

## **WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**EXECUTIVE – 12 JULY 2016**

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**Title:**

**OFFICER SUPPORT FOR OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY - OPTIONS ANALYSIS**

**[Portfolio Holders: Councillor Julia Potts and Councillor Tom Martin]**

**[Wards Affected: All]**

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**Summary and purpose:**

At its last meeting, the Executive received a report from the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee setting out the findings and recommendations from its review of Overview and Scrutiny at Waverley. The Executive noted the recommendation that 'dedicated scrutiny officer support be secured' and asked officers to put forward options. Accordingly, this report identifies and analyses options in respect of scrutiny staffing at Waverley. Executive Members are asked to consider the options set out within this report and decide upon a way forward.

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**How this report relates to the Council's Corporate Priorities:**

An effective Overview and Scrutiny function is a vital component of the Council's Strong Leader and Executive governance model in that it ensures Executive decision-making is transparent, well-informed and accountable. The arrangements for staffing support for Overview and Scrutiny at Waverley therefore have a bearing on the full range of Executive decision-making and therefore relate to ALL of the Council's priorities.

**Financial Implications:**

Options 1 (do nothing) and 2 (reallocate workloads within the existing Democratic Services structure so that an existing Grade 7 Democratic Services Officer has responsibility for servicing all scrutiny committees) would incur no additional costs because they would not provide any additional resource.

Option 3 (create a new Grade 7 Scrutiny Officer post), which is recommended to the Executive, would cost £35,000 rising to £39,600 at 7a. (including salary, NI and pension). Pay band 7 is the anticipated grade and would be subject to the job evaluation process. As there is no pre-existing budget that would cover any increased staffing costs, this would require a supplementary estimate being agreed for 2016/17 and growth proposals being agreed during the next budget round.

**Legal Implications:**

There are no direct legal implications.

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**Introduction**

1. A Sub-Committee of the Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee was appointed by the Executive to review the Terms of Reference and arrangements for Overview and Scrutiny (OS) at Waverley.

2. The Sub-Committee discussed this remit and in view of the length of time since OS arrangements were last reviewed comprehensively and along with anecdotal evidence of member dissatisfaction with OS arrangements, agreed that the review should be undertaken in the context of evaluating the effectiveness of Waverley's OS function in relation to the four principles of effective scrutiny as described by the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS). According to the four principles, good scrutiny:
  - provides a constructive 'critical friend' challenge – holding decision-makers to account;
  - amplifies the voices and concerns of the public;
  - is led by independent people who take responsibility for their role; and
  - drives improvement in public services and makes a difference.
3. As part of its evidence gathering, the Sub-Committee sought the views of Waverley Members through a survey and interviews. The feedback received indicated a high level of frustration with the way in which the current arrangements operate, and an appetite for the scrutiny function at Waverley taking a more constructive and proactive role in supporting the work of the Council. The desktop research carried out into OS arrangements at other councils, and a review of academic research into OS arrangements generally, shows that the issues that Waverley has with its OS arrangements are not uncommon.
4. When it met in June, the Executive endorsed the broad findings of the review into OS arrangements at Waverley. In addition to agreeing that plans for Member and Officer Training on Scrutiny be progressed and that the Constitutional SIG be asked to advise the Executive on any required changes to the Constitution, the Executive asked for a report outlining the costs and benefits of different options in respect of dedicated officer support for overview and scrutiny at Waverley.
5. Officers have considered and assessed the extent to which the new approach to scrutiny at Waverley that will be pursued as a result of the OS review would necessitate additional or different staffing resources and have also considered the extent to which it will not. Officers have also looked at the type of scrutiny support posts that exist in other authorities' structures to see what can be learnt from best practice. This work has informed the options set out below.
6. There are any number of approaches that Waverley could choose to take to support scrutiny. However, there are three basic and distinct options to be considered at this point:
  - Option 1 – no change
  - Option 2 - reallocate workloads within the existing Democratic Services structure so that an existing Grade 7 Democratic Services Officer has responsibility for servicing all scrutiny committees
  - Option 3 - create a new Grade 7 Scrutiny Officer post within the Council's Corporate Policy Team.

