

# REVIEW OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Chairman of Member Task Group, Councillor Chris Spruce

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Key Decision? NO

  
Lichfield  
district council  
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**Strategic  
Overview &  
Scrutiny  
Committee**

## 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 At its meeting on the 19<sup>th</sup> November 2020, the Strategic (Overview & Scrutiny) Committee agreed to create a Member Task Group to consider the Committee structure at Lichfield District Council and investigate whether any changes should be recommended to this Committee, considered by Cabinet and then onto Council for approval.
- 1.2 The Task Group consisted of Councillors Spruce (Chairman), Norman, B. Yeates and Lax. They were supported by Head of Governance and Performance and the Overview & Scrutiny Officer and met regularly throughout December and January.
- 1.3 The Task Group discussed the identified need to review Committees and agreed the key issues were the high impact on resources and especially with Overview & Scrutiny outcomes that were not effectively demonstrating an impact on outcomes to support effective decision making processes. The full scope for the Task Group can be found at Appendix A.
- 1.4 The Task Group considered information and evidence including the cost of conducting Committees, how other authorities operate their Committee Structures and the results of a questionnaire sent to all Members to gather their views.
- 1.5 The Task Group have compiled a number of recommendations for this Committee to consider.

## 2. Actions and Recommendations

The Member Task Group would like the Strategic Overview & Scrutiny Committee to consider the following:

- 2.1 That Parish Forum is removed as a constituted committee and become informal meetings to aid information flow and training.
- 2.2 The District Board is removed as a constituted committee. Any statutory function carried out by this meeting is delegated to officers and relevant, plans and decisions notified to Cabinet members and committees where appropriate.
- 2.3 That the structure for Overview & Scrutiny be changed to a single Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 2.4 That the Overview & Scrutiny Committee consider items earlier on to aid policy development and review whether stated outcomes from decisions, strategies and policies have been achieved via effective use of member task groups.
- 2.5 That clear role descriptors and mandatory training is developed for scrutiny chair, vice chair and task group chair roles and used to ensure effective recruitment and performance.
- 2.6 That an Independent Review Panel (IRP) is commissioned to assess the Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) payable to any roles affected by this review.

- 2.7 That a final report is sent to Cabinet for consideration before being presented to Full Council for approval.

### 3. Task Group Findings

- 3.1 The Task Group considered the following were required for effective committee meetings:
- Welcoming and accessible meetings – less formality but clear processes
  - Clear terms of reference – reducing overlap and duplication
  - Good planning and an effective workload
  - Excellent reports and associated presentations
  - Excellent and positive relationships between committee members and officers
  - Well trained and adequately prepared committee members who are confident in their role
  - Good informed debate
  - The discussion adds value early in the council's processes – helps develop good policy
  - Effective decisions and timely recommendations which can demonstrate progress toward our strategic outcomes
  - Where the investment in officer and member time involved can be demonstrated as value for money
  - Good engagement with stakeholders and the public at the meetings where appropriate
- 3.2 They noted that there was a strong desire to make more effective use of Overview and Scrutiny to develop policy and engage a wider group of members in decisions at an early stage and so the Task Group focused their review work largely around O&S.
- 3.3 The Task Group looked at the time taken at Overview & Scrutiny meetings compared to outcomes and recognised that many reports were noted and did not aid the Cabinet or officers develop ideas or contribute to the aims of the Strategic Plan.
- 3.4 The outcome of meetings was compared to the cost of Scrutiny which included all Officer time from drafting reports, Leadership Team reviews, preparations and holding the Committee meetings. It also showed that since holding virtual meetings, more Officer input was required with two clerks in attendance.
- 3.5 As agreed at this Committee in November, the Task Group created and sent all Members a questionnaire asking for views on the effectiveness of Committees and again this was focused towards O&S as it was agreed that this is where changes were required.
- 3.6 18 responses were received and the following points gathered
- Strong Chairmanship was essential
  - Earlier input of O&S in the process. Development and collaboration, not just considering final product.
  - Earlier preparation of items and for meetings.
  - Use of task groups would be more effective.
  - There should be more training to support the use of virtual platform if this was to continue.
  - There should be fewer O&S Committees better timed to allow planning.
  - There should be more scoping of items going on the work programme to keep focus and ensure outcomes are optimised for the investment.
  - The Strategic Plan and Delivery Plan should be the basis of work programmes with the ability to add in further issues if required to facilitate overview.

