Proposals Paper

Review of Council Meeting Structure

Woking Borough Council

2024

Version 3.5

Contents

_Toc160789927Summary of Proposals....4
1. Key Proposals....4
Introduction....5
2. Outcomes....5
3. The Constitution....5
4. Review of Changes....6
5. Timeline....6
6. Elected Member Workshop....6
7. The Improvement and Recovery Plan....7
8. Governance and Assurance....7
Overview and Scrutiny Committees....8
9. New Scrutiny Committee Structure....8
10. Allocation of Service Scrutiny Responsibilities....9
11. Intervention....10
12. Overview and Scrutiny / Executive Protocol....10
13. Scrutiny....11
14. Performance and Financial Management....11
The Standards and Audit Committee....12
15. CIPFA Guidance....12
16. Training....13
17. Strengthening Function....13
18. Review of Governance and Audit Function....13
Employment Committee....14
19. Proposal....14
Chairs' Group....14
20. Proposal....14
Council, the Executive and Remaining Committees....15
21. Full Council....15
22. Decision Making Responsibilities....15
23. The Executive....15
24. Licensing Committee and its Sub-Committees....16
25. Appeals Committee....16
26. The Shareholder Executive Committee....16
Review of the Annual Calendar of Meetings....17
Calendar of Meetings Comparison....18
27. In-Year Comparison....18
Working Groups, Boards and Panels....19
28. Proposal....19
Task and Finish Groups....21
29. Proposal....21
30. Scrutiny Toolkit....21
31. Resourcing and Prioritisation....21
Briefing / Workshop Programme....22
32. Proposal....22

33. Mandatory (Essential) Training 22
34. Briefings (regular, informal, online) 22
35. Workshops (ad-hoc, informal, in person) 22
Clearer Communication of Proposals and Decisions 23
36. Report Writing Review 23
37. Communication of Proposals and Decisions 23
The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny 23
38. Feedback 23
Appendix 1 26
CIPFA's Position Statement: Audit Committees in Local Authorities and Police 2022 26
1. Scope 26
2. Status of the position statement 26
3. Purpose of the audit committee 26
4. Independent and effective model 26
5. Core functions 27
6. Audit committee membership 28
7. Characteristics of audit committee membership: 28
8. Engagement and outputs 28
9. Impact 29
Appendix 2 30
Task and Finish Group Guidance 30
1. What is a Task and Finish Group? 30
2. Purpose and Duties 30
3. Membership/Roles/Leadership 30
4. Resources 31
5. Planning. 31
6. Evidence Gathering 32
7. Meetings 32
8. Monitoring 33
Appendix 3 34
Employment Committee – Draft Terms of Reference 34
1. Membership 34
2. Procedure Rules 34
3. Terms of Reference 34
Appendix 4 36
Overview and Scrutiny Member Session Analysis and insight from workshop, 24 January 2024 36
1. Review of scrutiny findings 36
2. Key areas for future focus 37
3. CULTURE 37
4. BEHAVIOURS 37
5. IMPACT 38
6. Recurring themes across CULTURE, BEHAVIOURS and IMPACT 39
7. Ideas for taking the themes forward 40

Summary of Proposals

The External Assurance Review of the Council tasked the Authority with strengthening the Authority's scrutiny responsibilities as well as reviewing the Working Groups with a view to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of both the formal and informal meetings of the Council.

Consequently, the Overview and Scrutiny workstream of the Improvement and Recovery Programme was developed. In scoping the workstream it was recognised that, to improve the Council's scrutiny processes, a review of the Council meeting structure and democratic process was required, which in turn became a workstream of the Governance and Assurance Theme.

Separately, the Council has undertaken an organisational restructure leading to the loss of resource throughout the Authority. Therefore, the level of business conducted by Committees must be rationalised against the remaining sustainable output of the Corporate structure.

1. Key Proposals

This paper articulates the outcomes of the review and proposes significant changes to the Council meeting structure. Notably they are:

- Replacement of the existing single Overview and Scrutiny Committee with 3, service-specific scrutiny committees.
- Reduction in the number of full Council meetings per Municipal Year to 6.
- Increase in the number of Executive meetings per Municipal Year to 9.
- Rebalancing of the Council calendar to ensure business can efficiently reach the appropriate Committee sequence (O&S → Executive → Council (if appropriate)) when the business is ready.
- Closing of the majority of Working Groups, Boards, Panels etc. with the exception of those required by statute or whose loss would otherwise have adverse consequences for the Council, partners and the wider community.
- Develop a programme of regular briefings and workshops informed by both Officers and elected Members to communicate and develop Council business on a less formal basis than at Committee.
- Renaming of the Standards and Audit Committee to the Governance and Audit Committee to highlight its role in actively monitoring the governance of the Council.
- Completing an assurance mapping exercise of the Standards and Audit Committee before the start of the new Municipal Year with the support of the LGA.
- Expansion of the O&S / Executive protocol to include Council, Governance and Audit Committee and other Committees as well as promote greater dialogue between the Executive and Committees.
- Removal of the now redundant Appeals Committee.
- Establishment of a 'Chairs' Group' to encourage cross-committee discussions and ensure the business of Council is considered holistically.
- The proposals, if adopted from May 2024, be reviewed after twelve months to ensure the ambitions and outcomes of these proposals are realised.

These proposals follow multiple months of review which considered a variety of different 'models' and configurations, taking in the advice of the Commissioners, the Local Government Association (LGA), the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) and Officers. The feedback received through the Member workshop on scrutiny, held in January 2024, was also used in the development work, and the feedback is summarised at the end of this paper. Furthermore, Officers have looked at examples of best practice

employed by other local Authorities, in particular those which have been, or are currently, under Government intervention.

Introduction

This paper outlines proposals arising from a review of Woking Borough Council's Committee structure conducted by Officers in partnership with the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (the CfGS). The Council's Improvement and Recovery Plan has highlighted the importance of the Authority's governance arrangements and it is apparent that the Council's Committee structure as a whole is due a substantial reconsideration amid perceived shortcomings.

Details of the Council's Improvement and Recovery Plan, and in particular the objectives relating to the governance and assurance theme, are outlined later in the paper.

The proposals have been drawn up to deliver a series of outcomes necessary if the Council is to strengthen its governance arrangements, in particular the Authority's responsibility to undertake effective scrutiny for the benefit of residents, local communities, partner organisations and the Council itself.

More information on the CfGS and the role it has played is set out later in this paper.

The start time of Committees has not been altered.

2. Outcomes

The intended outcomes of the proposals outlined in this paper include:

- Improved effectiveness and efficiency of meetings and decision making.
- Improved effectiveness and impact of scrutiny and a strong ethos of scrutiny amongst elected Members, the Corporate Leadership Team and Officers.
- Implementation of the recommendations of CfGS and the LGA.
- Rationalisation of closed meetings such as Working Groups, Boards etc.
- Greater openness and transparency of the decision-making process.
- 'Smarter working' to reflect the impact of changes to services and staffing levels.
- Improved cross-committee cooperation and coordination.

These outcomes seek to address those areas raised as concerns in discussions with elected Members, Officers, Commissioners, the LGA and the CfGS. It is clear that the Council's committee structure can be improved, recognising the many changes the Council has seen since the model was first adopted over 20 years ago. The Council must also adapt to having fewer resources.

Through changes to the structure, greater clarification of the roles of elected Members appointed to Committees, and the roles of the Committees, it is intended that decisions are made in an efficient, robust and transparent manner and that scrutiny is given a more central role. Such improvements will be achieved with the assistance and advice of the CfGS and the aspirations of elected Members and Officers.

The review will also contribute to other workstreams of the Governance and Assurance Theme.

3. The Constitution

The changes proposed will require significant redrafting of sections of the Constitution, including the creation of clear and robust terms of reference for the Committees. The intention is to determine the

proposals at Council on 28 March 2024 and that, subject to resources being available, a revised version of the Constitution be submitted to Council on 20 May 2024 based on the decision of 28 March 2024.

4. Review of Changes

These proposals represent substantial changes to the current arrangements and it is recommended that, if adopted, the new measures are reviewed to ensure that they are effective, efficient and sustainable.

It is therefore proposed that a review is undertaken towards the end of the 2024/25 Municipal Year/beginning of the 2025/26 Municipal Year. All Members will be afforded an opportunity to comment on the effectiveness of new arrangements, with a final paper to be presented to the Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee. Any changes will be recommended onto Council for decision.

It is recognised that even the most suitable arrangements for a Council in intervention may not be appropriate for the Council in future. Therefore, further reviews should be considered as the Council continues to recover and adapt to the needs of its residents.

5. Timeline

Set out below is a summary of the timeline and engagement followed in the development of these proposals:

- Initial discussions started in August 2023, working with the LGA and the CfGS in particular.
- CfGS hosted workshop for elected Members – 25 January 2024
- Improvement and Recovery Board Briefing – 6 February 2024
- Council – 8 February 2024 – Decision taken to merge the two Council Meetings in May, moving the election of Mayor (16 May 2024) to the meeting of Council on 20 May 2024.
- Informal Executive Briefing – 19 February 2024.
- Senior Managers Group Briefing – 21 February 2024
- Informal Member Briefing – 29 February 2024.
- Informal all Member Briefing – 7 March 2024.
- Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 18 March 2024. Undertake pre-decision scrutiny of proposals.
- Executive – 21 March 2024 – Consider the proposals with a view to recommending them to Council.
- Council – 28 March 2024 – To determine proposed changes to (i) the Committee Structure and (ii) a revised calendar of meetings for 2024/25.
- Selection Panel – 14 May 2024 – To consider the membership and proportionality of Committees and other Groups based on the new structure and the outcomes of the May elections.
- Council – 20 May 2024 – Appointments to be confirmed. New Constitution to be adopted.