These options are explained and analysed below.

## Option 1 – no change

### 7. Description

Under this option, there would be no additional staffing resource added to the Council's establishment and no changes to how democratic support is provided to scrutiny chairs and committees. Members should note that the constitutional changes recommended to the Executive following consideration and advice from the Constitutional Special Interest Group (SIG) would, in effect, change some of the practical arrangements for democratic support of Overview and Scrutiny in as much as the new committees are expected to differ in size, number and focus. However, under option 1 the Democratic Services team would simply reallocate responsibilities equally between full time Democratic Services Officers as is currently the case.

### 8. Analysis

This option is attractive from a cost point of view in that it would incur no additional cost. However, it clearly offers the least of all of the options in respect of driving forward a new way of working. By assessing the Council's approach to Overview and Scrutiny against the best practice model offered by the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) and robustly challenging its current practice, members at Waverley have arrived at a set of recommendations for change in how scrutiny is delivered which are ambitious and markedly different from how things currently operate. In this case, 'doing what we've always done' seems unlikely to support the degree of change and transformation members have clearly articulated a desire to see.

Option 2 - reallocate workloads within the existing Democratic Services structure so that an existing Grade 7 Democratic Services Officer has responsibility for servicing all scrutiny committees

### 9. Description

Under this option, the Democratic Services staffing establishment would remain as it is but where scrutiny committee duties are currently shared between Democratic Services Officers, workloads would be reallocated so that members and officers would have one dedicated Democratic Services Officer who took responsibility for servicing all scrutiny committees.

### 10. Analysis

Like option 1, this option is attractive from a cost point of view in that it would incur no additional costs. It would, to a pretty limited degree, support member aspirations to have 'dedicated' support for scrutiny by providing a single point of contact for democratic support. However, this proposal would not create any additional capacity and there is no 'spare' capacity within the team. Importantly, there is also no business case for lessening the traditional type of democratic support provided to committees under the review's proposals. The type of support members appear to be seeking isn't 'better' or 'more sophisticated', just 'different', and officers would advise against any decision which increased a new type of scrutiny support at the expense of existing core democratic support. In short, this option essentially has very similar benefits

and weaknesses as option 1. It is attractive in that it is cost neutral. It has marginal benefits by focusing and rationalising the way committees are serviced and by providing a single point of contact and DSO support although it should be noted that a single point of contact also creates the potential for a single point of failure and arguably reduces overall team resilience. However, its main weakness, as with option 1, is that it would not be fundamental change and would therefore be unlikely to support the delivery of fundamental change elsewhere.

Option 3 – create a new Grade 7 Scrutiny Officer post within the Council’s Corporate Policy Team (RECOMMENDED OPTION)

11. Description

Under this option, a new post would be created within the Council’s corporate policy team. The corporate policy team is part of the Policy and Governance Service but separate to the Democratic Services Team. The corporate policy team is led by the Corporate Policy Manager who line manages two Grade 7 officers. The team leads on a diverse range of areas, including: corporate planning; research and data analysis; consultation; policy support; performance management; business service reviews; learning and development; and project support for the Council’s *Foresight* programme. It is suggested that the new post would be called ‘Scrutiny Officer’ and would provide dedicated policy advice, support, research, analysis and briefings to the scrutiny committees and in particular the chairs and vice chairs.

12. Analysis

The clearest disadvantage of this option is the cost implication. As noted, this option would incur new staffing costs of £35,000 rising to £39,600 at the top of the grade. Pay band 7 is the anticipated grade and would be subject to the job evaluation process. However, whereas options 1 and 2 appear to offer little in respect of developing and sustaining a new, more robust, challenging, proactive and constructive form of scrutiny at Waverley, this option arguably does. Areas in which the review particularly challenges the Council to change and improve its approach to scrutiny include:

- Moving towards evidence-based scrutiny whereby objective data informs: the work programme; the terms of reference for reviews; and the means by which success is measured, judged and managed.
- Strengthening the extent to which Overview and Scrutiny fulfils its proactive ‘policy development’ role as well as its reactive select committee mode.
- A more streamlined, focused, work programme that focuses attention where performance outcome data shows it is needed rather than on ‘regular reports’ which always look at the same matters.
- Focused and tightly managed in-depth scrutiny reviews with clear terms of reference, pace and practical outcomes. It has been noted that this is an area in which scrutiny at Waverley has succeeded but members have been clear that they want to see more of it.

