

COUNCIL – 28 MARCH 2024

SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

Executive Summary

This supplementary report sets out the extracts from the draft minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 21 March 2024 which relate to the recommendations before the Council.

THE EXECUTIVE – 21 MARCH 2024

A. The Improvement And Recovery Plan Progress – November 2023 To March 2024

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Barker, introduced the report which recommended to Council the third Improvement and Recovery Plan progress report to Commissioners. The Improvement and Recovery Plan had been adopted by the Council in August 2023 following government intervention, and detailed the actions that the Council would undertake to deliver against the Government directions, together with milestones and delivery targets to measure progress. The Leader reported that although the Council remained in a challenging financial position and there was much work to do, good progress had been made on the Council's journey towards financial sustainability and delivering best value for residents. Attention was drawn to the Council being able to set a legal budget for 2024/25, which demonstrated to Government and residents that the Council was taking steps to get its own house in order and move towards financial sustainability.

Key areas of progress were highlighted across the Plan's five themes; Financial Recovery, Commercial, Governance and Assurance, Organisation and Service Redesign, and Housing Recovery and Improvement. It was noted that later on the agenda, the Executive would consider proposals to strengthen the Council's companies governance arrangements, investment in a new Resident Services Programme to improve customer experience, and proposals for a new Council meeting structure to improve effectiveness, openness and transparency of decision making.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee had considered the progress report at its meeting on 18 March 2024 and had not made any specific proposals.

The Executive welcomed the improvement and recovery work undertaken across all the Plan's themes and thanked Officers for their hard work.

RECOMMENDED to Council

That the third Improvement and Recovery Plan progress report to Commissioners be approved.

Reason: Following statutory government intervention and the issuing of a Section 114 Notice, the Council was required to put in place an Improvement and Recovery Plan and to report to the Commissioners on its delivery.

Supplementary Report – Recommendations of the Executive

B. Companies Governance Framework – Shareholder Executive Committee

The Executive received a report which set out proposals to further strengthen the Council's oversight and governance of its companies. Following changes to the governance of Council companies approved by Council in July 2022, further detailed work was undertaken as part of the Improvement and Recovery Plan which led to the Executive adopting the Companies' Governance Framework at its meeting on 16 November 2023. As part of the Council's continuous improvement, it was proposed to replace the Shareholder Advisory Group (SAG) with a formal Shareholder Executive Committee (SEC) in order to enhance, improve and strengthen governance. The SEC would comprise of the Executive and an Independent Co-opted Member, and would have scheduled public meetings in order to increase transparency. It was noted that Part Two commercially confidential matters would be kept to a minimum. Practical issues were raised such as the increase in face-to-face meetings, and resource requirements to properly manage the SEC.

Following a question on Appendix 2, it was clarified that COE referred to Council Owned Entities.

RESOLVED

- That (i) the Shareholder Advisory Group cease to exist as a group and the Shareholder Executive Committee be established as its replacement;
- (ii) the Terms of Reference for the new Committee, attached at Appendix 1 to the report, be approved; and

RECOMMENDED to Council

That Part 6 of the Council's Constitution be amended as set out in Appendix 2 to the report.

Reason: Establishing a new Committee will formalise arrangements for the oversight and governance of the Council's companies in the interests of accountability and transparency.

Background Papers: None.

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REPORT ENDS

COUNCIL – 28 MARCH 2024

SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT

REVIEW OF COUNCIL MEETING STRUCTURE

Executive Summary

The proposals paper before the Council on the review of the Council meeting structure was previously considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 18 March 2024 and by the Executive at its meeting on 21 March 2024.

This supplementary report sets out the relevant draft minutes from the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Executive, noting the points discussed at each of the meetings.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 18 MARCH 2024

8. Review of Council Meeting Structure

The Chief Executive introduced the item, noting that Officers had already provided two briefings to Members expounding the proposed new council meeting structure.

A range of views were expressed as to when the new structure should be reviewed.

