

Corporate Governance & Standards Committee Report

Ward(s) affected: All

Report of Director of Strategic Services

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## **Review of Task Groups reporting to the Committee**

### **Executive Summary**

Council Procedure Rule 24 (v) requires the appointing body to review annually, the continuation of task groups appointed by them. Although the Councillor Development Steering Group was set up originally as an Executive working group, it was agreed in 2015 that the Steering Group would report on its work to this Committee.

The Corporate Governance Task Group was established by the Committee in November 2019 to review a number of corporate governance related matters and has met on ten occasions in 2020-21, and twice already in 2021-22.

At its meeting held on 8 June 2021, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, following its consideration of the independent investigation relating to the Garden Village bid at the former Wisley Airfield, requested the Task Group to discuss and consider the following:

- (a) the Council's Constitution regarding the definition and processes for 'Key Decisions' so that any bids, tenders or other activities that may lead to key decisions in future are included in the Forward Plan or communicated to relevant Ward Councillors in a sufficiently timely manner for transparency;
- (b) how we can ensure that any meetings involving lead councillors, officers and the private sector are minuted and available in the public domain; and
- (c) steps we can take to ensure that any failings in transparency or procedure are communicated to the public by the Council as soon as identified.

This Committee is asked to consider adding these matters to the work currently being undertaken by the Task Group in considering proposals to promote transparency, and effective communications and reporting.

This report asks the Committee to review the work carried out by the Steering Group and the Task Group over the past twelve months, and the work they are likely to undertake over the next twelve months and to agree that both groups should continue their

important work. It is recommended that both groups continue to be representative of all political groups on the Council. Where political groups are invited to nominate a councillor to sit on a task group, there is no requirement for that councillor to be a member of the appointing committee.

**Recommendation to the Committee:**

- (1) That the Councillor Development Steering Group continues its work and that the numerical allocation of seats on the Steering Group to each political group shall be one member per group, and that each political group be invited to make an appropriate nomination for the 2021-22 municipal year, plus one nominated substitute per appointee.
- (2) That the terms of reference of the Steering Group be amended as follows:

“To continue to support councillors in their ongoing development and training needs through a clear, structured Action Plan for councillor development that responds to the **corporate priorities of the Council** fundamental themes that support the vision of the Corporate Plan: Place-making, Community and Innovation.”
- (3) That the Corporate Governance Task Group continues its work and that the numerical allocation of seats on the Task Group to each political group shall be one member per group, and that each political group be invited to make an appropriate nomination for the 2021-22 municipal year, plus one nominated substitute per appointee.
- (4) That the following matters be added to the work currently being undertaken by the Task Group in considering proposals to promote transparency, and effective communications and reporting:

To discuss and consider:

- (a) the Council’s Constitution regarding the definition and processes for 'Key Decisions' so that any bids, tenders or other activities that may lead to key decisions in future are included in the Forward Plan or communicated to relevant Ward Councillors in a sufficiently timely manner for transparency;
  - (b) how we can ensure that any meetings involving lead councillors, officers and the private sector are minuted and available in the public domain; and
  - (c) steps we can take to ensure that any failings in transparency or procedure are communicated to the public by the Council as soon as identified.
- (5) That the membership of the Corporate Governance Task Group shall continue to include a co-opted Independent Member (Murray Litvak) and a Parish Member (Julia Osborn) of this Committee.

Reasons for Recommendation:

- To recognise the important work that both groups undertake in respect of councillor training and development and reviewing various corporate governance related matters on behalf of this Committee.
- To comply with the requirement for this Committee to review the continuation of the Councillors' Development Steering Group and the Corporate Governance Task Group, in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 24 (v).

**Is the report (or part of it) exempt from publication? No**

**1. Purpose of Report**

1.1 This report asks the Committee to review the work carried out by:

- (a) the Councillors' Development Steering Group over the past twelve months and the work it is likely to undertake over the next twelve months; and
- (b) the Corporate Governance Task Group over the past twelve months and the work it is likely to undertake over the next twelve months.