6. Elected Member Workshop

On 25 January 2024, the CfGS hosted a workshop on the role of scrutiny to which all elected Members were invited. The workshop included an exercise in which smaller groups of Councillors were asked to provide feedback, inviting suggestions for ways in which the Council's scrutiny functions could be strengthened. Outlined below is a summary of the key points raised by Members, elements of which have been included in these proposals.

- A need to increase scrutiny skills and knowledge.
- A lack of clear impact with a danger of Overview and Scrutiny becoming a 'talking shop.'

- Poor documentation data and record keeping, lack of transparency and the need for better connectivity across Committees.
- A need for improved induction process and clearer structure for scrutiny.
- A desire for fewer working groups with better collaboration between Committees.
- A need for greater openness and transparency, increasing visibility.
- A desire to get more deeply involved in scrutiny, holding meetings 'in the open,' rather than in closed working groups.
- The Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be more reflective of itself, to help nurture understanding of what its impact has been.
- The scrutiny work programme to be designed collaboratively, involving both the Committee members and the Executive.
- A need for advance planning, reviewing topics at an earlier stage at Scrutiny Committee to determine the best impact.
- A proposal to assign a Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) Member to each scrutiny meeting, ensuring that outcomes are shared back to CLT and Council service areas.
- The Committee to arrive at clear recommendations.
- Concern over resourcing in view of the staffing restructure.

The full details of the feedback received through the workshop is set out in Appendix 4 to this paper.

7. The Improvement and Recovery Plan

Following statutory government intervention and the issuing of a Section 114 Notice, Woking Borough Council was required to put in place an Improvement and Recovery Plan.

The Improvement and Recovery Plan will deliver the expectations detailed in the Secretary of State's Directions published on 25 May 2023 and will support the Council in meeting its best value duty. The Plan will also draw upon the recommendations of the non-statutory external assurance review into the Authority's finances, investments and related governance.

The three-to-five-year Plan, adopted at an Extraordinary Meeting of Full Council on 22 August 2023, details the actions that the Council will undertake, together with milestones and delivery targets to measure progress. The Plan seeks to deliver sustained improvements in financial management, governance and commercial functions, and organisational effectiveness.

There are five themes to the Plan, namely Financial Recovery (Theme 1), Commercial (Theme 2), Governance and Assurance (Theme 3), Organisation and Service Redesign (Theme 4) and Housing Improvement Programme (Theme 5).

8. Governance and Assurance

The purpose of this theme is to strengthen and radically improve how decisions are made, improving the scrutiny and transparency of the process. This will include reviewing the approach to reporting and the content of reports to ensure decisions are based on evidence and are scrutinised. Included within the objectives of the theme are:

- Strengthen the role of scrutiny within the organisation including how the Council scrutinises the performance of the companies.
- Improve standards and audit to ensure greater scrutiny of the audit and governance functions and avoid past mistakes recurring.

- Undertake improvements to the constitution in order to ensure it remains effective and fit for purpose in light of changing circumstances.
- Improve the democratic process to ensure Members are making well informed decisions that are communicated and the public.

Overview and Scrutiny Committees

Officers have drawn up a detailed proposal based on a committee structure involving three Overview and Scrutiny Committees. The following section seeks to explain the reasoning behind the suggestion, how it would work in practice and the change in the annual calendar of meetings that would result.

It should be noted that Officers explored a range of alternative options, including the potential benefits of adopting a structure based on two Overview and Scrutiny Committees with a variety of responsibility splits. It was recognised that a two Committee structure had some merit, but generally did not adequately divide responsibility for scrutiny of all Council functions and resident interests.

It was also considered whether the current structure of one Committee would be sufficient, however there are distinct benefits of Committees focused on specific areas and with clear remits.

9. New Scrutiny Committee Structure

One of the most significant changes proposed to the Council meeting structure is the replacement of the single Overview and Scrutiny Committee with three, service-specific Scrutiny Committees, namely the Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee, the Communities and Housing Scrutiny Committee and the Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee, reflecting the three directorates of Corporate Services, Communities and Place.

The change would enable each Committee to attract those Councillors with knowledge specific to the service areas covered and would link each Committee to a Strategic Director of the Authority and specific Portfolio Holders. Above all, however, the division of responsibilities would focus the role of each of the Committees and would make clear to residents the purpose and scope of each Committee.

The objective is to achieve a position where more of each Committee's work is Member-led and as a consequence does not increase Officer resource in servicing each Committee.

The Forward Plan of Key Decisions to be taken by the Executive would be drafted in such a way that a select number of service specific items are taken forward to those meetings of the Executive falling after the meetings of the respective Scrutiny Committees to enable pre-decision scrutiny. This would ideally be informed by the annual cycle of Council business.

As is the case now, there will be the option to convene Extraordinary Meetings of the Committees under exceptional circumstances if deemed necessary, where items could not otherwise be considered and scrutinised. Such decisions should be made in consultation with the Monitoring Officer.

It is recognised that a directorate focused structure could risk items affecting the whole of Council not being effectively considered. To mitigate such a scenario the Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee is anticipated to have an explicit role to scrutinise such strategic, existential matters. Additionally, the Group of Chairs of the Council's Committees is intended to coordinate work.

It is recommended that each Scrutiny Committee should be Chaired by a different Councillor and that those Chairs work closely together to coordinate their work programmes with the support of Vice-Chairs. A review of the Council's Special Responsibility Allowances would need to be completed as part of these proposals.

10. Allocation of Service Scrutiny Responsibilities

Summarised below is an indication of where the scrutiny responsibilities would lie under the proposed three Committee structure, together with an indication of the associated working group under the current structure.

Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee Responsibilities	
Service Areas	**Relevant Working Groups**
Asset Management Corporate Finance planning and policy Council tax Fees and charges Revs and Benefits Corporate strategy and policy review Customer services HR services Digital services and ICT Democratic and Legal Services Elections and electoral registration Marketing, Communications and engagement Improvement/Recovery Plan Medium Term Financial Strategy Transformation	Corporate Governance Working Group Elections Panel Finance Working Group

Communities and Housing Scrutiny Committee Responsibilities	
Services Areas	**Relevant Working Groups**
Community Centres Community development Regeneration Cultural development Sports development Voluntary/faith communities Community Meals Independent living Community safety Health and wellbeing Homelessness Housing assets Housing needs Housing Revenue Account Refugee support	Housing Infrastructure Working Group HIF Housing Outcomes Working Group Housing Working Group Leisure Partnership Military Covenant Advisory Panel Safer Woking Partnership Group Sheerwater Regen Oversight Panel Woking Wellbeing Group

Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee Responsibilities	
Service Areas	**Relevant Working Groups**
Accessibility Building control Development management Planning policy Climate Change Flood risk management Economic development UKSPF Environmental health Environmental maintenance Open spaces and play areas Woking Palace Infrastructure Local Plan Parking services Recycling Waste collection	Economic Development Working Group Greener Woking Working Group Local Development Framework Working Group Woking Access Group Woking Palace Consultative Panel UKSPF Partnership Group

11. Intervention

While the Council remains in intervention it is recognised that there will be a greater workload for certain committees, in particular for the Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee. Though there are no proposals to disband the Finance Working Group, which will continue to scrutinise financial services, it is proposed that the Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee should have more scheduled meetings than the other two Scrutiny Committees. This will enable the Committee to deal with the workload emerging from the Council's Improvement and Recovery Plan.

As a recommended approach, the scrutiny function of the three Committees should focus on key issues around corporate health and the most business-critical of service-specific issues.

The proposed structure will only be achievable if resources are redirected to the formal calendar of meetings (and to member briefings) with the objective of enhancing the productivity of this scrutiny activity. Even so, if adopted, it is proposed that the structure is reviewed at the end of 2024/25 in order to ensure that the scheme is effective, inclusive and, above all, realistic in terms of the level of resources necessary to support it.

12. Overview and Scrutiny / Executive Protocol

The CfGS has recommended, following the successful adoption of the Executive / Overview and Scrutiny Committee protocol several years ago, that the protocol is extended to formalise the coordination between the Executive, the Scrutiny Committees and Audit Committees. As well as promoting dialogue between the meetings, the protocol will encourage liaison and co-ordination on financial management and oversight.

It is recognised that the outcomes of scrutiny need to be tracked and promoted for the benefit of all parties and provide confidence that Council business and function is scrutinised.

13. Scrutiny

The work of the Scrutiny Committees needs to become more focussed on achieving outcomes that have demonstrable benefits, particularly for local communities. The support of the CfGS will help significantly, as will the creation of service-specific Committees.

Both Elected Members and Officers must recognise the importance of effective scrutiny and its potential for positive impact or influence on Council business and the Borough, its residents and organisations within.

The current momentum around enhancing the Council's governance arrangements needs to be maintained and the Authority must carefully consider the level of resource required to achieve its governance ambitions.

