

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

23 January 2018

Report of the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Part 1- Public

For decision

1 REVIEW OF THE SCRUTINY FUNCTION

To set out some suggestions as to how the Overview and Scrutiny Committee can add value to the delivery of the Council's Savings and Transformation Strategy.

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 Following the discussion at the recent meeting of the Finance and Property Advisory Board which focused on the proposed budget for 2018/19, I have given some thought as to how the Council's Overview and Scrutiny function could be further developed. A number of concerns were expressed that Members, and in particular, those serving on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, should be doing more to understand and assist with the Council's Savings and Transformation Strategy and, in particular, how Members could help further with the delivery of the targets for savings/increased income needing to be achieved in 2018/19.
- 1.1.2 It was clear from comments made by some Members that they feel rather excluded from the process and that a more proactive role in helping to identify and deliver those savings or increased income should be explored. In the past, we have perhaps left such matters to our officers. I believe that elected Members should be far more involved in the process, and especially via the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This would enable Members to play a more active role by exploring areas of Council expenditure that could be reviewed and assessing opportunities to make the savings/increase income needed.
- 1.1.3 By way of background, I have asked Officers to provide a summary of the Savings and Transformation Strategy and some information about how this has performed over the past 3 years regarding the savings targets that have been set. This is attached as Appendix 1.

1.2 My Suggested Approach

- 1.2.1 I am aware that Members also have some concerns about the current way the overview and scrutiny process has operated in the recent past, and that to be more effective, we need to be more streamlined in our approach especially when dealing with issues related to the Savings and Transformation Strategy.
- 1.2.2 Whilst the use of scrutiny panels has enabled Members to look in more detail at issues of concern, I am aware that this has lengthened the overall time taken to complete a review. I believe that, for the coming year, we abandon the panel approach and focus on work led by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as a whole.
- 1.2.3 If Members are to be more involved in the process, I suggest that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee needs to work harder and more efficiently. That would mean having more formal meetings throughout the coming year, perhaps up to 6 in total, each focusing on one or two potential savings or potential for increased income. With the ongoing support of our officers, this would enable the Committee to agree if any savings or additional income in that area of business can be achieved. In that way, we could make clear and well-timed recommendations to the Cabinet on a number of key areas.
- 1.2.4 I suggest that we ask our Officers to plan ahead for these changes to be put in place from the start of the new financial year. It would then be a matter to arrange the suggested six meetings of the Committee over the coming year to ensure we deal with the areas of concern that have been or will be identified. Each quarterly meeting of the Cabinet then might need to consider 2 or 3 sets of recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

1.3 Initial list of Reviews

- 1.3.1 I have spoken with officers and agreed that the two outstanding reviews (the Gibson Building – Option Appraisal and a review the Council’s Constitution) should be completed via two special meetings of the Committee in March/April. Members will be advised of the dates in due course.
- 1.3.2 This will then free up time to commence the new approach with meetings every two months focusing on single issues. I hope that Members will be able to attend and support as many of these meetings as possible to ensure that a range of views and suggestions for change can be discussed. Some initial suggestions for review that have been put forward previously are listed below:

Youth Engagement (including Sports and Events Development)

Concessionary Charges

Customer Service Surgeries

Road Closures for Local Events

Public Conveniences

- 1.3.3 I am reflecting on other areas which might be appropriate to review, and of course, other Members of the Committee are welcome to contribute to that thinking too. Our Officers would also be able to advise Members as to which specific areas of Council spending, as set out in the Council's Budget Book, perhaps need to be re-assessed.

1.4 Conclusions

- 1.4.1 It is clear from the recent discussions that Members want to be more involved in the process that supports the delivery of the Savings and Transformation Strategy. We need to work with our officers more effectively and give clearer guidance to them when budgets for 2019/20 need to be formulated. I hope the Committee will support this new suggested approach.

1.5 RECOMMENDATION

- 1.5.1 That the proposals, as set out in the report, **BE ENDORSED.**

Allan Sullivan

Background papers:

Nil