

Report to: **Hub Committee**  
Date: **28 March 2017**  
Title: **REVIEW OF HUB COMMITTEE AND THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY FUNCTION**  
Portfolio Area: **Strategy and Commissioning - Cllr Sanders**

Wards Affected: **All**

Relevant Scrutiny Committee: Overview and Scrutiny (Internal and External) Committees

Urgent Decision: **N** Approval and clearance obtained: **Y**

Date next steps can be taken: The Committee recommendations will be presented to the Council meeting on 11 April 2017 for approval.

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**RECOMMENDATION:**

That the Working Group has undertaken a review into the working arrangements of the Hub Committee and Overview and Scrutiny function and **RECOMMENDS** that the Hub Committee **RECOMMEND** to Council that:

1. the existing governance arrangements for Hub Committee are working well and should therefore be retained;
2. the Overview and Scrutiny function be carried out by one Committee (rather than two) with effect from the Annual Meeting in May 2017;
3. With effect from the Annual Meeting in May 2017, Members of West Devon Borough Council sit on either Hub Committee, or Audit Committee or Overview and Scrutiny Committee. In so doing, substitutes will not be allowed on any of Audit, Hub and Overview and Scrutiny Committees;

4. the Hub Committee has a membership of 9, Overview and Scrutiny Committee has a membership of 15 and Audit Committee membership is increased to 7; and
5. the Hub Committee Forward Plan be improved to better enable more effective programming of agenda items for Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

## **1. Executive summary**

- 1.1 When the Council approved its revised governance arrangements, Members reiterated the importance of reviews being undertaken to ensure the effectiveness of the new arrangements.
- 1.2 It was equally recognised that the Political Structures Working Group was the appropriate forum for this review to take place. In conducting this most recent review the Group has met on one occasion.
- 1.3 The Working Group has made recommendations in respect of the structure of Overview and Scrutiny, membership of Audit, Hub and Overview and Scrutiny Committees and the Hub Committee Forward Plan, all of which should further improve the effectiveness of decision making at West Devon Borough Council.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1 At its full Council meeting on 9 December 2014, West Devon Borough Council agreed to revise its governance arrangements to come into effect from May 2015 (Minute CM 65 refers). One of the main revisions was the creation of a single Committee as follows:

*"One politically balanced Hub Committee with 9 places on the Committee, scheduled to meet 10 times per year."*

- 2.2 The Hub Committee has now been in place for almost two years, and it was always intended that the arrangements be regularly reviewed to assess the effectiveness of the new structure. The first review into the roles and responsibilities of the Hub Committee took place during 2016 and was reported to Hub Committee on 22 March 2016 (Minute HC 63 refers), and Council on 5 April 2016 (Minute CM 61 refers). The resolution was as follows:

*"The existing governance arrangements are working well and should therefore be retained, subject to the approval of some minor amendments as outlined in section 5 of the presented report"*

- 2.3 This recent review which has resulted in this report took place at the request of a number of Members and included discussion on the Overview and Scrutiny Committees as well as the Hub Committee.

- 2.4 The Political Structures Working Group (PSWG) is the appropriate body to undertake that review and it met on 14 March 2017 to consider the existing arrangements.
- 2.5 In order to enable any changes to take place with effect from the Annual Council meeting in May 2017, the outcome from the meeting of the PSWG must be reported to the next meeting of full Council on 11 April 2017. The challenging timeframe has not allowed for views to be formally sought from the wider membership, however the report is being presented to Hub Committee on 28 March 2017 where Members views would be welcome, prior to presentation to Council on 11 April 2017.

### **3. Outcomes/outputs**

#### **Overview and Scrutiny Committees**

- 3.1 The PSWG considered a number of aspects in relation to Overview and Scrutiny Committees.
- 3.2 The Group considered whether Members should specialise in one area, for example, Audit, Hub, Overview and Scrutiny. This would enable Members to have a more focussed approach. It was discussed and agreed to recommend that all Members sit on either Audit Committee, Hub Committee or Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 3.3 The Group then discussed whether there should be one or two Overview and Scrutiny Committees. One of the prompts for this discussion was the comments raised at the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committees meeting held on 17 January 2017 which had been felt to be a particularly effective meeting. There were disadvantages to two Committees, particularly in terms of timing for agenda items. For example, it was difficult to time the reporting of Performance Indicators to Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Internal) to coincide with the end of the reporting quarter. If there was only one Overview and Scrutiny Committee, it could meet more frequently and those meetings could be co-ordinated with Hub Committee meetings and timed to enable a more meaningful discussion on Performance Indicators. A single Overview and Scrutiny Committee could be more focussed on the function itself, rather than whether an item was appropriate for an Internal or External Committee focus (or indeed both).
- 3.4 In terms of membership numbers, the Group felt that the Audit Committee should be increased to 7 to reflect the wider responsibilities of the Committee such as Risk Management and Review of Constitution. The increase in membership would also balance the fact that the Committee will no longer have substitutes, as Members will sit on either Audit Committee, or Hub Committee or Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