14. Performance and Financial Management

The Council publishes the Performance Management Report (formerly referred to as the 'Green Book') on a quarterly basis. As part of the proposed scheduling of meetings of the Executive and the Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee, Officers have sought to ensure that meetings of the two Committees fall within a reasonably short period following the publication of the Report. The proposed scheduling for 2024/25 is set out below:

Quarter 4 (January to March 2024). Published End April 2024.

- Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee – Tuesday, 11 June 2024*.
- Executive – Thursday, 13 June 2024*.

Quarter 1 (April to June 2024). Published End July 2024.

- Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee – Tuesday, 10 September 2024**.
- Executive – Thursday, 12 September 2024**.

Quarter 2 (July to September 2024). Published End October 2024.

- Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee – Tuesday, 5 November 2024.
- Executive – Thursday, 14 November 2024.

Quarter 3 (October to December 2024). Published End January 2025.

- Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee – Tuesday, 4 February 2025.
- Executive – Thursday, 13 February 2025.

In the event an elected Member has any concerns over performance figures, these concerns should be referred for consideration to the next available meeting of the appropriate Scrutiny Committee through the relevant Chair. Should a Member have questions over any of the information provided in the quarterly Performance Management Report, these should be referred to Officers in the first instance.

* The month of May each year is taken up with the election timetable, essential training and half-term; the earliest that meetings of the Executive and the Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee can take place to consider the Q4 Performance and Financial Management information is therefore early June.

** The month of August each year is formal recess during which meetings of the Council are not held; the earliest that meetings of the Executive and the Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee can

take place to consider the Q1 Performance and Financial Management information is therefore early September.

The Standards and Audit Committee

It is proposed that fundamental changes are introduced to the Standards and Audit Committee which would see:

- the name of the Standards and Audit Committee changed to the 'Audit & Governance Committee' to reflect its key roles in holding the governance of the Council to account and overseeing its audit responsibilities;
- assurance mapping and independent review are in train to ensure that the audit committee is sufficiently constituted and reflected in its Work Programme and the working knowledge of the Committee;
- up to two Independent Co-Opted Members being appointed by the Council to serve on the Committee; and
- adoption of a protocol between Committees that emphasises the Governance and Audit Committee's role in reviewing aspects of Council business.

The role of Chair of the Committee would continue to be filled by one of the two Independent Co-Opted Members.

The recruitment of the Independent Co-Opted Member will be undertaken once Council agreement has been received, to ensure that an appointment can be made early in the Municipal Year.

15. CIPFA Guidance

It is proposed that the role of the Standards and Audit Committee is reviewed and governance actions and arrangements of the Council be prioritised in the Committee's function. This will in part be achieved by implementing the key principles drawn up by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA).

The Council should ensure that the Committee:

- is directly accountable to Full Council;
- remain independent of both the executive and the scrutiny functions;
- has rights of access to and constructive engagement with other committees/ functions such as the Scrutiny Committees;
- has the right to request reports and seek assurances from relevant Officers; and
- includes co-opted independent members in accordance with the appropriate legislation or, where there is no legislative direction, includes at least two co-opted independent members to provide appropriate technical expertise.

The CIPFA guide sets out the specific responsibilities of the Committee to ensure that it provides oversight of a range of core governance and accountability arrangements. The CIPFA guide is attached at Appendix 1 to this paper.

16. Training

It is recommended that training opportunities for the members of the Committee are pursued to ensure that they are in a position to exercise all elements of the Committee's responsibilities.

In addition to the yearly free training provided by the LGA through our membership, financial resources will need to be identified to ensure there is sufficient corporate knowledge and best practise maintained.

17. Strengthening Function

It is recommended that a more formal Work Programme model be adopted, akin to that used by the Scrutiny Committees to set and guide the objectives of the Audit Committee.

The areas of responsibility for the Audit Committee in the Constitution is proposed to be further defined to aid the development of the Work Programme.

It is also proposed that the extant Executive / Overview and Scrutiny Committee protocol be expanded to include the Governance and Audit Committee. It is recognised that the Audit function is best placed to review certain areas of Council business.

The Group of Chairs will have a role in ensuring that the work of the Audit and Scrutiny Committees are coordinated and where there is overlap between responsibilities work does not become siloed or too narrow of focus.

There is benefit in formalising the link between the Committee and its lead Officer, the Section 151 Officer particularly on formulating and maintaining the yearly Work Programme.

18. Review of Governance and Audit Function

The Council has engaged the LGA to perform an assurance mapping exercise to ensure that all responsibilities of the Audit Committee are captured within the Constitution and that these are reflected in the Work Programme of the Committee.

The Council is seeking to perform an independent review of its governance and audit function imminently.

CIPFA recommends that audit committees should review and assess themselves annually or seek an external review. The results of the assessment should be available in the annual report from the Committee.

It is suggested that the review is completed at the end of each Municipal Year. Any recommendations of the Committee would be reported to Council.

Employment Committee

19. Proposal

It is proposed that an Employment Committee is formed which shall combine the functions of an Appointments Panel, appointing statutory officers and strategic directors, and with the functions of determining employee pay and conditions.

The Committee will be responsible, amongst other matters, for:

- overseeing the recruitment and selection process of the Council's Head of Paid Service, Strategic Directors, the Monitoring Officer, Section 151 Officer and determine terms and conditions of employment and make recommendations to Council in this respect;
- considering allegations concerning the conduct or capability of Statutory Officers and other Chief Officers;
- reviewing local terms and conditions of employment for employees and make recommendations regarding the annual local pay award;
- considering, and recommending appropriate actions to, proposals for changes within the structure of the organisation which involve substantial changes in the responsibilities of Chief Officers;
- promoting equal opportunities in employment; and
- considering matters relating to superannuation, pensions and gratuities.

A draft terms of reference for the Employment Committee is set out in Appendix 3. It is envisaged that 2 meetings of the Employment Committee will be held in each Municipal Year, though additional meetings will be convened in the event any issues are raised which cannot be determined at the scheduled meetings. The meetings will be held in public. It is proposed that the Committee size is set at 7 elected Members based on the proportionality of the Council.

Chairs' Group

20. Proposal

The review has looked at the relationships between the Committees and has explored ways in which those relationships could be strengthened and developed. The suggestion of a Chairs' Group was raised through group feedback by Councillors and the Independent Co-opted Member at the recent elected Member workshop hosted by the CfGS. Such an arrangement would have the added benefit of ensuring that there is coordination of work across the Committees.

It is therefore proposed that an opportunity for Chairs to meet regularly should be established, consisting of the Chairs of the main Committees. The importance of the Vice-Chairs should not be underestimated and it is therefore proposed that they too be invited.

The Group would meet through Teams three times a year on an informal basis to allow free discussion between those elected Members attending. Portfolio Holders may be invited to attend if specific matters are to be discussed. Actions will be captured and the meetings would be held in private. In terms of Officer attendance, it may be useful for Members of the Corporate Leadership Team to attend the meetings to advise on any discussions together with a Democratic Services Officer and any other relevant Officers.

The meeting would be informed by way of forward plans of each Committee.

The inclusion of dates within the calendar of meetings should enable a high level of engagement by the different Chairs. However, consideration should be given to cancelling the sessions in the event no items for discussion are identified.

In terms of managing the business of the Group, CfGS has advised against the Leader of the Council acting as Chair. It is instead suggested that at its first meeting each year one of the Scrutiny Committee Chairs should be elected to lead the Group. The Group could otherwise choose to invite the Chief Executive or their nominee to act as Chair, in a similar fashion to that adopted for the Council's Selection Panel.

Council, the Executive and Remaining Committees

21. Full Council

These proposals do not make any significant changes to operation of the Full Council meetings of the Authority.

At the meeting of Full Council meeting on 8 February 2024 Council agreed to 'merge' the two meetings of Council traditionally held in May; as a result of this change, the elections of Mayor and Deputy Mayor will take place on the same evening that the Committees are appointed to for the year.

In addition to this change, the review of the calendar of meetings has highlighted that the number of Full Council meetings can be further reduced by one (1) a year. It is therefore proposed that six (6) Full Council meetings are held annually.

22. Decision Making Responsibilities

Feedback from the CfGS has highlighted a concern that the Council has evolved a decision making process which has led to a greater level of decision making being undertaken by meetings of Full Council than would normally be expected under the Strong Leader/Executive model adopted by the Council. The representations make clear that the range of decisions taken by Full Council should be narrowed, with those items affected referred to the Executive for decision rather than simply recommendation to Full Council.

This piece of work has not yet commenced and is anticipated to be completed in the first half of the new municipal year. It is likely that the advice of the CfGS will be needed, together with engagement with relevant Officers and elected Members. The intended outcome is to have a clearer definition of the types of decision to be taken at meetings of the Executive and Full Council, reducing any uncertainty when bringing proposals forward and ensuring a consistent approach.

A framework for decision making will be developed to achieve greater clarity in responsibilities for decision making.

23. The Executive

No significant changes are proposed to the Executive.

As part of the overall review, Officers have sought to create a calendar of meetings which develops the effectiveness and efficiency of the Committee structure. Central to this is ensuring the Calendar supports the relationship of the Executive with other meetings, notably Full Council and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

In light of this, it is proposed that the optimum number of meetings of the Executive should be nine (9) in each Municipal Year, an increase of one (1) on previous years.

