

## CABINET – 19 MARCH 2013

### IMPROVED MEMBER ENGAGEMENT & STREAMLINED GOVERNANCE

#### GOVERNANCE REVIEW FURTHER DETAILS

##### Report of the County Solicitor & Monitoring officer and Research and Major Programmes Manager

#### Background

1. A working group comprising members of the Strategy & Partnerships Committee have developed a number of proposals for the future development of governance and back bench member engagement following the May election. The proposals are based on feedback from members, research on other locality authority models and underpinned by a principle of less bureaucracy and more engagement in the context of reduced member and officer resources.
2. The following proposals were agreed to be recommended to Cabinet and Council in March and April respectively:
  - Creation of Cabinet Advisory Groups
  - Creation of a standing Transport Advisory Panel
  - Streamlining of the overview and scrutiny function from 6 committees to 3 (Performance, Education and Health)
  - Abolition of the Democracy & Organisation Committee with the re-alignment of its functions to Council, the Remuneration Committee and Audit & Governance committee
  - Strengthening of local member engagement via Locality Working Groups
3. This report sets out further detail on how these new arrangements will operate.

#### Cabinet Advisory Groups

|                               | <b>Frequency</b>   | <b>Membership</b>  | <b>Chairman</b>           |
|-------------------------------|--|--|---------------------------|
| <b>Cabinet Advisory Group</b> | Up to 5 groups at any one time.<br><br>Task and finish groups meeting as required depending on the topic / issue being discussed.<br><br>Meetings could range from one day select committee style meetings to a longer term project. | Each group to involve approximately 7 members. The actual number will vary however according to the issue to be discussed.<br><br>Nominations via group leaders according to interest in the topic. Final membership agreed by Chairman. | Relevant Portfolio Holder |

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4. Cabinet Advisory Groups will primarily examine topics selected by Cabinet which align to corporate council priorities. This will enable back bench members to be more closely involved with issues of greatest importance to the council. The proposed number of groups running at any one time reflects available resources both member and officer. Once a group has completed its work and made recommendations to Cabinet, Cabinet would be able to commission further groups.
5. It is proposed that each group involves approximately 7 members, however numbers are likely to change (i.e. to be more or less) according to the topic and level of interest and will be determined on a case by case basis. The Constitution will allow for flexibility around the numbers in each Cabinet Advisory Group but will remain politically proportional.
6. The Performance Scrutiny Committee (see below) will be able to recommend to Cabinet performance concerns that may benefit from a Cabinet Advisory Group. It will be up to the Cabinet to agree if a group should go ahead.
7. The Groups will be supported by officers from the relevant Directorate and a member of the Research & Major Programmes team. (In a similar arrangement to current support for scrutiny).
8. There will be a presumption that Cabinet Advisory Groups meet in public. However there may be occasions when meetings would be best held in private, due to the issue being considered, as this would allow for exploration of all available options before a recommendation to Cabinet. Cabinet Advisory Groups will be undertaking discussions to aid policy formulation with the ultimate decision resting with Cabinet and being taken in public in the usual open and transparent way.

### **Transport Advisory Panel**

|                                 | <b>Frequency</b>           | <b>Membership</b>                    | <b>Chairman</b>           |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Transport Advisory Panel</b> | At least six times a year. | 12 members covering all 9 localities | Relevant Portfolio Holder |

9. The Transport Advisory Panel will support the Cabinet member for transport with their delegated decision making. The 12 members of the panel will be nominated by group leaders who will have regard to the aim to create a geographical spread within the panel.
10. The Panel will also advise the Cabinet member on transport policy developments and ensure policies are developed with the needs of Oxfordshire's diverse communities in mind.

## Overview and Scrutiny

|                                       | <b>Frequency</b>  | <b>Membership</b>  | <b>Chairman</b>   |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|---|
| <b>Overview and Scrutiny Meetings</b> | Meet at least four times a year (with the ability to call more meetings if needed). | Education* - 7 OCC members plus 4 co-opted members.<br><br>Performance - 10 OCC members<br><br>HOSC - 7 members plus 5 District Council and 3 Co-opted members | Best person for the job regardless of party appointed by the Committee. |

\*Retention of the current provision on political proportionality. The number of Councillors may be adjusted to ensure that a group with an overall majority on the Council has a voting majority (when voting co-optees are counted)

11. The Overview and Scrutiny function will be independent of Cabinet and include three standing committees with standing chairmen appointed by their Committee. Each committee will have the option to establish its own working groups should it wish to in order to explore particular issues in more depth.
12. The Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee will focus on the following areas:
  - a. The work of the Education Transformation Board, (two way relationship with the Board which oversees the education strategy), including review of the annual report of the Board.
  - b. Constructive challenge on performance issues. Education Transformation Board to highlight issues where the committee could support the improvement dialogue.
  - c. Remaining OCC education functions (e.g. early years, Special Education Needs and school place planning).
  - d. Regular review of progress / issues report from the School Organisation Stakeholder Group on admissions patterns and arrangements.
13. The Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be linked to the Council's quarterly performance monitoring timeframes. It will focus on:
  - a. Review of corporate performance and finance reporting
  - b. Budget scrutiny
  - c. Arrangements for any call – in will be led by this committee
14. The remit of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee will remain the same. This already includes scrutinising aspects of adult social care. As some queries have been raised regarding the prominence of adult services in the new governance proposals it is worth highlighting that where there are issues of concern or queries over the decisions being taken in relation to adult social care these would be picked up by the Performance Scrutiny Committee. Developments in the provision of adult services may also form the work of a Cabinet Advisory Group prior to decisions being taken.

15. The proposals outlined create up to 71 places for councillors to participate in the scrutiny and cabinet advisory function. (There are currently 59 places within the scrutiny function).

### **Locality Working**

16. As discussed in January the changes to electoral boundaries and the reduction in members requires the Council to reconsider its own locality boundaries (a map outlining the proposals is attached at Annex 1).
17. Localities will continue to meet twice yearly and provide an opportunity for members to influence and comment upon local services and commissioning intentions.
18. Localities are not formal decision making bodies, and do not as a matter of course have specific resources allocated to them. However they provide an important avenue of influence for members and a forum in which members' views on local issues, needs and services can be shared with officers; and potentially also with scrutiny committees, cabinet advisory groups and Cabinet. As such, Locality meetings will be an important conduit for considering feedback from members about the local impact of the council's plans and services.
19. Given the integral nature of the Locality meetings, it is also intended that they will provide a key focus for member induction following the 2013 county council elections.

### **Member Induction**

20. A programme of member induction activities is being developed to help support members in effectively carrying out their role post-election. A key feature of the Council's induction programme will be locality briefings and opportunities to meet with key officers to support local members in their role as community leaders.

### **Changes to other committees**

21. It is proposed to reduce the number of members on the Planning and Regulation Committee from the current 15 to 12. This reflects the reduction in members of the council overall. This change will not affect the remit or operation of the committee.

**Recommendation**

22. Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to comment on and endorse the proposals outlined prior to consideration by Council. If supported, the Constitution will be updated accordingly, with changes coming into effect following the election.

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