

Report to: Governance Committee

Date of meeting: 4 March 2025

By: Deputy Chief Executive

Title: Amendment to Constitution – Place Scrutiny Committee Terms of Reference

Purpose: To seek approval to extend the Terms of Reference of the Place Scrutiny Committee to reflect Government reforms in relation to devolution and local government reorganisation.

RECOMMENDATION:

To recommend the County Council approve the revised Place Scrutiny Committee Terms of Reference set out at appendix 1 to the report and that the Constitution be amended accordingly.

1 Background Information

1.1 The Government's English Devolution White Paper was released on 16 December 2024 and represents wide ranging and ambitious reform and reorganisation of local government structures in all two tier areas and public services more widely. It also strengthens the previous Government's direction of travel to Mayoral Combined Authority based local devolution.

1.2 In February 2025 the Government announced that Sussex would be one of six areas included in the Devolution Priority Programme (DPP), working towards establishing a Mayoral County Combined Authority on an accelerated timescale ahead of a mayoral election in May 2026. Also in February, the Minister of State for Local Government invited all two tier local authority areas to prepare plans for local government reorganisation, with areas within the DPP required to submit progress on these plans for unitary local government in March 2025 and final proposals in September 2025.

1.3 Subject to Government decisions, significant programmes of work will be required to deliver these reforms. Active Member engagement, insight and oversight, including through robust scrutiny arrangements, will be critical.

2 Supporting information

2.1 In light of the Government reforms set out above, there is a need to extend the remit of scrutiny to incorporate the new areas of work, which are not currently reflected in committee terms of reference. Given the cross-cutting nature of potential implications for the County Council, from both devolution and local government reorganisation, the views of the Scrutiny and Audit Committee Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group have been sought on the recommended approach.

2.2 The proposed approach, supported by the Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group is:

- to extend the terms of reference of Place Scrutiny Committee to incorporate devolution and local government reorganisation, given the weighting of potential implications towards services within the remit of Place;
- that Place Scrutiny Committee, as the lead scrutiny committee, establishes a joint Member Reference Group which will be open to members of both Place and People Scrutiny Committees, recognising the potential impacts on services across the Council and the need to draw on expertise from both committees;

- the approach to scrutiny to remain under review by the Scrutiny and Audit Committee Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group as programmes of work develop; and
- ongoing oversight by the Audit Committee, particularly in relation to risks arising from the reforms;

2.3 The proposed addition to the existing Place Scrutiny Terms of Reference is shown at appendix 1. The proposed joint scrutiny Member Reference Group would develop and agree its own work programme to incorporate specific areas of Member interest to support detailed scrutiny to inform any recommendations to decision makers at key points.

2.4 The Place Scrutiny Committee next meets on 20 March 2025, following the Council meeting to be held that day, which provides an early opportunity for the committee to establish a joint Member Reference Group. In order to update the Place Scrutiny Terms of Reference ahead of the next meeting, the Governance Committee is recommended to recommend the County Council to agree to the revised Terms of Reference set out at appendix 1 to the report and that the Constitution be amended accordingly.

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Local Member: All

Background Documents: None