24. Licensing Committee and its Sub-Committees

No changes are proposed to the Licensing Committee and its Sub-Committees.

25. Appeals Committee

The Appeals Committee, which consists of three elected Members, is responsible to considering appeals against intentional homelessness decisions. Meetings of the Committee have only been scheduled in the event of an appeal being received; as such, it has been a number of years since the Committee has had to meet other than to appoint a Chair and Vice-Chair annually.

As part of this review, the role of the Committee has been discussed with Officers involved in such appeals and it is apparent that procedures are now in place within authority delegated to Officers which mean that the Committee is unnecessary. It is therefore proposed that the Committee is disbanded; no additional delegated authority is required to achieve this.

26. The Shareholder Executive Committee

Included with the proposals to go to Council at the end of March 2024 is the intention to replace the Shareholder Advisory Groups (SAGs) with a single Shareholder Executive Committee (SEC) which will meet 9 times per year and comprise the Members of the Executive.

The purpose of the new Committee will be to approve and oversee the Council's strategic objectives across the Authority's group of companies and to support the development of the companies, in line with the Council's regulations and ambitions.

A separate report on the proposals for the Shareholder Executive Committee will be brought to the Council meeting on 28 March 2024.

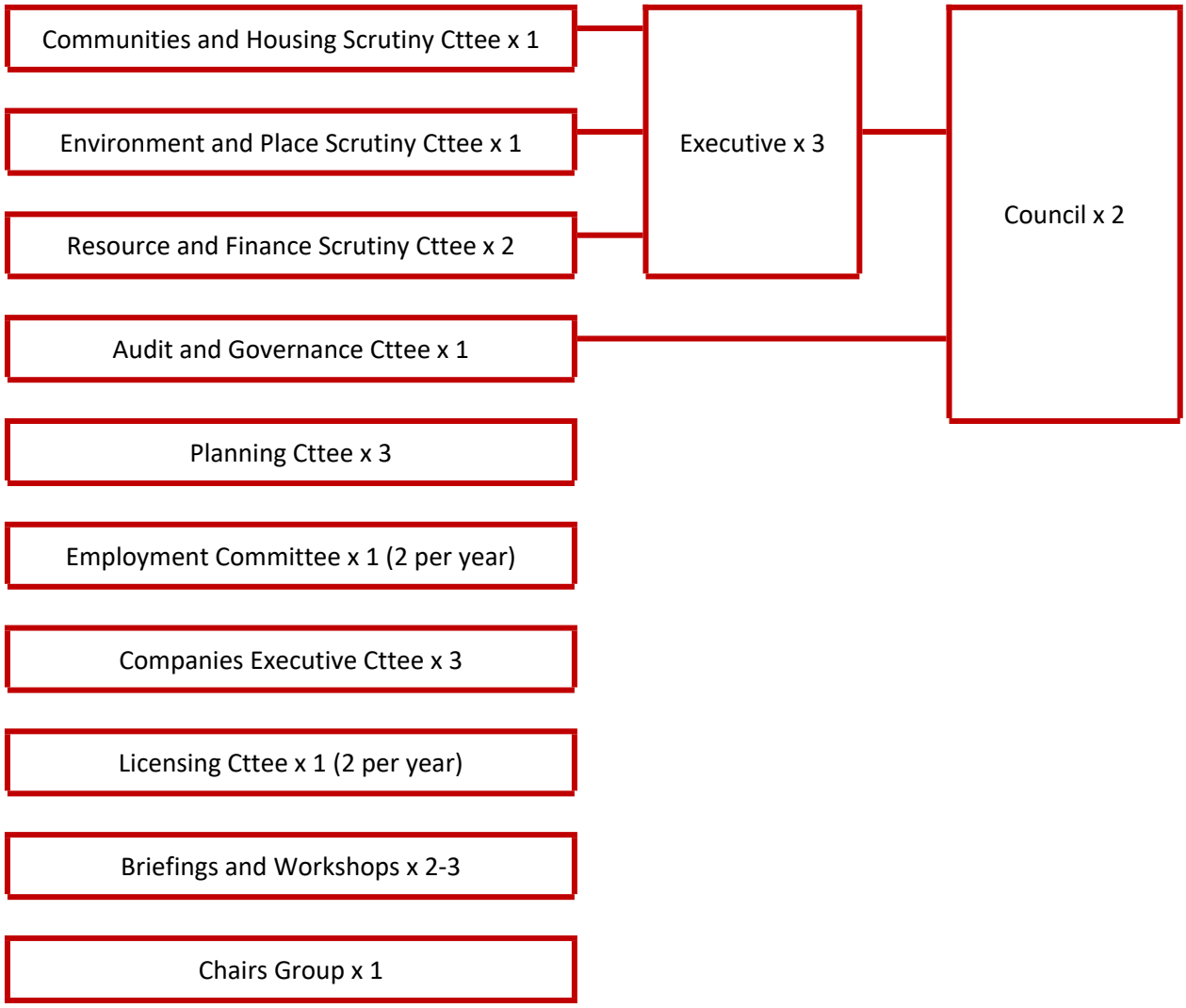
Review of the Annual Calendar of Meetings

It is proposed to adopt a new calendar of meetings from May 2024 onwards, comprising a set of Committee meetings scheduled to maximise the opportunities for pre-decision scrutiny of Executive recommendations and provide a consistent and logical route for the business of Council.

A calendar based on the proposals has been drawn up and will be put before the Council on 28 March for determination. If supported, the revised calendar will replace the calendar of meetings for the coming Municipal Year which was agreed at the end 2023. An example of a four-month period is set out below.

As part of the agreed Gateway savings proposals there will be a reduction in the presence of security staff for evenings. Accordingly, in-person, evening meetings are now scheduled for Tuesdays and Thursdays.

January-April example



Calendar of Meetings Comparison

27. In-Year Comparison

Set out below is an indicative comparison between the number of scheduled Committee meetings in 2023/24 (excluding any extraordinary meetings) and the Committee meetings that would form the proposed calendar for the coming Municipal Year.

In recognition of the intervention, the focus of the Council must be on the actions of the Council in accordance with the Improvement and Recovery Plan. As such, it is proposed that five (5) meetings of the Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee should be scheduled for the year. Should it be necessary, the option to arrange extraordinary meetings for specific matters of business remains available, where such items of business could not otherwise be determined.

These proposals do not reduce the volume of Committee meetings and are designed to enhance to productivity of scrutiny. Whilst Officer resources are expected to be significantly reduced, included within these proposals is a rationalisation of the numerous working groups which will provide the resource 'saving' necessary to achieve a productive new governance structure, reduce the overall number of meetings held and free up Officer capacity.

Meeting Type	Frequency (excl. extra meetings)	
	2023/24	2024/25
Council	8	6
Executive	8	9
Shareholder Executive Committee	16	9
Overview and Scrutiny Cttee	8	-
Resource and Finance Scrutiny Cttee	-	5
Communities and Housing Scrutiny Cttee	-	3
Environment and Place Scrutiny Cttee	-	3
Planning Cttee	11	10
Licensing Cttee	2	2
Employment Cttee	-	2
Governance and Audit Cttee	4	4
Totals	**57**	**53**

Working Groups, Boards and Panels

28. Proposal

It is clear that Woking Borough Council has a far higher number of such groups than would be expected for a Council of its size. This review is therefore proposing a significant reduction in the variety and volume of working groups, boards etc., recognising that the Council needs to direct its attention more towards decision-led meetings and away from items for noting or information. It is also important for the Council to improve the openness and transparency of its governance arrangements; all the working groups, boards etc. are currently held in private. The proposals also reflect the reduced staffing capacity to support the current range of groups.

The list below proposes the ways in which each of the existing working groups, boards etc. are treated under the review. The reductions proposed are significant; however, capacity has to be created if the new Scrutiny arrangements are to be effectively supported, including the scope to establish task and finish groups to drive demonstrable outcomes from the work of the Members of the Scrutiny Committees.

Retained groups shall necessarily be held virtually, as previously resolved by Council. If there is a need for a meeting to be held in person or as a hybrid these will need to be held on a Tuesday or Thursday when there is adequate security presence.

Withdrawal of administrative support.

There are several Groups which the Council has historically supported with free accommodation and administrative support, but which do not come under the remit of the Council. These include the Woking Access Group and the Woking Palace Community Group.

The proposal does not include the Council withdrawing from engagement with the Groups; the intention is to remove secretarial support.

The Groups would continue to be able to use the meeting rooms of the Council and would continue to be engaged by the Officers in the respective service areas.

The Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy Working Group

The Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Working Group is the only one of all Working Groups that has decision making authority, namely, to determine applications for CIL funding up to maximum of £9,999. Any requests for funding of £10,000 and above are determined by the Executive. As part of the review, it is proposed that authority to approve funding applications below £10,000 is delegated to the Strategic Director of Place in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder.

Any scrutiny on the use of CIL funds would fall under the responsibility of the Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee.