- 3.7 The Task Group also drew from their own experiences and agreed that there should be a solid return on the investment made by Members at Committee meetings and so there should be fewer reports for noting and it would be more effective and useful to use the skills of Members earlier to feed into the development of reports. It was discussed that task groups could be used further to do this with invites to join to interested Members (even if not Committee Members) being a more effective platform for collaboration. It was felt that this more informal setting would help get more involvement from a wider range of members with different skills and not just those confident in the formal Committee setting. It was also agreed that invites to relevant external bodies should be utilised more as the views given by these groups are often invaluable in understanding issues. These task groups could continue in a virtual setting which would aid accessibility from all, allow external people to participate from their workplace if required and reduce cost (and carbon emissions) in not requiring travel to meeting rooms as well as only needing one officer to host.
- 3.8 Election of Chairs (and vice chairs) to O&S Committees was considered and it was discussed whether the nomination should be made by the Leader of the Council as currently or by the Committee themselves. It was believed that the Leader should continue to choose the nomination for Chair and consider the appointment against a clear role criteria, with a requirement for mandated training or compensatory experience for the person nominated. It was clear from the survey that this was felt to be a critical issue to ensure the chairs (and vice chairs) can plan the meetings effectively as well as have suitable skills to keep control of the meeting and deliver key outcomes. We also considered the use of two vice chairman for scrutiny and recommend that the requirement for a second vice chairman is removed and it is accepted that the vice chairman role will be nominated by the leader of the leading opposition party.
- 3.9 Based on the comments made and their own experiences at meetings, the task group considered different structures for O&S and also looked at other authorities to consider what structures they used. This included other councils regarded as operating best practice models. The Task Group were also able to watch many meetings online via YouTube to understand the operation of such meetings.
- 3.10 The Task Group carried out an options appraisal of a range of scrutiny models used by other authorities. Options for three or four standing scrutiny committees will not help to achieve our aims and remain too costly to resource effectively. Two standing committees were felt to be viable given our resources, however a clear split of these options was difficult and will still require some element of external co-ordination to rebalance activity. By far the best solution, considering all of the factors and issues raised by the review, is to develop a single overview and scrutiny committee that will mirror monthly Cabinet meetings to maintain pace, provide a consistency in planning and use member task groups effectively to explore topics in more detail without excessive formality within the resources available. Although there will need to be a number of task groups, it would be easier to timetable and plan the work as it would not be rigid to committee cycles and statutory publishing requirements. The Overview & Scrutiny Committee could set these task groups up to assist in developing policy and plans, review outcomes and effectiveness, as well as dealing with overview matters, call-Ins and regular scrutiny of upcoming executive decisions as set out in the forward plan.
- 3.11 This model was felt to be critical to encourage wider participation from members and stakeholders who are often daunted by formal committees. As part of this proposal it is expected the role of Chairman for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will become more demanding and potentially attract a higher responsibility allowance. Similarly, the role of chair for member task groups will also need to be assessed to determine if this should now attract a responsibility allowance. This would need to be undertaken by an independent remuneration panel (IRP) once the proposals are formally recommended to ensure these are affordable within the existing member responsibility budget.
- 3.12 It was noted that regulatory Committees such as Planning Committee were governed by other legislation and are subject to regular review. It was felt that Parish Forum was invaluable, especially in allowing the Monitoring Officer to communicate information regarding Standards, but could operate

just as effectively as informal meetings and not a constituted Committee requiring district member attendance and could therefore continue via virtual means.

- 3.13 District Board was felt to be a vital communication tool to support liaison with key stakeholders and as a forum to discuss the Community Safety Plan and other broader areas of partnership working. However it was not felt that constituting such meetings and appointing district councillors to membership added value. Information from this committee will continue to be shared, and where necessary, key plans and strategies will be notified to the relevant officer or member.

|                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Alternative Options                                | Members can choose not to review the number or format of committees, frequency of meetings or their effectiveness and the status quo would remain. Current O&S are not aligned to the strategic plan and currently operating in silos which can only be managed via regular co-ordination meetings. This will limit officer capacity to support other key legal and governance functions, put additional pressure on the team that will impede performance and wellbeing or create additional budget pressures. |
| Consultation                                       | Member Questionnaire                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Financial Implications                             | An independent remuneration panel (IRP) will need undertake an assessment of any recommendations to roles attracting special responsibility as a result of the proposed structural changes. Given the proposed reduction in standing O&S committees and roles from 4 to 1, this will be contained within the existing revenue budget and may result in some nominal savings.                                                                                                                                    |
| Contribution to the Delivery of the Strategic Plan | The review will ensure that LDC will be considered a good Council through ensuring effective use of its resources and decision making processes and supporting our strategic ambitions.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Implications  | None from undertaking the review, however members should consider the implications of any recommendations.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Crime & Safety Issues                              | None from undertaking the review, however members should consider the implications of any recommendations.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Environmental Impact                               | There could be a number of positive impacts from changing the way that Committees are structured and conducted. Continuing with remote meetings in any capacity would reduce carbon admissions from vehicles traveling to the Council House. There would also be less emissions from heating and running electrical appliances for meetings e.g. lighting. However this may be lessened with the number of electrical IT devices being used.                                                                    |
| GDPR/Privacy Impact Assessment                     | None from undertaking the review, however members should consider the implications of any recommendations.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |

|   | Risk Description                                                    | How We Manage It                                                                            | Severity of Risk (RYG)                |
|---|---------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| A | Outcomes of the review are not achievable within existing resources | The review has been led by ensuring all solutions are deliverable within existing resources | Yellow<br>Impact med, likelihood med  |
| B | Virtual meetings are not legally permitted beyond May 2021          | Consider alternative solutions based on either outcome                                      | Yellow<br>Impact high, likelihood low |
| C | Member recommendations do not ensure effective meetings             | Options have been explored and best practice considered.                                    | Yellow<br>Impact high, likelihood low |

|   |                                                                                        |                                                                                                        |                                       |
|---|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
|   |                                                                                        | Recommendations will be subject to review before full adoption                                         |                                       |
| D | Member recommendations undermine the purpose of meetings and our statutory obligations | Wide range of evidence to be explored and recommended options to be evidence based with expert support | Yellow<br>Impact high, likelihood low |

## Background documents

The Constitution <https://democracy.lichfielddc.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=190&MId=304&Ver=4&info=1>

## Relevant web links

<https://local.gov.uk/pas/pas-support/planning-committee-support/planning-committee-review>

[https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/11%2064 Scrutiny%20for%20councillors 03 1.pdf](https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/11%2064%20Scrutiny%20for%20councillors%2003%201.pdf)

<https://www.cfgs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020-06-10-const-review-flyer2.pdf>