

Council Report

Ward(s) affected: all

Report of Director of Finance

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Date: 26 February 2019

Report of the Executive Advisory Board Review Task and Finish Group

Executive Summary

The Council, at its meeting on 9 October 2018 considered a report concerning a review of the structure of the Executive Advisory Boards (EABs), which contained the following three options:

1. To disband the existing EABs and establish one overarching EAB making greater use of existing powers to establish task groups to look at specific issues and projects relating to the delivery of the nine strategic Corporate Plan priorities.
2. To disband the existing EABs and establish topic based advisory boards to be commissioned directly by the Executive as and when required.
3. To make no change to the current arrangements.

The Council resolved that, before any decision was taken in respect of the future of the EABs, a cross party task and finish group of nine councillors, comprising five Conservative councillors and one councillor from each of the other four groups, be established to consider the matter and report its findings to the Council.

Accordingly, the EAB Review Task and Finish Group was established and met on 20 November 2018 when it considered the future structure of the EABs. This report outlines the Task and Finish Group's findings and sets out its conclusions and recommendations to the Council, which were also considered by the EABs in February

Recommendations to Council:

- (1) That Option 2: "*To disband the existing EABs and establish topic based advisory boards to be commissioned directly by the Executive as and when required*" be not supported and discounted as a possible future EAB governance structure.

- (2) That the existing arrangement of the two EABs be retained for the time being whilst the Forward Plan process is strengthened pending review following the Borough Council Elections in May 2019 to ascertain whether changes to the Forward Plan process and/or EAB structure are required.
- (3) That the review referred to in paragraph (2) above be carried out within 12 months of the Borough Council Elections
- (4) That the Forward Plan be included on future EAB agendas as part of the standing item on the Work Programme to facilitate better agenda planning¹.
- (5) That lead councillors do not play a part in determining the Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme at work programme meetings.

Reason for Recommendations:

To introduce a more efficient and effective EAB configuration.

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise the Council of the outcome of the meeting of the EAB Review Task and Finish Group held on 20 November 2018 and of the views of the two EABs thereon, and to commend the Group's conclusions and recommendations to the Council.

2. Background

- 2.1 Following a review of governance arrangements, on 7 October 2015 the Council agreed a new hybrid approach featuring the establishment of two EABs to advise and make recommendations on key or other significant decisions prior to the formal consideration of such decisions by the Executive. This system was implemented with effect from 1 January 2016 with the recommendation that the arrangements would be reviewed after a twelve-month period of operation. This twelve-month review took place in the form of a seminar on 7 March 2017 to which all councillors were invited. Having concluded that the new arrangements were at an early stage and were beginning to embed, the review reinforced the role of the EABs in advising the Executive at an early stage in respect of the formulation and development of policies and projects that would assist with the delivery of Corporate Plan priorities.
- 2.2 From 4 to 6 December 2017, the LGA undertook a corporate peer challenge review of the Council and submitted its final feedback report on 5 February 2018. Although the report contained no specific recommendations relating to organisational governance, there was some feedback in this area regarding the Overview and Scrutiny function and the operation of the EABs. The relevant extract from the feedback report concerning the EABs was as follows:

'The recent introduction of Executive Advisory Boards (EABs) is clearly work in progress and perhaps needs more time to settle down into a more effective grouping. The aim of allowing early stage involvement on backbench councillors in the development of decisions aligned to corporate plan themes pre-Executive is laudable. However, we found some confusion among councillors and officers about the role of EABs. It will be important for the Council to review ways to make their work more effective. This is important as the areas covered by the

¹ Recommendation (4) has already been implemented

EABs such as innovation and housing are vitally important for the future of the Borough. Given councillor appetite for smaller task and finish groups, perhaps topic based Advisory Boards may be a way forward.'

- 2.3 A key recommendation of the peer challenge review was to review the Council's Corporate Plan and identify a deliverable number of priorities. Following a review, a revised Corporate Plan 2018-2023 was adopted by the Council on 15 May 2018 when Councillors acknowledged that it would be necessary to review the remits of the EABs to reflect the three fundamental themes of Place-Making, Community and Innovation which underpinned the newly adopted Corporate Plan and differed from those in the previous version of the Plan. On 24 July 2018, the Council agreed revised names and remits for the EABs and established the Place-Making and Innovation EAB, in place of the Borough, Economy, and Infrastructure EAB, and the Community EAB, in place of the Society, Environment, and Council Development EAB, following the most logical approach to aligning the remit of the two EABs with the three new fundamental themes in the revised Corporate Plan. The Terms of Reference of the EABs was changed to reflect the amended names and remits.
- 2.4 Further to the peer challenge review feedback that it was important for the Council to review ways to make the work of EABs more effective, consideration was given to achieving this goal. The review took account of issues including difficulties with work programming, confusion around the remit of the EABs which can be blurred and overlapping, cancellation of meetings due to insufficient or delayed business and reluctance to discuss some matters at an early stage of development in a public forum. As a result of this review, the following options for future EAB configurations were identified:
1. To disband the existing EABs and establish one overarching EAB making greater use of existing powers to establish task groups to look at specific issues and projects relating to the delivery of the nine strategic Corporate Plan priorities.
 2. To disband the existing EABs and establish topic based advisory boards to be commissioned directly by the Executive as and when required.
 3. To make no change to the current arrangements.
- 2.5 These options formed the basis of a report to Council on 9 October 2018 concerning the outcomes of the review and Option 1 was recommended for adoption. Having considered the report, the Council resolved that, before any decision was taken in respect of the future of the EABs, a cross party task and finish group be established with the following terms of reference:
- (a) to review the existing governance arrangements in relation to the Executive Advisory Boards and to discuss available options to improve those arrangements, including the proposal for a single Executive Advisory Board; and following that review
 - (b) to make recommendations as appropriate to the Council at its meeting on 6 February 2019.