Body	Proposal	Scrutiny Responsibility
Appointments Panel	Disband	Employment Committee / Council
Corporate Governance WG	Disband	Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee / Standards and Audit Committee
Economic Development WG	Disband	Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee
Elections Panel	Disband	Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee
Finance WG	Retain	Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee
Freedom of the Borough WG	Disband	Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee / Council
Greener Woking WG	Disband	Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee
HIF Housing WG	Disband	Communities and Housing Scrutiny Committee.
HIF WG	Disband	Communities and Housing Scrutiny Committee.
Housing WG	Disband	Communities and Housing Scrutiny Committee.
Leisure Partnership Board	Disband	Communities and Housing Scrutiny Committee
Local Development Framework WG	Disband	Task and Finish Group / Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee.
Military Covenant Advisory Panel	Withdraw administrative support.	Communities and Housing Scrutiny Committee / Council.
Neighbourhood CIL WG	Disband	Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee / Executive.
Ostensible Authority Standing Panel	Disband	No role to be allocated
Safer Woking Partnership Group	Retain	Retain
Selection Panel	Retain	Retain
Sheerwater Regen Oversight Panel	Disband	Communities and Housing Scrutiny Committee / Council.
UK Shared Prosperity Fund PG	Disband	Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee.
Woking Access Group	Withdraw administrative support.	Responsibility for accessibility* to go to the Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee. Responsibility for equalities to go to Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee. *Any accessibility issues in respect of the Council's housing stock to be referred to Communities and Housing Scrutiny Committee.
Woking Palace CP	Withdraw administrative support.	Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee.
Woking Wellbeing Group	Disband	Communities and Housing Scrutiny Committee.

Task and Finish Groups

29. Proposal

Under these proposals, it is recommended that the emphasis of the Council, and in particular that of the Scrutiny Committees, should move to establishing Task and Finish Groups for specific matters based on anticipated outcomes, impact for residents and available resources.

Task and finish groups may be established by a committee for the purpose of doing and undertaking a time-defined piece of work. This may be a service development, a locality plan, a local pathway change or any piece of work which needs to be undertaken and which falls under the remit of that Committee. This would align the Council with the recommendations of the CfGS and best practice.

30. Scrutiny Toolkit

The Council's Scrutiny Toolkit includes ways in which such Task Groups can conduct their reviews, including involvement of stakeholders, experts and 'witnesses'. A draft guide for the work of Task and Finish Groups is set out in Appendix 2.

Key elements of a successful Task and Finish Group include:

- Keeping the size of the Group to a minimum; smaller is more effective, fast moving and flexible;
- Ensuring the Groups include elected Members who have the responsibility and knowledge to deliver the objective(s);
- Ensuring the Members of the Groups are given a clear task and time frame;
- Defining the topic for review, using tools such as SMART objectives to ensure the desired outcomes are clear, that the Authority has the resources available for the piece of work and that the process is project managed.
- Ensuring Task and Finish Groups are time-defined and are disbanded once the area of work has been completed.
- Regularly reporting to the parent Committee including the outcomes and any recommendations.

31. Resourcing and Prioritisation

Task and finish groups can be resource intensive for both Officer and elected Member time and can have potential financial implications for the Council, either through the actions of the task and finish groups (consultations, off-site meetings etc.) or through the proposals to come out of a scrutiny review. Establishing a programme of task and finish groups without proper consideration of resource availability will hamper and indeed jeopardise the successful outcome of such groups.

To ensure that the Council's resources are fully considered in the establishment of any task and finish group, and to avoid the number of ongoing reviews placing undue pressure on existing resources, the statutory officers – the Head of Paid Service, the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer – will be consulted as part of the process of considering a request to undertake scrutiny through a task and finish group.

This has therefore been reflected in the guide set out in appendix 2 to this paper.

The Group of Chairs will also be important in ensuring that the programme of task and finish groups is considered jointly between the Committees to ensure that the ambitions of the Committees for scrutiny do not go beyond the resources of the Authority.

It is proposed that a limit be placed on the total number of task and finish groups running concurrently in recognition of the size of the Authority and its ability to resource groups. This would allow for one task and finish group per Committee and a further one to be agreed through the Group of Chairs for a total of four task and finish groups running at any one time.

In the event that Members consider another topic has a pressing need for scrutiny by way of a task and finish group it will be the responsibility of the Group of Chairs to propose the scheduling and potential early closure of an extant task and finish group.

Briefing / Workshop Programme

32. Proposal

These proposals would see a large number of long-established groups being disbanded. The scrutiny roles these groups played will in future fall to the newly created Scrutiny Committees and, where necessary, task and finish groups. However, there will also be a need for Elected Members and Officers to have frank and open discussions in an informal setting and to this end it is proposed that a formal programme of briefings and workshops should be included in the calendar of meetings.

33. Mandatory (Essential) Training

Each year, the Council provides essential training for Members sitting on each Committee. A number of these sessions are held at the beginning of each Municipal Year, in advance of the first relevant Committee meeting. Further training will be identified throughout the year.

It is proposed that supplementary training, strengthened by being declared mandatory by Council, are held at regular intervals throughout each Municipal Year.

It has been identified through the work of the IRP that training should be reviewed.

34. Briefings (regular, informal, online)

Briefings are an opportunity for Officers, Portfolio Holders, Partner Organisations and other agencies to impart key information or training to Elected Members. To-date, these have been arranged on an ad-hoc basis and have tended to be specific to a single topic. Attendance at such briefings has been mixed in the past.

It is proposed that briefing sessions are held regularly, at least six times per year and as requested by service areas. Each briefing would cover one or more topics, with the sessions supported by agendas. All Members of the Council would be invited to attend the briefings. Dates would be reserved in the calendar of meetings. As such, it is hoped that attendance would be consistently high.

35. Workshops (ad-hoc, informal, in person)

In addition to briefing sessions, it is proposed that workshops are organised at intervals as requested by Members or service areas. Each would consider one or more topics with the specific purpose of enabling Elected Members to discuss matters in an informal setting and for Officers to seek the views of Councillors on matters still under development.

All Members of the Council would be invited to attend the workshops, dates for which would be reserved as part of the annual calendar of meetings.

Clearer Communication of Proposals and Decisions

Two further strands of work have grown out of the review amid comments from both Officers and Members. Both projects are being taken forward with the prime objective of ensuring that there is clear communication of both proposals and decisions going forward. The work is at an early stage, and outcomes are likely to be adopted in the new Municipal Year.

36. Report Writing Review

Reports to meetings of the Council and Committees have to be clear and concise and yet provide all the information needed for Members of Public to be fully informed and for elected Members to be able to take decisions with all the relevant information to-hand. There is certainly a level of knowledge and skill necessary for Officers to prepare such reports in a consistent manner, which can be difficult in such a broad-service Authority, particularly for those Officers who seldom have to draw up such reports.

A review has now started of the core report templates used for meetings of Council, the Executive and Committees to identify ways in which the template structure can support the objective of ensuring reports are consistent and clear. Once drawn up, the templates will form the basis of a training programme for Officers on writing reports for Committees.

37. Communication of Proposals and Decisions

The second piece of work is looking at ways in which both forthcoming proposals and recent decisions of the Council, Executive and Committees can be communicated in a clear and user-friendly format which would be equally beneficial to Officers, elected Members and Members of Public.

The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny

38. Feedback

CfGS exists to promote better governance and scrutiny, both in policy and in practice. The organisation supports local government, the public, corporate and voluntary sectors in ensuring transparency, accountability and greater involvement in their governance processes. The Centre offers a range of services to identify governance challenges, design interventions and support ongoing improvement, and through the support of the Local Government has been working with Woking Borough Council since the summer 2023.

The rationale for this review was identified through the work of the Improvement and Recovery Plan.

The feedback received from the CfGS is summarised below. The CfGS feedback has been incorporated into the review and the CfGS continues to be consulted.

Several Officers, including those that have experience of Council meeting structure from other Local Authorities, have been engaged. Their feedback has been incorporated.

Senior Officers have been engaged on the process and their feedback is sought.

Feedback	Council Response	CfGS Response
Concern at use of trimesters instead of quarters for Municipal Year	Use is entirely for Democratic Services' internal use and it was ensured that those items of business that must go quarterly still match up optimally to meetings.	Accepts reasoning. Requested comparative calendar be provided to confirm.
Concern that business is not decided by Executive with responsibility abrogated to full Council	Confirmed that the business received by Council is not in contravention with the strong leader-Executive model that the Council has adopted.	Acknowledges the WBC position but urges that business is not in contravention of the model.
Concern as to the legality of widening the role of S&A to include scrutiny	Misuse of language with lack of explanation. No intention to remove Scrutiny function from those Committees legislated to do it. Simply only to ensure that G&A is empowered to undertake its statutory powers and those recommended by CIPFA (instead scrutiny with a small 's').	Accepted by CfGS but wishes for the Executive/O&S protocol to be strengthened/ expanded to meet this. Suggested LGA do assurance mapping.
Establishment of 3 scrutiny committees good, but to review the division of work.	Changes have been made to the proposal, agree with the suggested arrangements.	Accepted
Limiting Members' contributions at Committee	No new stringencies. New forms of communication only to be used in addition to improve the running of Committees (submission of questions ahead of meeting).	Accepted, encourage Officers not to attempt to 'control' Members.
Use of briefing papers instead of taking items to Committee	Agreed	n/a
Lack of dedicated scrutiny resourcing; concern that without a dedicated scrutiny (not Dem Services) Officer change will not be effected or maintained.	Accepted but financial constraints of Council may prevent this from happening.	Accepted
Establishment of three new boards not understood.	Agreed, removed from proposal and instead increased emphasis on Member briefing programme and workshops.	Accepted. Emphasised that member briefings should be controlled by the service area with minimal involvement of Democratic Services.

