

Request for consideration of an issue by Overview and Scrutiny

Guidance on the use of this form:

This form is for use by councillors and members of the public who want to request that an item joins an Overview and Scrutiny agenda. Any issue may be suggested, provided it affects the BCP area or the inhabitants of the area in some way. Scrutiny of the issue can only be requested once in a 12 month period.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee receiving the request will make an assessment of the issue using the detail provided in this form and determine whether to add it to its forward plan of work.

They may take a variety of steps to progress the issue, including requesting more information on it from officers of the council, asking for a member of the overview and scrutiny committee to 'champion' the issue and report back, or establishing a small working group of councillors to look at the issue in more detail.

If the Committee does not agree to progress the issue it will set out reasons for this and they will be provided to the person submitting this form.

Please complete all sections as fully as possible

1. Issue requested for scrutiny

The potential benefits in terms of improved public confidence, effective use of Councillors' knowledge and time, and the overall cost savings that can all be achieved by changing from the present system of a single Planning Committee to one that has three committees, one for each town in the conurbation.

2. Desired outcome resulting from Overview and Scrutiny engagement, including the value to be added to the Council, the BCP area or its inhabitants.

The outcome we request is that Overview & Scrutiny Committee support the proposal and recommend a change in the Council's Constitution.

Additional value will be added by virtue of:

- Greater public confidence that planning applications would be considered by Councillors who are totally familiar with the area
- Potentially lower travel costs for holding meetings more local to Councillors addresses.
- Greater capacity with three small committees to keep pace with the ever-increasing number of planning applications
- Less pressure on Councillors to research and learn about planning issues in areas they are not familiar with.

3. Background to the issue

The Town Council of Christchurch and the Parish Councils of Burton, Highcliffe & Walkford Hurn and Throop & Holdenhurst are consultees for all planning applications received by BCP. As such our Councillors are in regular touch with local residents and the one overriding question asked by them is how can the BCP Councillors who sit on the Planning Committee be expected to decide whether to accept or reject an application when it will frequently be in a part of the area they are not familiar with. Often more than two thirds of Committee members in attendance will come from towns other than the one involved in an application. This, residents believe, cannot be the best way to decide such important issues.

In response to these regular criticisms the 4 local councils commissioned the attached report from a well known and respected planning consultant, Jo Witherden.

The report confirmed our view that a change to three committees would be welcomed by the public, would be in line with the practice at many other similar sized local authorities, would be effective management and should not cost more to operate.

4. Proposed method of scrutiny - (for example, a committee report or a working group investigation)

We favour a small working group but would respect that Overview & Scrutiny Committee members are in a better place to decide how to proceed.

5. Key dates and anticipated timescale for the scrutiny work

We hope for an early decision but defer to Overview & Scrutiny as to the best timetable to observe.

Last reviewed – April 2021

Contact – democratic.services@bcpcouncil.gov.uk