

Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Capacity/Achievement Sub-Group

Wednesday, 31 January 2007

Present: Councillors Francis Culshaw, Dennis Edgerley, Mrs Marie Gray and Harold Heaton

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

Councillor Dennis Edgerley was appointed to act as Chair of the Capacity and Achievement Sub-Group.

2. DECLARATIONS OF ANY INTEREST

No Member declared any interests in relation to matters under consideration at the meeting

3. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

a) Overview and Scrutiny Improvement Plan

As background information to the Inquiry, Members received the latest Overview and Scrutiny Improvement Plan which listed all the actions required to ensure that the Plan was kept on track in order to assist the delivery of the Council's performance agreement and corporate strategy.

b) Provision of Overview and Scrutiny Training Session

The Sub-Group received a briefing note drawing Members attention to the proposal being developed with the Improvement and Development Agency (IDEA) for Members to receive training sessions.

Following the completion of the Centre for Public Scrutiny Self Assessment Framework for Overview and Scrutiny, an Overview and Scrutiny Improvement Plan had been produced which had identified 2 key actions.

- the provision of appropriate Overview and Scrutiny training for both Members and Officers and
- reviewing and updating the Council's Overview and Scrutiny structure and Toolkit to ensure it was fit for purpose and in line with best practice

The training session would be based around general Overview and Scrutiny issues, chairing Overview and Scrutiny and Financial Strategy.

Members considered it would be beneficial to extend training sessions to other Chairs and Vice-Chairs and not just for the Overview and Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs.

c) Structures currently used for Overview and Scrutiny

The Sub-Group received a note on the Overview and Scrutiny structures currently being used by local authorities.

The note identified the scrutiny structures with the following three specific models being the most popular:

- Multiple overview and scrutiny committees that reflect portfolios or directorates
- One scrutiny committee and multiple overview committees
- One overview and scrutiny committee that commissions time-limited panels

Each specific model showed the potential advantages and potential disadvantages along with the Council's using the structure.

Members considered it would be worth consulting the rest of the Councillors on how effective our own scrutiny structure was and receive Members opinions on other structures that may be available to us.

More information was required on how other Local Authorities perform using their particular Overview and Scrutiny model along with examination of their CPA report relating to Overview and Scrutiny.

4. PRESENTATION ON THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT WHITE PAPER AND SCRUTINY IMPLICATIONS

The Sub-Group received a presentation from the Director of Customer, Democratic and Legal Services on the implication on scrutiny following the publication by the Government of the Local Government White Paper.

The White Paper identified the need to strengthen and make more effective the role of scrutiny. The new proposals identify a strengthening of the scrutiny of Police and their community safety portfolio. The new proposals encourage the scrutiny focus on areas, communities or neighbourhoods.

5. STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS (SWOT) ANALYSIS - GROUP DISCUSSION

The Sub-Group undertook a SWOT analysis of the Council's current Overview and Scrutiny function.

The results of the exercise are as follows:

Strengths

- Consideration of Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme
- Engagement and interest in some inquiries (effort put in)
- Opportunities to scrutinise the budget
- Structure – small panel – strengths
- Scrutiny in Cabinet meetings
- Officer organisation
- Executive - Serious consideration of recommendations

Weaknesses

- Lack of engagement and understanding
- Irrelevant – feeling under valued
- Not happy with toolkit for selecting issues to review
- Not always enough preparation/apathy
- Large panels may be a disincentive to engage
- Lack of holding the Executive Member to account
- Current system does not match White Paper
- Public engagement
- Customer feedback not used

- Strategic Planning of Reviews
- Engagement of Officers – greater concentration on Executive matters

Opportunities

- What is the role of Scrutiny? What do our Members want to achieve? (All sign up via Council)
- White Paper – Structure
 - Rethink role of Full Council
- Scrutiny of other Public Bodies
 - Policy Development
- Improving Work Planning
 - Feedback/Complaints/Petition
 - Strategic plans as basis
 - Leave slack
 - Possible Joint Executive/Scrutiny Planning
 - Possible 4 year plans
- Improve Members feeling of value
 - Promote value/worth of Ward activities
 - Community Call to Action
- Engagement between Executive Cabinet and Scrutiny
 - Advice/Canvas
 - Holding to Account
- Developing Scrutiny Function – Officers
- Potential for more efficient use of Member and Officer time

Threats

- Lack of understanding/view of post wp structures
- Lose Members if don't make them feel valued
- Can get misrepresentation of public opinion
- Unrealistic expectations
- Failure to tackle capacity issues for Officers and Members
- No experience to tap into

6. THE WAY FORWARD

The Sub-Group received notification that the future meetings of the Sub-Group would be as follows:

Monday, 26 February 2007

Thursday, 8 March 2007, commencing at 6.30pm

The commencement time for the meeting on 26 February 2007 was agreed to be 9.30am.

The issues to be considered at the next meeting would be to determine the solutions and actions to improve the areas that came out of the SWOT analysis.

Chair