Establishment of Task and Finish groups not fleshed out	Explained that this had already been developed through the Constitution review last year and not included on the working paper seen by CfGS.	Accepted. Guide to Task and Finish Groups drafted to provide clarity and consistency in the role of the Task and Finish Group (Appendix 2).
Task and Finish Groups shouldn't be in public.	Accepted, only to be used if and when considered necessary by the Council in recognition of its intervention status.	Accepted.
Establishment of a Council Business Management Cttee.	Accepted but would be radical for Council.	Agreed, not ordinarily recommended but suggested as of possible benefit to Woking specifically.
Establishment of Board of Chairs – should be an informal arrangement.	Agreed, want to foster coordination between the O&S Committees and with Governance and Audit and the Executive.	Accepted. (Note: suggestion now to establish a Chairs' Group.
Concern that not all Working Groups etc can be shuttered.	Agreed, will meet with stakeholders of each Group to determine which should be shuttered and which closed.	Accepted
Improvements to the scheduling of meetings.	Agreed and will continue to refine the calendar of meetings to ensure it meets the needs of the Council.	Accepted
Consider increasing Executive to meet more regularly than proposed.	Accepted, will explore with senior Officers.	Accepted.
Consider increasing each O&S Committee meetings to 4pa.	Agreed, will explore.	Accepted.

Appendix 1

CIPFA's Position Statement: Audit Committees in Local Authorities and Police 2022

1. Scope

This position statement includes all principal local authorities in the UK, corporate joint committees in Wales, the audit committees for PCCs and chief constables in England and Wales, PCCFRAs and the audit committees of fire and rescue authorities in England and Wales.

The statement sets out the purpose, model, core functions and membership of the audit committee. Where specific legislation exists (the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 and the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016), it should supplement the requirements of that legislation.

2. Status of the position statement

The statement represents CIPFA's view on the audit committee practice and principles that local government bodies in the UK should adopt. It has been prepared in consultation with sector representatives.

CIPFA expects that all local government bodies should make their best efforts to adopt the principles, aiming for effective audit committee arrangements. This will enable those bodies to meet their statutory responsibilities for governance and internal control arrangements, financial management, financial reporting and internal audit.

3. Purpose of the audit committee

Audit committees are a key component of an authority's governance framework. Their purpose is to provide an independent and high-level focus on the adequacy of governance, risk and control arrangements. The committee's role in ensuring that there is sufficient assurance over governance risk and control gives greater confidence to all those charged with governance that those arrangements are effective.

In a local authority the full council is the body charged with governance. The audit committee may be delegated some governance responsibilities but will be accountable to full council. In policing, the police and crime commissioner (PCC) and chief constable are both corporations sole, and thus are the individuals charged with governance.

The committee has oversight of both internal and external audit together with the financial and governance reports, helping to ensure that there are adequate arrangements in place for both internal challenge and public accountability.

4. Independent and effective model

The audit committee should be established so that it is independent of executive decision making and able to provide objective oversight. It is an advisory committee that has sufficient importance in the authority so that its recommendations and opinions carry weight and have influence with the leadership team and those charged with governance.

The committee should:

- be directly accountable to the authority's governing body or the PCC and chief constable.

- in local authorities, be independent of both the executive and the scrutiny functions.
- in police bodies, be independent of the executive or operational responsibilities of the PCC or chief constable.
- have rights of access to and constructive engagement with other committees/functions, for example scrutiny and service committees, corporate risk management boards and other strategic groups.
- have rights to request reports and seek assurances from relevant officers.
- be of an appropriate size to operate as a cadre of experienced, trained committee members. Large committees should be avoided.

The audit committees of the PCC and chief constable should follow the requirements set out in the Home Office Financial Management Code of Practice and be made up of co-opted independent members.

The audit committees of local authorities should include co-opted independent members in accordance with the appropriate legislation.

Where there is no legislative direction to include co-opted independent members, CIPFA recommends that each authority audit committee should include at least two co-opted independent members to provide appropriate technical expertise.

5. Core functions

The core functions of the audit committee are to provide oversight of a range of core governance and accountability arrangements, responses to the recommendations of assurance providers and helping to ensure robust arrangements are maintained.

The specific responsibilities include:

Maintenance of governance, risk and control arrangements

- Support a comprehensive understanding of governance across the organisation and among all those charged with governance, fulfilling the principles of good governance.
- Consider the effectiveness of the authority's risk management arrangements. It should understand the risk profile of the organisation and seek assurances that active arrangements are in place on risk-related issues, for both the body and its collaborative arrangements.
- Monitor the effectiveness of the system of internal control, including arrangements for financial management, ensuring value for money, supporting standards and ethics and managing the authority's exposure to the risks of fraud and corruption.

Financial and governance reporting

- Be satisfied that the authority's accountability statements, including the annual governance statement, properly reflect the risk environment, and any actions required to improve it, and demonstrate how governance supports the achievement of the authority's objectives.
- Support the maintenance of effective arrangements for financial reporting and review the statutory statements of account and any reports that accompany them.

Establishing appropriate and effective arrangements for audit and assurance

- Consider the arrangements in place to secure adequate assurance across the body's full range of operations and collaborations with other entities.
- In relation to the authority's internal audit functions:

- oversee its independence, objectivity, performance and conformance to professional standards;
- support effective arrangements for internal audit; and
- promote the effective use of internal audit within the assurance framework.

- Consider the opinion, reports and recommendations of external audit and inspection agencies and their implications for governance, risk management or control, and monitor management action in response to the issues raised by external audit.
- Contribute to the operation of efficient and effective external audit arrangements, supporting the independence of auditors and promoting audit quality.
- Support effective relationships between all providers of assurance, audits and inspections, and the organisation, encouraging openness to challenge, review and accountability.

6. Audit committee membership

To provide the level of expertise and understanding required of the committee, and to have an appropriate level of influence within the authority, the members of the committee will need to be of high calibre. When selecting elected representatives to be on the committee or when co-opting independent members, aptitude should be considered alongside relevant knowledge, skills and experience.

7. Characteristics of audit committee membership:

- A membership that is trained to fulfil their role so that members are objective, have an inquiring and independent approach, and are knowledgeable.
- A membership that promotes good governance principles, identifying ways that better governance arrangement can help achieve the organisation's objectives.
- A strong, independently minded chair, displaying a depth of knowledge, skills, and interest.
- There are many personal skills needed to be an effective chair, but key to these are:
  - promoting apolitical open discussion;
  - managing meetings to cover all business and encouraging a candid approach from all participants; and
  - maintaining the focus of the committee on matters of greatest priority.
- Willingness to operate in an apolitical manner.
- Unbiased attitudes – treating auditors, the executive and management fairly.
- The ability to challenge the executive and senior managers when required.
- Knowledge, expertise and interest in the work of the committee.

While expertise in the areas within the remit of the committee is very helpful, the attitude of committee members and willingness to have appropriate training are of equal importance.

The appointment of co-opted independent members on the committee should consider the overall knowledge and expertise of the existing members.

8. Engagement and outputs

The audit committee should be established and supported to enable it to address the full range of responsibilities within its terms of reference and to generate planned outputs.

To discharge its responsibilities effectively, the committee should:

- meet regularly, at least four times a year, and have a clear policy on those items to be considered in private and those to be considered in public;
- be able to meet privately and separately with the external auditor and with the head of internal audit;
- include, as regular attendees, the chief finance officer(s), the chief executive, the head of internal audit and the appointed external auditor; other attendees may include the monitoring officer and the head of resources (where such a post exists). These officers should also be able to access the committee members, or the chair, as required;
- have the right to call on any other officers or agencies of the authority as required; police audit committees should recognise the independence of the chief constable in relation to operational policing matters;
- support transparency, reporting regularly on its work to those charged with governance;
- report annually on how the committee has complied with the position statement, discharged its responsibilities, and include an assessment of its performance. The report should be available to the public.

9. Impact

As a non-executive body, the influence of the audit committee depends not only on the effective performance of its role, but also on its engagement with the leadership team and those charged with governance.

The committee should evaluate its impact and identify areas for improvement.

Appendix 2

Task and Finish Group Guidance

1. What is a Task and Finish Group?

A Task and Finish Group is a time-defined group set up as an action subgroup of one of the Scrutiny Committees, the Executive and Council with the aim of a delivering a specified objective. Task and finish groups may be established by a committee for the purpose of doing and undertaking a time-defined piece of work. This may be a service development, a locality plan, a local pathway change or any piece of work which needs to be undertaken and which falls under the remit of that Committee.

The size of the Task and Finish Groups should be kept to a minimum and should ideally include those who have the responsibility and knowledge to deliver the objective(s). Smaller is better - more effective.

Larger, long standing Working Groups are traditionally quite difficult places to get work done; Task and Finish Groups are used because it is easier to get work done when a small number of people are given a clear task and time frame.

The key to success is to clearly define the problem or deliverable, using tools such as SMART objectives: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time bounded. The relevant Committee setting up a Task and Finish Group must define and sign off the remit of the Group and agree the resources needed to do the job.

Task and Finish Groups should be time-defined and, once that area of work has been completed, should be disbanded. The outcomes are then fed back into the authorising Committee.

