

Joint meeting of the Finance & Audit and Overview & Scrutiny Committees

Minutes of the remote joint meeting of the Finance & Audit and Overview & Scrutiny Committees held on Tuesday 29 July 2020 at 6.02pm, which was broadcast live via the Council's YouTube channel.

Present: Councillors Bartlett, Davison, A Dearing, J Dearing, K Dickson, R Dickson, Grey, Illingworth, Jacques, Luckhurst, Margrave, Milton, Murphy, Nicholls, Norris, Redford, Russell, Syson, Tracey, Weber and Wright.

6. **Appointment of Chair**

It was proposed by Councillor Russell, duly seconded by Councillor Syson and

Resolved that Councillor Milton be appointed as Chair for the meeting.

7. **Apologies and Substitutes**

- (a) There were no apologies made.
- (b) Councillor Murphy substituted for Councillor Noone, Councillor Weber substituted for Councillor Cullinan and Councillor K Dickson substituted for Councillor Kohler.

8. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made.

9. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 July 2020 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

10. **Developing Scrutiny**

The Committees considered a report from Democratic Services which brought forward proposals for developing Scrutiny within Warwick District Council to enhance its profile and use its resources more effectively.

Following the Council elections in May 2019, a Governance Review was undertaken and the details of this were included in a report to the Executive of 30 July 2020. As part of this review, considerable discussions took place on the importance of good scrutiny in helping all Councillors to make a valuable input in decision making and holding the Executive to account.

Following the appointment of two Scrutiny Chairs this year, they had conversations about the importance of scrutiny, and its workload, considering the significant pressures on the Council, Councillors and officers, especially in respect of responding to the global pandemic, climate change emergency and the Medium Term Financial Strategy combined with the Business Plan and Service Area Plans (including the significant number of projects within them).

The report included Article 6 of the Constitution and the Overview & Scrutiny Procedures Rules at Appendices 1 and 2 to the report. Appendix 3 to the report was an excerpt from the Constitution on Public Speaking rules for Scrutiny Committees. Suggested additions to these rules were in italics and a recommendation in the report sought that these additions should be recommended to Council for approval.

In recognition of the desire to improve Scrutiny, there was a joint meeting of both Scrutiny Committees on 7 July 2020 where Members brought forward individual ideas for improvement. These views were combined to bring forward the recommendations in the report for consideration by the Committees that sought to identify where scrutiny could add the most value.

A suggestion made by Councillor Illingworth was agreed; to replace the word previously with "satisfactorily" to Recommendation 2.2 (ii) so that it read:

"The Scrutiny Committees agree to trial to December 2020 for the Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees to have discretion to decline called in Executive item if questions were ~~previously~~ *satisfactorily* answered or if no good reason/questions are provided."

Following the publication of the agenda a revised wording for the proposed public speaking procedures for scrutiny, as initially set out at Appendix 3 to the report, had been circulated. The revised wording as circulated was generally supported by the Committee and were assured by the Democratic Services Manager & Deputy Monitoring Officer that the scheme was manageable.

It was proposed by Councillor Milton and seconded by Councillor R Dickson and:

Recommended to Council that the Public speaking procedure for Scrutiny Committees, as set out at Appendix 3 to the report, be approved, but the last paragraph written in italics should be wholly replaced with:

A maximum period of 3 minutes is allowed for each speaker. If several people wish to speak on the same subject, they will be restricted to an overall total of 5 minutes. The time allowed for all speakers at any one meeting is limited to 30 minutes. The Chair will have discretion to increase the time available for speakers

where they consider the matter has a significant public interest.

Speakers will be encouraged and helped to contact each other so that repetition can be avoided. This means that you may be given the names, addresses and telephone numbers of other speakers on the same issue and they may be given your details, but only with your permission. It may be helpful for a spokesperson to speak on behalf of all speakers. Where a number of speakers cannot agree on a spokesperson, they will be heard in the order in which they registered their intention to speak.

Resolved that

- (1) Performance
 - (i) the annual Service Review reports cease to be produced for Scrutiny;
 - (ii) the service area performance data be made available to Councillors electronically as soon as possible;
 - (iii) the Red Amber Green (RAG) status, including the finance stream, of key projects sponsored by either the Chief Executive or his Deputies be made available to all Councillors by January 2021; and
 - (iv) the work of the Performance Management Officer to investigate benchmarking Council performance with other Councils be noted;
- (2) Executive reports
 - (i) the Scrutiny Committees commit to the use of pre-meeting questions in writing on Executive reports;
 - (ii) the Scrutiny Committees agree a trial to December 2020 for the Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees to have discretion to decline called in Executive items if questions were previously *satisfactorily* answered or if no good reason/questions are provided;
 - (iii) the Chairs write to the Group Leaders to remind them that they can directly comment on Executive reports and the process for this; and
 - (iv) Councillors Davison, Grey, Margrave, Milton and Nicholls, representing each political group, be appointed to meet and define the criteria for bringing an Executive report to Scrutiny;
- (3) Work Programme
 - (i) the Scrutiny Chairs and Lead officers produce revised Work Programmes to focus on core themes (Covid 19, Climate Change, Medium

- Term Financial Strategy and Business Plan) while recognising statutory functions; and
- (ii) Councillors bring forward concerns for review by the Scrutiny Committees based on exception and evidence; and
- (4) Review – Senior Managers be asked for their views on where they find scrutiny useful for adding value to their work;
- (5) Training
- (i) the Chairs of Scrutiny meet with representatives from CfPS and the Deputy Chief Executives to develop a dedicated/mentoring scrutiny training for Officers and Councillors and to bring a report on this back to Committees in October 2020; and
 - (ii) the Chair of Finance & Audit Scrutiny Committee liaises with the Head of Finance and CfPS bring forward proposals to the October 2020 meeting on scrutiny of local Government Finance and identify training on local government finance for all Councillors; and
- (6) the work being undertaken to promote Committee meetings be noted.

11. **Governance Review of Warwick District Council**

The Committees considered the following non-confidential item which would be discussed at the meeting of the Executive later on Thursday 30 July 2020.

Item 2 – Governance Review of Warwick District Council

The Committees supported the recommendations in the report but wanted to draw a number of points to the attention of the Executive that needed to be carefully monitored.

The Committees had concerns about the large remit of each PAB and how they would cope looking at such large areas of work. This was a specific concern that the listed areas were just projects and did not cover other work the PABs would look at, such as refinements to or creating new policies.

The Committees shared concerns that with the change to scrutiny of service provision, the development of and quality of service provision might not be adequately picked up by the scrutiny of RAG and KPIs that had been developed and which would be adopted.

They noted the dates in 2.2 and 2.7 for review should be combined so they were the same, and that the remit of the review should be produced in agreement with both Scrutiny Chairs.

The Committees appreciated clarification that the presumption would be for briefings to remain in the evening, in line with the protocol for arranging meetings with Councillors, but accepted this may mean some needed to be held at the same time as other meetings.

The Committees made a general comment on the resources for Civic & Committee Services, that this proposal should be work neutral and therefore this element needed to be closely monitored and fed back on as part of the 6, 12 and 18-month review.

In addition, some Members of the Committee raised concerns about:

- the loss of Shadow Portfolio Holder meetings and highlighted this could lead to more work for officers through more frequent questions/contacts from Councillors; and
- for providing an SRA for the role of Chairman of a PAB.

(The meeting ended at 7.16pm)

CHAIRS

Councillor Milton - 18 August 2020
Councillor Nicholls - 19 August 2020