

## **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PERFORMANCE BOARD 23 MARCH 2017**

### **COUNCIL WORKING GROUP - UPDATE**

---

#### **Summary**

1. The Chairman of the Council has been invited to the meeting to update the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board (OSPB) on the work of the cross-party Council Working Group and its emerging findings.

#### **Background**

2. At the Board's meeting on 18 January 2017, concern was expressed about the length and productivity of meetings of full Council. Members were informed that a cross-party Council Working Group (CWG) was looking into this area.
3. In February 2016, following a notice of motion standing in the names of Mrs E B Tucker, Prof J W Raine, Mrs S Askin and Mrs F M Oborski, Council resolved to form a cross-party working group to consider how better use might be made of the opportunities that full Council meetings represent, and how every Councillor can make a strong personal contribution for the benefit of residents and the county.
4. The cross-party CWG is chaired by the Chairman of the Council Tony Miller and has been considering a number of issues which may improve Council meetings and the role of Members. Engaging with all Members is an important part of that process, and there has been a recent questionnaire seeking their views.
5. Response to the initial survey was 50% and the data was analysed and presented to the CWG in January 2017. The data was somewhat in depth so CWG Members were asked to identify what they felt the top 10 issues were highlighted in the survey. From this, a series of further questions were sent out to Group Leaders requesting this information be shared with their political groups. Once responses had been received from political groups, the CWG were going to meet again to agree the recommendations to be submitted to the County Council in May. Unfortunately, no responses were received by the closing date of 3 March, although the Conservative Group are planning to discuss the issue at their meeting on 31 March and will then provide a formal response.

#### **Proposals**

6. In the meantime, however, one specific, urgent issue was considered by the CWG which was whether the budget-setting process could be improved. Setting the budget and precept is a vital task for full Council to perform. Previously, alternative budgets were filed ahead of the Council meeting, but budget amendments could be moved during the debate itself.

7. There was a view that this process meant that budget amendments proposed on the day could not be given full consideration and their merits not properly identified, and so there were advantages in ensuring that all proposed amendments to the budget were also filed ahead of the meeting to promote good decision-making. This could also improve the transparency of the Council's deliberations as all budget proposals would be published in good time ahead of the Council budget debate and decisions.
8. The CWG therefore proposed the amendments with immediate effect and this proposal was agreed at Council on 12 January 2017 and implemented for the budget meeting in February.

### **Further emerging potential recommendations of CWG for improving the effectiveness of Council Meetings**

9. The further emerging potential recommendations were:
  - Questions and Notices of Motions – only one question from each Member and adopt the parliamentary system of written and verbal questions in advance
  - Cabinet Member (CMR) reports to be circulated to all Members but be put to Scrutiny (OSPB) rather than full Council. OSPB can then consider the reports alongside its other Scrutiny functions and refer the CMR report or part of it to Council only by exception if of sufficient concern or importance
  - A constitutional limit of 2 Notice of Motions per political Group with an 'emergency override' if the Chairman is persuaded, in consultation with Monitoring Officer, that any proposed 3<sup>rd</sup> Motion is sufficiently important/urgent to be permitted. The rules should allow an additional one Motion which has cross-group support
  - There was majority but not consensus support for limiting the time available for Notices of Motion debates
  - Deadline for formal Questions and Notice of Motions to be the same to avoid confusion; both formal Questions and Notice of Motions to be received by noon 5 clear working days before Council (ie the preceding Thursday)
  - Project questions onto the screen in the Council Chamber. It is not necessary for Members to read out written questions as they are on the agenda and website
  - District Councils be contacted over future Council dates to reduce future meeting clashes.

### **Conclusion**

10. The purpose of the CWG was ratified at full Council and it has endeavoured to progress the agreed work streams. This has proved challenging at times as not all members have been able to attend each meeting. In order for the CWG to achieve its objectives there needs to be a willingness from members to give due consideration to potential recommendations.

## **Next Steps**

11. The Chairman of the CWG has extended the closing date for comments on the Member survey to 17 March. The CWG will reconvene in early April to discuss these and to begin compiling a report to be submitted to full Council in May.

## **Purpose of the Meeting**

The Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board is asked to:

- consider the information in the report
- determine whether it would wish to carry out any further scrutiny, and
- agree whether it would wish to make any comments

## **Contact Points**

### County Council Contact Points

Worcestershire County Council 01905 763763

Worcestershire Hub: 01905 765765

### Specific Contact Points for this report

Alyson Grice/Samantha Morris, Overview and Scrutiny Officers 01905 844962/844963

Email: [scrutiny@worcestershire.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@worcestershire.gov.uk)

## **Background Papers**

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Head of Legal and Democratic Services) there are no background papers relating to the subject matter of this report.