Accordingly, the EAB Review Task and Finish Group was established and met on 20 November 2018 when it reviewed the governance arrangements in relation to the EABs.

2.6 The members of the Task and Finish Group were:

Councillor David Reeve (Chairman)
Councillor Adrian Chandler
Councillor Alexandra Chesterfield
Councillor Nils Christiansen
Councillor David Goodwin
Councillor Angela Gunning
Councillor Mike Piper
Councillor Tony Rooth
Councillor Matt Sarti

3. Proposal

3.1 The following points arose during the Group's discussions and questions leading to its conclusions and proposal:

- EABs were the correct vehicle to advise the Executive on corporate priorities.
- Further time was required for the EABs to bed in fully and reach their potential to advise the Executive.
- There was no prescribed formula for a hybrid governance model such as that currently in place at Guildford, and the other councils known to be operating a similar hybrid system, namely Canterbury, Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks, all differed in approach.
- Whilst there could be insufficient business to warrant two EABs going forward, a single EAB could become overloaded, although more frequent meetings could be arranged to compensate for this. A trial with one EAB for a period of 6-12 months could inform the likely success of such an arrangement in the future.
- Reducing the number of EABs to one could reduce the potential for non-Executive councillor involvement in advising the Executive on the formulation and development of policies and projects. With two EABs, the total number of members was 24, which would reduce to 15 in the case of one EAB. However, all non-Executive councillors were free to attend and participate in EAB meetings. A smaller number of interested and engaged councillors could be more productive than a larger membership who were less engaged, and as it was likely that there would be a percentage of EAB councillors with limited attendance and involvement, reducing the EAB membership may not diminish its value.
- Whilst increased councillor presence and participation at EAB meetings was sought, it was felt that task groups had the potential to add greater depth and value, particularly in the case of a single EAB. Task groups could include councillors who were not EAB members thereby increasing the number involved.
- Although EABs had been looking at some matters retrospectively when they should have had involvement earlier in the process to advise the Executive before decisions were being formulated and made, it was felt that progress was being made in this area. A possible reason for this retrospective view was that much business was in train when the EABs were established and therefore they had not had the opportunity for early involvement.
- Setting up task and finish groups early at the work programme stage to report to EAB meetings would enable early involvement.
- The Forward Plan process was currently insufficiently robust to facilitate and inform EAB or Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) input as many proposed decisions were entered late which hampered work programming and early involvement. However, officers were seeking to strengthen this process and issues with

forward planning and updating the Forward Plan were being tackled through educating senior leaders and others to plan ahead and programme their work in a timely fashion.

- Solving issues with the Forward Plan could possibly resolve the issues associated with the EABs and it was agreed that the Forward Plan should be included on EAB agendas in future to facilitate work programming.
- The Council agreed a recommendation on 25 July 2017 that, in order to improve the arrangements for topic selection and agenda planning, the Executive and CMT be requested to provide suggestions for topic areas for EABs drawn from the Corporate Plan Action Plan for consideration at future work programme meetings. Council also agreed have both a CMT and Executive representative attend those meetings. However, given that the work programmes of both the EABs and O&S were discussed by their respective chairmen and vice-chairmen at the same meeting, and in order to preserve the independence of O&S, it was felt strongly that the Executive representative attending the work programme meeting should not play a part in setting the O&S work programme. Careful work programming would reduce the risk of duplication between EABs and O&S.
- Although there had been some confusion over which EAB topics should be reported to and where strategic and innovative future thinking sat, the Corporate Plan indicated which EABs should consider which topics. The Corporate Plan would be refreshed after the Borough Elections and a Councillor requested that version numbers be added to future editions to enable identification of the current version.
- Progressing the Local Plan had adversely affected the business of the Community EAB and now that the Plan was nearing adoption it was expected that more business would be directed to that EAB.
- Care needed to be taken when selecting topics for consideration as overloaded agendas did not allow in-depth consideration and discussion. Two items per agenda were considered appropriate. Although the establishment of EAB task groups increased the opportunity for input, particularly in a single EAB scenario, officer workload and capacity were factors to bear in mind.
- The views expressed by EABs were recorded in the minutes of their meetings and included in relevant reports to the Executive.
- Taking a Council decision in respect of the future EAB structure in February 2019 was too close to the Elections in May 2019. Postponing the decision until after the Elections was favoured as this would give an opportunity to strengthen the Forward Plan process and gauge the resulting impact on the effectiveness of EABs. Furthermore, new Councillors should be given the opportunity to influence and buy into the way forward as they may have fresh ideas and views.

3.2 The Community EAB and Place-making and Innovation EAB received the Task and Finish Group's findings, including its conclusions and recommendations at their meetings held on 14 and 18 February 2019, respectively. Having considered the Task and Finish Group's findings, the Community Executive Advisory Board indicated its agreement with the conclusions and recommendations and commended them to Council. As the meeting of the Place-making and Innovation EAB takes place after the publication of this agenda, its views will be included on the Order Paper for this Council meeting.

4. Legal implications

4.1 There are no legal implications arising from the proposals in this report.

5. Financial implications

5.1 There are no significant financial implications arising from the proposals in this report.

6. Human Resource implications

6.1 There are no significant human resource implications arising from the proposals in this report.

7. Risk Management Implications

7.1 There are no significant risk management implications arising from the proposals in this report.

8. Summary of Options

8.1 The Council could decide to implement an alternative EAB structure.

9. Conclusion

9.1 In conclusion, the Group agreed the five recommendations listed in the Executive Summary of this report for submission to the EABs for comment and to full Council for approval.

10. Background Papers

None

11. Appendices

None