Services presented that report into Future Scrutiny Panel arrangements and explained the report had been driven by the Governance Improvement journey. Members were also advised the report had received input from those working on the CIPFA sub-working group concerned with Governance arrangements.

The report contained two appendices which included an analysis of how scrutiny operated in the Council and what good scrutiny would look like.

The purpose of the report was to present a new structure for the Council's scrutiny panels. The current structure consisted of eight thematic panels. However, the work of the Governance sub-group found a new structure would be better suited to themes based on strategic objectives. It was commented that the proposed structure could allow for improved relationships between scrutiny and service areas.

The Head of Democratic Services advised the report and its recommendations sought a discussion from OSB about the future structure of scrutiny panels.

OSB was advised an Executive/ Scrutiny Protocol was being drafted but this would be brought to a future meeting.

A Member commented that, while agreeing with the proposals, fewer and therefore larger panels may make them unwieldy and prone to subject overlap. The Member also commented that panel members would need to be clear about what services fell within respective panel remits. It was clarified that the panels would be closely aligned to respective service areas.

Members pointed out that one of the Sub-Group's suggestions was for panel's Chair and Vice Chair to be from different political groups. It was clarified this would be difficult to enforce and was based on political make-up and cultural shift.

A Member raised concerns about the amalgamation of some panels as larger panels could lead to broader topic selection. As such topic selection would need to be precise. It was commented this issue would be seen in any panel structure.

It was commented that political persuasion of Chair and Vice Chairs of panel should be left to the political process. It was also commented that more emphasis should be placed on the role of the Vice Chair of panels, rather than just taking assuming the Chair's role when required. It was also noted that more needed to be done about publicising the role scrutiny played.

A Member commented that a change to the panel structure would be beneficial but held some reservations about the potential breadth of some remits. However, the Head of Democratic services clarified that the frequency of meetings would not be affected just the number of panels.

A Member queried if other Council's scrutiny panel structures had been examined by means of benchmarking. It was clarified this had been done as part of the options appraisal but had not included Councils in the Tees Valley.

The Chair queried if it was possible for Chair and Vice Chairs to be selected at the first meeting of the panel rather than the Annual General Meeting. It was commented this would require a change to the constitution, but enquiries would be made of the Monitoring Officer.

A discussion took place regarding the number of Members that could sit on panels and the possibility of having a more equal gender balance on panels. It was also discussed those matters were based on political proportionality.

A Member queried if OSB could reconsider the proposals at a later stage. It was clarified that was possible if OSB requested it. It was commented that accepting the proposals demonstrated a willingness to look at how to change and improve the existing system.

ORDERED that:

- 1. The proposed scrutiny panel structure be approved and;**
- 2. Establish the advantages and disadvantages of appointing Chairs and Vice Chairs of panels at first committee meetings rather than the AGM**

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ANY OTHER URGENT ITEMS WHICH, IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR, MAY BE CONSIDERED.

None.