2. Purpose and Duties

Task and Finish Groups will undertake specific agreed pieces of work whether is it to develop local priorities, deliver locality service change priorities or carry out a deep dive on key items or other areas requiring specific consideration. Task and Finish Groups will report back on progress and final outcomes to the responsible Committee, giving assurance by:

- Developing an agreed action plan on the key task at hand;
- Action the work programme in a timely fashion i.e. doing the work;
- Developing measures of evaluation; and
- Reporting on the impact, learning, and outcomes, and making recommendations in the final report to the relevant committee.

3. Membership/Roles/Leadership

In general, Task and Finish Groups are small in number of Members, given that they are a 'doing' group. Members of the Task and Finish Group should be chosen based on their personal knowledge and expertise and capacity to deliver. Someone is elected as a Lead of the Task and Finish Group.

Every Task and Finish Group need not be politically balanced. Members of the Task and Finish Group should have a special knowledge or interest in the subject to be investigated.

The presumption shall be that other members of Council have delegated their authority and trust to those subsequently appointed to serve on the Task and Finish Group, to complete their work in an effective manner. If it is not possible to reach agreement on the membership of a Task and Finish Group, the make-up of the group will be based on political balance.

Unless otherwise agreed by the Task and Finish Group, the documents relating to it should be regarded as documents for a "work in progress" and as such are not in the same category as committee documentation which is generally regarded as complete.

Task and Finish papers may contain work undertaken on a range of proposals, some of which may be put forward to give comparison between a range of possibilities, and/or to help members clarify arguments for or against certain actions.

In some cases, premature publication of such documents may be counter-productive, in raising concerns that the Council may be inclined to a particular course of action, before any alternative courses of action have been considered or tested.

Members of a Task and Finish Group should therefore consider the papers sent to them in connection with their work to be of a sensitive nature, and should not copy, or cause them to be copied, outside the group. However, where a member of the Task and Finish Group feels that there would be benefit from the Group seeking the views of an external body, group or individual, then they should be invited to attend a future meeting for this purpose.

Adequate resources should be available for Task and Finish Groups to complete the tasks.

4. Resources

Task and finish groups can be resource intensive for both Officer and elected Member time and can have potential financial implications for the Council, either through the actions of the task and finish groups (consultations, off-site meetings etc.) or through the proposals to come out of a scrutiny review. Establishing a programme of task and finish groups without proper consideration of resource availability will hamper and indeed jeopardise the successful outcome of such groups.

To ensure that the Council's resources are fully considered in the establishment of any task and finish group, and to avoid the number of ongoing reviews placing undue pressure on existing resources, the statutory officers – the Head of Paid Service, the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer – will be consulted as part of the process of considering a request to undertake scrutiny through a task and finish group.

It is proposed that a limit be placed on the total number of task and finish groups, one per Committee and a further one agreed by the Group of Chairs for a total of 4 task and finish groups running at any one time.

In the event that Members consider another topic has a pressing need for scrutiny by way of a task and finish group it will be the responsibility of the Group of Chairs to propose the scheduling and potential early closure of an extant task and finish group.

5. Planning.

A plan is the backbone of every project and is essential for a successful outcome. It describes how, when and by whom specific target(s) are to be achieved. The activities of the group need to be clearly identified and the appropriate resources allocated to them to ensure successful completion of each element within the time scales agreed.

A plan is a design of how identified targets for outcomes, timescales, costs and quality can be met. Effective planning will:

- Identify whether the targets set can be achieved;
- Identify the resources required;
- Ensure that quality is built into the process;
- Identify any risk;

- Avoid confusion and ad hoc decisions;
- Aid communication of what is to be done, how it is to be done, allocation of responsibilities and monitoring of progress;
- Provide control;
- Gain commitment from members of the group;
- Develop a Business Plan for the service area under consideration; and
- Agree the type and level of communication;

The key elements of a plan are:

- The products/outcomes to be produced;
- The activities needed to create the products/outcomes;
- Validation of the quality of the products/outcomes;
- The resources needed (including specific skills);
- Any dependencies on partners or external agencies;
- Time scales;
- Monitoring and reporting points; and
- Allocation of responsibilities

If the task is complex and/or extensive in scope then an overall plan may be required.

6. Evidence Gathering

The task and finish group can gather evidence through a variety of ways, including (but not limited to):

- written evidence;
- oral evidence and interviews with external and internal witnesses;
- site visits;
- visiting other organisations - partners, user groups, other councils;
- research;
- holding public meetings to seek views on an issue; and
- talking to people who are affected by the issue.

Once the evidence has been gathered, the task and finish groups will produce a report to be submitted to the Scrutiny Committee outlining details of the review process, evidence gathered, conclusions and any subsequent recommendations.

7. Meetings

Unless otherwise agreed by the Task and Finish Group, its meetings will be held in private. Agendas will be provided for all members and will clearly indicate the items to be discussed. Any member wishing to attend the meeting who is not a member of the Group shall be entitled to attend. Unless they have a disclosable pecuniary interest in a matter under discussion, any member may speak having first given prior notice of their intention to do so or otherwise at the discretion of the chair.

The Groups will need to agree the frequency and intervals of its meetings in order to achieve its purpose and specific duties within the timescale agreed. A significant proportion of the work may be expected to be undertaken by the Members outside the Task and Finish Group meetings. In general,

Task and Finish Groups will complete their work and submit an evaluation and outcome report to the Committee within a period extending from a few weeks to six months of the work commencing, with the time duration being determined by the task.

8. Monitoring

Task and Finish Groups report directly to the establishing body (Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Executive or Council) via the Chair of the Task and Finish Group, who will present progress reports, either verbal or written as required.

The meetings of Task Groups will be supported by Democratic Services and Officers from the relevant service areas.

Appendix 3

Employment Committee – Draft Terms of Reference

1. Membership

The Employment Committee will be composed of 7 Councillors to be appointed annually at the annual Council meeting.

The membership of the Employment Committee will comply with the political balance rules set out in s.15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and must include at least one Member of the Executive.

Membership of the Committee will from time to time as and when required include the involvement of the relevant appointed independent person as required by Officer Employment Procedure Rules.

2. Procedure Rules

Meetings of the Committee

The Employment Committee will meet as frequently as it requires to discharge its responsibilities. Meetings will be held in person and in public.

Chair and Vice Chair

At the Annual Meeting, the Council shall appoint the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Employment Committee. If the Chair or Vice-Chair resigns by giving written notice of resignation to the Chief Executive, the Committee shall, as the first item of business at the next ensuing meeting, elect a successor.

The Chair, if present, shall preside. If the Chair is absent, the Vice-Chair shall preside. If both the Chair and Vice-Chair are absent, the Committee shall elect one of the Councillors present as Chair for the duration of the meeting.

3. Terms of Reference

Subject to Officer Employment Procedure Rules, the Committee shall meet to:

- oversee the recruitment and selection process of the Council's Head of Paid Service and determine terms and conditions of employment and make recommendations to Council in this respect.
- oversee the recruitment and selection process of Strategic Directors, the Monitoring Officer, Section 151 Officer and posts falling within the definition of Deputy Chief Officer in Section 2(1) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and make recommendations to Council in this respect.
- consider allegations concerning the conduct or capability of Statutory Officers and other Chief Officers in order to establish whether or not they are sufficiently well-founded and serious in content to justify investigation.
- suspend, if appropriate, a Statutory Officer or other Chief Officer under the terms of the Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) Conditions of Service for Chief Executives or the JNC Conditions of Service for Chief Officers.
- appoint an external investigator to carry out an investigation on behalf of the Committee.
- receive and consider any report of an investigator and, if appropriate, hold a capability or disciplinary hearing and, following any capability and/or disciplinary hearing, to determine a course

of action (up to and including dismissal) within the Council's power under law and within its procedures.

- dismiss Chief Officers, the Monitoring Officer, Section 151 Officer and posts falling within the definition of Deputy Chief Officer in Section 2(1) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.
- settle all matters relating to the above appointments or dismissals.
- oversee the recruitment and selection process of the relevant independent person in accordance with the Localism Act 2011 and make recommendations to Council in that respect.

The Committee will take decisions affecting the remuneration, terms and conditions of service of the Head of Paid Service.

The Committee will undertake performance appraisals of the Head of Paid Service and contribute to Corporate Directors annual targets against which performance can be measured.

The Committee will discharge the Council's functions under Section 112 of the Local Government Act 1972 which have not otherwise been delegated, including advising the Council and Committees on:

- the requirements for, and the availability of, human resources necessary for the fulfilment of the Council's policies;
- the promotion of good employee relations in the Council;
- matters of general employment and personnel concern to the Council;
- the promotion of equal opportunities for all employees of the Council, and in the Council's recruitment and selection procedures, and to monitor the effectiveness of such measures;
- to consider matters affecting the efficient use of the Council's staff resources and to make recommendations to Executive;
- to review and recommend adoption of the People and Organisational Development Strategy and Annual Pay Policy prior to going to Council.

The Committee will keep under review local terms and conditions of employment for employees and make recommendations regarding the annual local pay award.

The Committee will consider and recommend appropriate actions where necessary in response to proposals relating to changes within the structure of the organisation which involves substantial changes in the responsibilities of Chief Officers.