Officers' advice is that the type of staffing support members would need to meet these ambitious goals is professional policy officer support. A policy officer would be recruited on the basis of them having professional knowledge, skills and experience in areas such as: research; data analysis; performance management; strategic thinking; policy advice; and project management.

#### Options considered but discounted

13. An obvious variant to option 3 (and one which does exist in some Councils) would be for this additional resource to be added to the Council's existing Democratic Services team rather than its Corporate Policy team. This would be no more or less expensive as the officer would be employed at Grade 7 either way. However, officers' advice is that there are clear benefits to having a dedicated scrutiny officer, if one is to be employed, working in a separate team. There would be a better fit professionally in a policy team, there is more management capacity in Waverley's policy team to take on new staff, and there is a clear benefit to having a distinct separation between democratic support and scrutiny support roles. The democratic services and policy teams are part of the same service so the necessary synergies would exist but with far less risk of blurring the lines between democratic support and a different type of policy support.
14. A second variant to option 3 would be for a new dedicated resource in the corporate policy team but on a part time basis. Clearly this would offer the prospect of achieving at least some of the same benefits but at a reduced cost so is worth consideration. However, officers do feel that it would take a full time officer to fully meet the demands and expectations of the role.
15. Another option would be for additional support for Overview and Scrutiny to be identified from within existing staffing structures across the organisation. As an example, a member of staff within Community Services could be identified as the nominated person to support on all matters relating to the scrutiny of Community Services. There are obvious disadvantages to this. Firstly, no additional resource would be created so in effect this option would be only to formalise what currently takes place. Secondly, the resource provided would not be, in any way, 'dedicated'. Thirdly, whilst members of staff within services have a vital role to play in terms of supporting scrutiny reviews by providing information, advice, ideas and perspectives, their familiarity with and closeness to the subject matter may also be a constraint to delivering the type of fully objective and fresh approach that a corporate policy resource could provide and which members wish to have.

#### **Conclusion**

16. The need for dedicated scrutiny resource to support the Council's Scrutiny (and Executive) Committees to develop and sustain a new, more constructive and effective, approach to scrutiny at Waverley, does not in anyway lessen the need for the traditional existing type of support offered by the Council's Democratic Services Team to members and officers. Meetings will still need to be convened and clerked, agenda packs prepared, and decisions recorded and managed. By the same token, however, more of the same type of resource or indeed a reallocation of workloads within the existing Democratic Services structure to provide a single designated point of contact for Scrutiny would be

very unlikely to drive forward or support the type of significant change proposed by the review's recommendations. For these reasons, options 1 and 2, whilst workable and viable and being attractive in as much as they incur not additional cost, are unlikely to meet the expectation of having dedicated scrutiny staffing resource to support a transformation in how the Council does scrutiny.

17. Option 3, a dedicated new Scrutiny Officer as part of the Council's corporate policy team, offers the Council the type of staffing resource it would need to develop and sustain a more robust and informed approach to scrutiny but would incur additional cost as a result. This additional cost does need to be considered against the desired added longer term strategic, financial and democratic value that a dedicated scrutiny policy officer would support scrutiny members to achieve, but it is an additional cost nonetheless.

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### **Recommendation**

It is recommended that the Executive:

1. recommends to the Council that the new post of 'Scrutiny Officer' be added to the Council's establishment as set out as option 3 within the report; and
2. agrees a supplementary estimate to cover additional staffing costs in 2016/17 and agrees to growth proposals being put forward during the next budget round from 2017/18 onwards.

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### **Background Papers**

7 June Executive Report 'REVIEW OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ARRANGEMENTS'.

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