1.2 As part of this review, the report also asks the Committee to agree that both groups should continue their work and to approve the composition of both groups.

**2. Strategic Priorities**

2.1 The work of councillor task groups should assist in the delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan and the fundamental themes that support that Plan.

**3. Background**

3.1 Council Procedure Rule 24 (v) requires the Committee to review annually the continuation of those task groups for which it is responsible. The Councillors' Development Steering Group and the Corporate Governance Task Group are such groups.

Operation of working groups/task groups

3.2. The Council agreed in December 2016, as part of a review of the Constitution, to include for the purposes of clarity and avoidance of doubt, information in Council Procedure Rules on the appointment, terms of reference, composition, and duration of:

- working groups (appointed by the Leader, a lead councillor, or the Executive) and
- task groups<sup>1</sup> (appointed by Council, a committee, or an EAB),

including the appointment of working/task group chairmen and substitutes.

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<sup>1</sup> The Steering Group is in effect a "task group" in this context

- 3.3 Under Council Procedure Rule 24, this Committee may determine, amongst other things,
- the number of councillors on a task group,
  - whether the task group should be cross-party (it is essential that *all* political groups are represented on the Steering Group and the Task Group) and
  - whether to ask political group leaders to nominate councillors for membership of the Steering Group and Task Group<sup>2</sup> or appoint those councillors itself.
- 3.4 This report sets out in **Appendix 1**:
- (a) the respective terms of reference and current composition of the Steering Group and the Task Group; and
  - (b) a summary of general progress in respect of both groups, including work undertaken, goals achieved and work still to be carried out.
- 3.5 Clearly, the work of the Steering Group is vital to ensure that the Councillor training and development programme continues to meet the needs of councillors and strives to maintain the standards required by the South East Employers Charter for Elected Member Development, for which the Council received re-accreditation in January 2020.
- 3.6 Similarly, the work of the Task Group is very important for the purpose of addressing a number of key corporate governance related matters identified in 2019, including reviewing key aspects of the Council's ethical standards framework and promoting greater openness and transparency.
- 3.7 Accordingly, the Committee is asked to agree that both groups continue with their work. It is also recommended that the terms of reference of the Steering Group be amended as follows to ensure that councillor training and development is geared towards the Council's corporate priorities:

“To continue to support councillors in their ongoing development and training needs through a clear, structured Action Plan for councillor development that responds to the **corporate priorities of the Council** ~~fundamental themes that support the vision of the Corporate Plan: Place-making, Community and Innovation.~~”

#### 4. Equality and Diversity Implications

- 4.1 The groups are responsible for having due regard to the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010) when making any policy recommendations.

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<sup>2</sup> Where political groups are invited to nominate a councillor to sit on a task group, there is no requirement for that councillor to be a member of the appointing committee.

## **5. Financial Implications**

- 5.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report. Any proposals, projects, or suggestions from the groups with financial implications will either be contained within approved budgets or considered as part of the Service and Financial Planning cycle.
- 5.2 The budget for councillor training and development in 2021-22 is £12,000.

## **6. Legal Implications**

- 6.1 There is no legal requirement to establish working groups or task groups, but most councils use them for purposes similar to ours. There is also no legal requirement for them to be politically balanced. As stated above, we have made provision for their operation in Council Procedure Rules.

## **7. Human Resource Implications**

- 7.1 Currently, we are able to service both groups from within existing staffing resources in the Democratic Services team.

## **8. Summary of Options**

- 8.1 In the light of the information provided in this report, the Committee (as the 'appointing body') is asked to agree that the Steering Group and Task Group continue with their work.
- 8.2 The Committee may also, if it so wishes, revise the respective terms of reference and composition of both groups. In that regard, the Committee is also asked to agree the numerical allocation of seats to each political group on both the Steering Group and on the Task Group. Officers are suggesting that this should continue to be on the basis of one member from each of the five political groups on the Council.

## **9. Background Papers**

None

## **10. Appendices**

Appendix 1: Table showing details of the Councillor Development Steering Group and Corporate Governance Task Group including work undertaken over the past 12 months, and work to be carried out during the year