The Committee will promote and pursue a policy of equal opportunities in employment and "sign-off" key information before it is published i.e. Gender Pay Reporting.

The Committee will consider matters relating to superannuation, pensions and gratuities.

Appendix 4

Overview and Scrutiny Member Session
Analysis and insight from workshop, 24 January 2024

From table discussions with 15 cross-party Members, a total of 77 lines of data were recorded from notes and banded into key themes. These have been synthesised and analysed by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny to arrive at the following findings.

1. Review of scrutiny findings

In the first section of the workshop, Members were invited to reflect on the findings for the Scrutiny Impact Review that CfGS led in 2023.

- From the insight collated through table discussions the main area recorded (23% of themes) a need was identified to increase scrutiny **skills and knowledge** within the council. Retaining corporate memory of scrutiny functions was also raised, via ongoing training, peer support and a commitment to sharing knowledge across the organisation.
- It was acknowledged that more **scrutiny confidence** is needed in Woking Borough Council. To build this, Members highlighted that they would like encouragement to ask questions without fear of retribution:

"Nervous of saying something wrong - ideal is 'permission to fail'.''

"Balance - Good questions and good answers. Honest we don't know is ok [sic]."

- **Lack of clear impact** was also mentioned, representing just over 15% of reflections. Comments highlighted a danger of Overview and Scrutiny being a 'talking shop.'
- The majority of other clustered themes related to **current processes** within the Council, (totalling 61%) emphasising poor documentation data and record keeping, lack of transparency and the need for better connectedness across Committees.

"Look at O&S and S&A work programmes for overlap."

"Assign CLT Member to each scrutiny meeting and ensure they share outcomes with all of CLT and handover to the next CLT Member."

'Churn' was referenced, including lack of continuity, non-contributing councillors, and a high number of new councillors who would benefit from an improved induction process. Scrutiny was described in this context as a 'bewildering experience' for new Members. To address this, an amended, clearer Terms of Reference and clearer structure for scrutiny was suggested by Members taking part in the workshop.

Views shared about current processes also included a vision for fewer working groups as Committees connected and collaborated.

2. Key areas for future focus

In the second part of the workshop, Members were asked to think about their ambition as a council and identify priority areas to focus on in the future.

Three main themes for future focus were identified by Members:

1. **CULTURE** – 57%
2. **BEHAVIOURS** – 29%
3. **IMPACT** – 14 %

3. CULTURE

3.1 On CULTURE, the most significant ambition (25% of themes discussed) was for Woking Borough Council to develop its internal **learning culture**. Members wanted more opportunities to discuss, reflect, ask questions, and take part in training, in order to build deep understanding of the value that scrutiny can offer. This would include peer mentoring and use of role modelling to demonstrate scrutiny practice, teamed with examples of best practice from other organisations – Thames Water, for instance, was mentioned.

Exactly 50% of the themes on future focus were split evenly (12.5% each) across the need to prioritise:

- Greater **openness and transparency**
- Developing **skills and knowledge**
- Increasing **visibility and ownership**
- Making the work of the Council more **welcoming and inclusive**

Members discussed ways to get more deeply involved in scrutiny, holding meetings 'in the open,' rather than in closed working groups. Creating more opportunities for public involvement was also a key consideration.

3.2 Building **skills and knowledge** and being well-informed were seen as important. High quality, accurate and timely information were mentioned as factors the support this.

3.3 Members talked about garnering more **ownership** of the scrutiny process, encouraging fellow Members to increase their buy-in through making scrutiny more **visible**. Ideas included wider promotion of the Executive Forward Plan and a dedicated webpage to promote the work of Overview and Scrutiny.

3.4 A focus on the Council being more **welcoming and inclusive** was covered. This theme included more public involvement – for example, inviting resident panels to have input at scrutiny meetings and Committees.

4. BEHAVIOURS

4.1 In review of BEHAVIOURS, developing a **learning culture** was also a primary theme, accounting for 50% of ideas shared by Members. Practical suggestions to influence a behaviour shift, included setting up pre-scrutiny time for asking the Executive and officers questions. Emphasis was also on the Committee to be more reflective of itself, to help nurture understanding of what its impact has been. Another idea was for the Chair and Vice-Chair to model behaviour expected of Committee Members. It was thought that Councillors should keep their focus away from politics and play a more active role in preparing their Members before taking them on the scrutiny journey.

4.2 Developing more **strategic processes** would support Members to embody behaviours that enhance scrutiny. One thought was for the Chair to employ stricter time management and challenge/limit speeches made by Members at Committee. Work is needed to train Lead Members on the induction process for new Councillors and to ensure that this includes detail on the function of each Committee. This theme of strategic processes accounted for 25% of collated ideas. Another was for Members to make questions to Officers more strategic than operational in Committee:

"…ignore the details and focusing on minutiae in favour of wider view.''

4.3 **Collaboration and connection** were raised as a way to enhance behaviours (17% of ideas). Here, Members thought it was important to design Scrutiny Work Programme collaboratively, involving both the Committee Membership and the Executive. One view was that the Committee does not necessarily need to be proportionally cross-party.

4.4 Finally, **accountability** was highlighted as an issue to address (8% of comments). Although Members do buy-in the principle of scrutiny, this is not necessarily followed through with actions.

5. IMPACT

5.1 To increase IMPACT**,** introducing more **strategic processes** was considered as a core area for Woking Borough Council to focus on. With 40% of themes, there were plenty of ideas to draw from here. Ways to improve processes and make them more strategic included advance planning, reviewing topics at an earlier stage at Scrutiny Committee to determine the best impact. It was important here to also provide Members with accurate data and information on the topic in advance.

5.2 **Collaboration and connection** were a recurring theme (25%) in which Members discussed how to increase the impact of their scrutiny work. Assigning a Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) Member to each scrutiny meeting was one suggestion, ensuring that outcomes are shared back to CLT and Council service areas. Overview and Scrutiny could also work more closely together on work programming, spotting areas of overlap.

5.3 The role of **audit** was seen as key (15%) for enhancing impact, used to measure and monitor the effectiveness of scrutiny. Taking lessons learned for the audit process was seen as a valuable step to improve scrutiny.

5.4 Increasing **visibility and ownership** (5%) was an issue to tackle as some Members said that they…

'…struggle to know what impact we can have/we do have in a meeting.'

"How do we get more ownership? Maybe have O&S Members sharing their thoughts to wider council - a pre-meet approach for informal discussion."

5.5 Arriving at clear recommendations was considered as a target to strive for, within the theme of greater **clarity** (5%).

5.6 **Information** flow was raised (5%), specifically how data can be optimised to demonstrate impact.

5.7 Some concern was expressed on **resourcing** (5%) in relation to a fall in Officer support given that the total of Woking Borough Council resources are subject to restructure.

6. Recurring themes across CULTURE, BEHAVIOURS and IMPACT

Themes crosscut and reoccurred across the areas of **CULTURE, BEHAVIOURS and IMPACT.**

Developing a **learning culture** in hand with introducing **smarter, more strategic processes** (37% together) were most commonly referenced. This was followed by **skills and knowledge** and encouraging more and clearer **collaboration and connection** (18% together).

a) Developing a **learning culture** was an area for future focus, where there would be ample opportunities for discussion, asking questions and reflection. Role modelling and mentoring to help develop this culture was a suggestion here:

"Councillors should play a role in getting Members prepared and take them on the journey."

b) Ideas for **smarter processes** included a shift towards a more balanced strategic outlook, away from overview to an increased focus on scrutiny. Attention was also placed on stricter time management, including time limits for Committee Member speeches. A review of processes supporting Committee meetings was mentioned:

"Review the Council meeting structure, especially those meetings not in public and the number to increase the effectiveness of scrutiny."

c) **Skills and knowledge** touched all areas - culture, behaviours and impact – as a topic for Woking Borough Council to prioritise. Thinking here was in how to effectively share knowledge and information across the organisation, with a view to encourage ownership whilst building and retaining corporate memory of scrutiny. Two pathways to achieve this were identified: ongoing training and peer learning.

d) Better **collaboration and connection** across Committees, and between service areas of scrutiny and audit work programmes was referenced for the future. An ambition here was for closer collaboration between Committees to design a work programme together. Also, to assign a CLT Member to each scrutiny meeting and ensure they share outcomes with all of CLT with handover to the next CLT Member.

e) Other recurring and crossing themes included:

f) Accountability

g) Audit

h) Clarity

i) Confidence

j) Connectedness

k) High profile

l) Openness and transparency

m) Resources

n) Structure

o) Time

p) Trust

q) Visibility and ownership

r) Welcoming and inclusive

These ranged from between 1 and 6% of mentions during the workshop.

7. Ideas for taking the themes forward

As a final activity, Members were asked to complete *'I will…'* statements, in support of how ideas might follow into action:

Cross-party discussions, open mind, leave politics out to increase understanding - 'listen and learn,' 'Informed and prepared.'
Advocate closer ties between S&A and O&S.
Embrace cross-party co-operation.
I will contribute by co-ordinating and making recommendations on training and development for the Committee.
More conversations/communication with Executive.
Relationships building with Commissioners.
People and Place Holistic.
Members and Officers joint training support.
Please scrutinise CAT Policy and consequences (social impact).
Structural review.
Lots of training and support for Members and officers.
Meetings of SCR with SSO and Commissioners.
Work programmes facilitated externally.