As part of the restructure, it was proposed that the Strategic Director of Place be delegated authority to determine Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) fund applications below £10,000 in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning. In response to concern raised, Beverley Kuchar confirmed that the procedure currently followed to receive and consider the application would not be altered and only the final determination of those applications below £10,000 would shift. Ward Councillors would still be inherently involved by virtue of submitting an application and their support being a necessary step of the procedure. It was emphasised that officers were required to ensure that the proposed project met the requirements of CIL funding.

Views were expressed as to the best way to determine CIL applications; whether all should be determined only by Officers, or at Committee with cross-party representation.

Officers confirmed that Council had previously resolved that a number of training topics be made mandatory for Members to attend periodically but that there had been no resolution on enforcement. Officers stated that training was necessary to be able to sit on planning and licensing committees.

In response to concern raised that the new structure would limit the ability to scrutinise Executive decisions Officers confirmed that the structure and calendar were designed to accommodate. The proposed restructure would not impact the ability for scrutiny Chairs to call extraordinary meetings which would further mitigate concern of Executive decisions not available for scrutiny.

The extant structure kept parity between the number of meetings of the Executive and Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Under the new structure there were scheduled to be more scrutiny meetings than Executive meetings.

The Chief Executive explained that the current Constitution set out that the scrutiny Chair would normally be from a political group different from the ruling one and that Officers did not propose altering the arrangement.

Supplementary Report – Review of Council Meeting Structure

It was confirmed that the proposals for the Military Covenant Advisory Panel were to remove administrative (secretariat) support only and that Officers and Members would still be involved with partners.

The focus of Overview and Scrutiny on the Executive agenda was discussed and how much the former should consider scrutiny of other issues that affect the Borough and residents.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

EXECUTIVE – 21 MARCH 2024

8. Review of Council Meeting Structure

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Barker, introduced the paper which proposed a new Council meeting structure following a review of existing arrangements undertaken by Officers in partnership with a number of stakeholders including the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS). The Leader explained that the proposals would provide greater openness and transparency of the decision-making process by increasing the number of meetings held in public, and would allow all Members to take a role in scrutinising the work of the Council. No change would be made to the current Strong Leader Model operated by the Council. It was proposed to rationalise the number of ‘closed’ meetings, such as Working Groups, Panels and Boards. To improve the scrutiny function of the Council, it was proposed to reconstitute the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as three, directorate-specific, Scrutiny Committees. It was noted that the proposed Scrutiny Committees would be able to establish Task and Finish Groups for undertaking a time-defined piece of work. Further, it was proposed to rename the Standards and Audit Committee to the Audit and Governance Committee reflecting the important work of the Committee in the audit and governance of the Council. A requirement would be included that Councillors received appropriate training to sit on the Audit and Governance Committee. The Leader also set out plans for a Chair’s Group and an Employment Committee.

The Executive was advised that Members had been consulted on the proposals through workshops and briefing sessions. It was noted that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had considered the proposals at its meeting on 18 March 2024.

Regarding Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) applications for funding below £10,000 on a neighbourhood basis, it was confirmed that the current requirement for Ward Councillors to be in agreement of such applications before submission to the Council would remain.

The Executive welcomed the proposed reduction in the number of ‘closed’ meetings which would increase openness and transparency. The number of face to face meetings proposed was raised, and the environmental benefits of online meetings were highlighted. It was noted that non-voting participants could be able to participate virtually. It was commented that planned agendas could benefit the three Scrutiny Committees. Concern was raised at the timescale to produce a revised Constitution by 20 May 2024. It was also commented that the Chair’s Group should include Vice Chairs. The Executive was keen to find an alternative way take forward the benefits of the work of the Greener Woking Working Group, which had been a valued group.

The Executive was supportive of the proposals which would put in place a new Council meeting structure that would be more efficient, effective and use staff resources in the best way possible. Officers were thanked for their hard work on putting together the proposals. The Review of Council Meeting Structure report would be considered by Council at its meeting on 28 March 2024.

Supplementary Report – Review of Council Meeting Structure

RESOLVED

That comments of the Executive on the proposed new structure be submitted to Council.

Reason: For the Executive to review and provide commentary on the proposed new meeting structure.

Background Papers:	None.
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