

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

5 March 2019

Briefing Note: The Overview and Scrutiny Function and Motions Process Update

Purpose of the briefing note: To provide a short update to the Committee on the progress made since the meeting of 31 January 2019 regarding the overview and scrutiny function and motions project.

This briefing note is to inform Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Members of the proposed, and inform them of the ideas that have been discussed within the Democratic Services team. The briefing note is also asking Members for feedback on the ideas presented, and to make their own suggestions. Members are asked to agree the approach outlined below, as well as taking into account political standpoints, and assist in recruiting backbench Members to take part in the project. Since the meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 31 January 2019, the overview and scrutiny functions project has developed in the following ways.

1. To undertake an 'Informal Workshop: the Relationship between Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny'

This workshop will include selected Portfolio Holders (PFH) as well as the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This would be held during the summer, possibly in June-July, as there will be no other Committees during this time and would be before overview and scrutiny meetings for the 2019/20 municipal year. It would be an afternoon/evening meeting to suit the majority of Members, to increase the possible attendance, and would last for approximately an hour.

The points that would be considered during this workshop could include:

1. How would Cabinet feel about written recommendations from O&S to each Cabinet meeting?
2. What would O&S like recommendations to Cabinet look like? For example in the form of a briefing note or as part of the report?

3. Would the relevant O&S chair attend Cabinet meetings to provide a summary of O&S discussions?

2. To undertake an ‘Overview and Scrutiny Symposium’

Democratic Services would hold a symposium event for all overview and scrutiny Members to attend, including Chairs and backbenchers. Members can decide if the event will be held in the afternoon or evening to suit the majority of Members availability. The symposium would be held after the first overview and scrutiny meeting of the municipal year, to give new overview and scrutiny Members the chance to experience a meeting first hand. There is a possibility for a Centre for Public Scrutiny or Local Government Association official to lead, which would ensure a politically neutral event. Alternatively, a Democratic Services officer could chair. The symposium would consist of group exercises and discussions focussed around the role of overview and scrutiny at Thurrock, as well as focussing on the positive aspects and areas for development.

Below is a draft agenda for the symposium:

7.00pm	Introductions
7.10pm	Post-It Note Challenge: the positives and challenges of sitting on an overview and scrutiny committee
7.50pm	O&S Committees: what community issues would O&S members like to raise during O&S meetings throughout the municipal year?
8.20pm	10 minute break
8.30pm	O&S Members view on O&S in Thurrock – brainstorm ideas on the O&S process in Thurrock
8.50pm	Questions and closing remarks

3. Comparative Exercises

As a comparative exercise, Thurrock Council will compare their overview and scrutiny function with both neighbouring councils such as Essex County Council and Southend Borough Council; and direct comparators in terms of other unitary authorities. This information will be presented at a meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as well as legal and governance law regarding the role that overview and scrutiny can play in an Executive system.

For any questions regarding this briefing note, please contact:

Name: Lucy Tricker & Wendy Le, Democratic Services Officers

Email: ltricker@thurrock.gov.uk OR wle@thurrock.gov.uk