

Together we are delivering your

New Somerset Council

**Scrutiny at Somerset Council Task and Finish Group
Recommendations**

December 2022 to January 2023

Constitution and Governance – 30th January 2023



Context 1

- The County Council's Scrutiny Manager tasked to work with County Council's 4 Scrutiny Committees to establish views and recommendations on how scrutiny should function and operate at Somerset Council post Vesting Day
- The Scrutiny Manager sought volunteers for a cross-committee, cross-party Task and Finish Group during late October/early November 2022 meeting cycle
- The Leader of Council agreed to waive political proportionality and enabled creation of a group consisting of 12 elected Members (4 x Liberal Democrats, 4 x Conservatives, 2 x Labour, 1 x Green and 1 x Independent) plus 2 co-opted scrutiny members from across all 4 Scrutiny Committees, including 3 of the current Scrutiny Committee Chairs

Context 2

- The group met on 4 occasions during December 2022 and January 2023, considering various topics such as current structure, what happens elsewhere, possible scrutiny models and a Director's perspective,
- The group agreed on a series of 7 Recommendations at their meeting on 11th January, were presented to Executive/SLT on 16th January, followed by a formal report to be considered at the Constitution and Governance Committee on 30th January and by Full Council on 22nd February.

Recommendations 1-3

1. There should be a full review of the revised scrutiny structure within 12 months of Vesting Day to ensure it is fit for purpose. This review should take place sooner if required.
2. The Adults and Health Scrutiny Committee and the Children and Families Scrutiny Committees to remain as they are currently constituted.
3. Create a Corporate and Resources Scrutiny Committee, whose portfolio will include Finance and Procurement, Strategic Asset Management, ICT, Partnerships and Localities and Strategy and Performance. This committee would have specific responsibility for budget monitoring and financial scrutiny.

Recommendations 4 and 5

4. The new Corporate and Resources Scrutiny Committee will form part of an increase to 5 formal Scrutiny Committees – Adults and Health, Children and Families, Communities, Corporate and Resources and Climate and Place. The Task and Finish group have endeavoured to reflect the revised Senior Officer/Director's structure within the Scrutiny Committee division of responsibilities.

5. The 5 Scrutiny Committee model will be supported by an informal 6th 'committee' which will comprise the 5 Scrutiny Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs who will fulfil an oversight and steering role for the 5 formal Committees to ensure no duplication, efficiency of meeting time and allocation of work to Joint Scrutiny Committees. This group will also assume the responsibility for the review detailed in Recommendation 1 and will meet initially on a bi-monthly basis.

Recommendations 6 and 7

6. Specific Joint Scrutiny Committee meeting dates are to be established as part of the committee meetings calendar and an on-going forward work programme to be maintained for each of them.

7. Create a dedicated scrutiny resource from the post Vesting Day Democratic Services team, to consist of a minimum of 1 x Service Manager, 1 x Governance Specialist/Team Leader, 2 x Committee clerks and 2 x Scrutiny Researchers. This would allow for much more effective and efficient scrutiny and greatly increase scrutiny opportunities, whilst ensuring resilience within the officer cohort.

Areas to be maintained or strengthened

- Reinforce with Executive, SLT and wider officer cohort the importance of pre-decision scrutiny and ensuring the relevant Committee is given the opportunity to scrutinise effectively and in a timely manner
- Include within the new Council's Constitution that all Scrutiny Chairs should be a member of an opposition party.