- 3.5 Whilst this change to the Audit Committee membership would result in an Overview and Scrutiny Committee of 15, this was considered appropriate as it would enable resilience within the Committee to appoint to Task and Finish Groups where necessary.
- 3.6 In discussing Task and Finish Groups, the Group all agreed that this was an area which had been successful and the practice of using Task and Finish Groups for discrete pieces of work should continue.
- 3.7 The Group discussed the practice of reports being presented to Overview and Scrutiny, and then Hub Committee and then Council. The Group did not feel that this was the most effective use of resources. The Group also discussed how items could be brought forward to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agenda. It was understood that the Hub Committee Forward Plan was a vehicle to enable Overview and Scrutiny Members to receive updates from Hub Committee Lead Members, on forthcoming reports. However, it was accepted that the Forward Plan was not particularly effective and was not currently used as it had been intended. It was agreed that a recommendation be proposed that the Hub Committee Forward Plan be improved to better enable effective programming of items on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agenda.
- 3.8 A further advantage of a single Overview and Scrutiny Committee was that the reduction in resource requirements to support two Committees would enable more time to be spent on focussed work programming which would help to add value to the Overview and Scrutiny function.
- 3.9 One Member stated that there was a duplication of work for officers in undertaking policy development at both West Devon Borough Council and South Hams District Council. A joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee was not yet possible, however, joint working should not be ruled out. As well as reducing the workload for officers, informal joint meetings of Overview and Scrutiny would facilitate learning and sharing of knowledge across both Councils and should be encouraged.
- 3.10 The Group were keen that Overview and Scrutiny should be a positive process that added value to the organisation. The Group hopes that the recommendations within this report will support this.

### **Hub Committee**

- 3.11 The Group then considered a number of questions relating to the effectiveness of the Hub Committee.
- 3.12 It was agreed that the Hub Committee should remain with a membership of 9. Lead Members had settled into their roles and, following the changes that took place after the last review, the Group felt that whilst the workload amongst the Lead Members would never be equal, it was now more equally shared.

- 3.13 The Group accepted that there were some areas that crossed over more than one Lead Member responsibility. In such cases, it was important that the Lead Members recognised this and communicated with other Lead Members who may have an interest.
- 3.14 In response to discussions about the relationship between Lead Members and their related officers, the Group was of the view that some working relationships could be better, however, it was not just the responsibility of officers but that the Lead Member should take responsibility for keeping in touch with officers to ensure that they were aware of developments within their area of responsibility.
- 3.15 It was also agreed that it would be beneficial for Lead Members of the Hub Committee to meet informally with the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) on a periodic basis to allow early discussion of matters that may come forward, and help to confirm direction of travel for the organisation. This meeting should not be used to make decisions. It would not be open to the wider membership to attend, but would help to improve communication between SLT and Hub Committee as a Group.
- 3.16 The Group felt that the Hub Committee was working well, and Lead Members were settling into the responsibilities of their role. The Group were pleased to note the increase in numbers of other Members who now attended Hub Committee meetings.

#### **4. Options available and consideration of risk**

- 4.1 The Group considered a number of options in their discussions, as set out above, and have concluded that the recommendations made represent the most effective future governance structure for West Devon Borough Council.

#### **5. Proposed Way Forward**

- 5.1 To adopt the recommendations as set out and make changes to the Constitution and governance arrangements accordingly, to take effect from Annual Council May 2017.

#### **6. Implications**

Implications	Relevant to proposals Y/N	Details and proposed measures to address
Legal/Governance	Y	In accordance with the Council Constitution, it is ultimately a decision for the Council if it wishes to make any proposed revisions to the Council's governance arrangements.
Financial	N	Since there is no appetite to increase the membership of the Hub Committee, there are no financial implications associated with this report other than the reduction of a SRA for Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Risk	N	The proposed amendments to the working arrangements will ensure that the Council retains an efficient and cost effective governance structure.
Comprehensive Impact Assessment Implications		
Equality and Diversity	N	There are no equality and diversity implications associated with this report.
Safeguarding	N	There are no safeguarding implications associated with this report.
Community Safety and Crime and Disorder	N	There are no Community Safety and Crime and Disorder implications associated with this report.
Health, Safety and Wellbeing	N	There are no Health, Safety and Wellbeing implications associated with this report.
Other implications		There are no other implications associated with this report.

### **Supporting Information**

#### **Appendices:**

None

#### **Background Papers:**

Council Report and Minutes – 9 December 2014 Meeting  
Hub Committee Report and Minutes – 22 March 2016 Meeting  
The Council Constitution