

Executive Scrutiny Committee

A meeting of the Executive Scrutiny Committee was held on Friday 9th May, 2006.

Present: - **Councillor** Lupton (Chairman), Councillors Mrs Beaumont, Cains, Fletcher, Rix, Roberts (Vice Councillor Mrs Trainer), Mrs Womphrey and Woodhead (Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council); Mrs S Mustafa (Parent Governor Representative).

Officers: - J Haworth (CE); P K Bell, Mrs J Trainer, Mrs M Waggott (LD).

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Jones, Dalgarno, Frankland, Lynch, Narroway, Mrs Nelson, Mrs Nesbitt, Mrs Rigg and Mrs Trainer (Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council); Mr I Bartle (Parent Governor Representative) Mr T Maxwell (Diocesan Representative).

Also in attendance: - Councillor Mrs Fletcher (Previous Chairman of Housing and Community Safety Select Committee)

Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 7th April 2006 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

Matters Arising

- i) At the last meeting Members requested that the Team Leader for Democratic & Development Services contact all Heads of Service to illicit from them their preferred mechanism for alerting their employees to the facility of the agreed terms of reference and in particular the ability for employees to identify suggested areas of scrutiny work. This would be in addition to the issue being raised at future Setting the Standard Sessions and the inclusion of an appropriate article in the Keeping You in Touch employee newsletter.

The Heads of Service had responded and outlined that they would use the mechanisms already in place i.e. team meetings, staff news letters, message of the day and notice boards.

- ii) The Head of Democratic Services informed Members that a draft copy of the Scrutiny Guidance Toolkit was in the process of being finalised. Members requested that they receive a hard copy of the Toolkit for easy reference.

The Head of Democratic Services also informed Members that she had secured Dr Stephanie Snape (Local Government Centre-Warwick University) and Mark Palmer (Head of Improvement & Development-South East Employers Organisation) to give Members training on scrutiny. A bespoke training programme was being developed for Authority which would incorporate general scrutiny skills and the national context. Each Scrutiny Chairman/Vice Chairman and one other member from each Scrutiny Committee would be invited to attend the training.

Reporting Performance to Scrutiny Committee

Consideration was given to a report which set out options for reporting performance information to Executive Scrutiny Committee, and linked reporting to Thematic Select Committees on performance.

It was outlined that the recent review of scrutiny placed responsibility for monitoring and challenging performance with the Executive Scrutiny Committee which may also choose to delegate further scrutiny of specific performance issues to a thematic scrutiny committee. The Committees terms of reference included:

“Maintain an overview of, and to monitor performance information to inform the scrutiny work programme.”

In the past this role was performed by Performance Review and Audit Select Committee which received quarterly performance reports throughout the year. Over

time, these reports developed to be thematic and to more clearly highlight exceptions in performance.

The Executive Scrutiny Committee's focus would be particularly on using performance information to inform the overall scrutiny review programme. It was therefore timely to review the approach taken to reporting to ensure that it was fit for purpose for the new committee's role. In particular, it was vital that reporting be in a format which was easy to interpret and would allow members to easily pull out the key performance issues.

The report outlined the wide range of performance information available about all the council's activities. This included:-

- Corporate basket
- Local Area Agreement
- Council Plan targets
- Service Improvement Plan targets
- Feedback from residents and service users
- Self assessments and external assessments for Comprehensive Performance Assessment

The reporting options were detailed within the report. There were numerous combinations of information and different levels of detail that could be reported to Members for scrutiny. The key factors considered were:

- Frequency of reporting
- Content of reporting
- Layout of reporting
- What should be reported to Executive Scrutiny and what considered by individual Thematic Selects?

Two options of reporting were outlined to Members and they were as follows:-

Option 1 – a quarterly report which outlined the Council's overall performance against the corporate basket plus more detail on an 'exception' basis. The report would include:

- An overview of overall performance on indicators and targets setting out where targets are being met by whole basket and by community strategy theme.
- An "exception" analysis of performance where this is either under or over achieving. Criteria for those areas highlighted could be developed.
- Financial performance information e.g. performance against Medium Term Financial Plan.
- Analysis of service user and resident feedback including the results of resident surveys.
- A more in depth analysis of specific issues at the request of Members.

Sample reports, based on the third quarter of 2005/06 were attached to the report to enable Members to see what this option might look like in practice. Steps had been taken to make the way that performance was reported more user friendly and a series of graphs had been developed. These graphs enabled performance trends and performance against targets to be easily identified.

Option 2 – a fully detailed report of performance against all indicators, all Council Plan targets, financial performance and full details of service user and resident feedback.

At the end of each municipal year, an additional analysis of whether services were providing value for money could be provided in both options.

After some discussion Members felt that Option 1 should be used as the preferred option of reporting performance to scrutiny committees.

When reporting to thematic scrutiny committees on performance it was outlined that when the Executive Scrutiny Committee decided to refer a performance issue to a thematic select committee for closer scrutiny or a Thematic Select Committee needed details of performance, a report detailing the appropriate measures could be provided using the same performance graphs as would be used for Executive Scrutiny.

With regard to reporting information to all Members the report outlined that all performance against all corporate basket performance indicators could be placed on the intranet quarterly. All measures would have a commentary and contact details of the relevant Head of Service for Members to contact with any queries.

Service and performance officers from service groupings would be available to attend the appropriate committee to discuss issues and to enable Members to challenge performance issues.

It was anticipated that Cabinet would receive performance information quarterly and that this would take the form of a report similar to that outlined as option 1 for Executive Scrutiny.

Members felt that a regular item should also be included on scrutiny committee agendas drawing attention to performance information and how Members can access the information on the intranet.

Overall Members were happy to proceed with Option 1 and the processes as detailed within the report but felt that this should be re-visited after two quarters to check if the preferred option and processes were fit for purpose.

RESOLVED that:-

1. Officers proceed with Option 1 and the processes detailed within the report.
2. The processes be re-visited after two quarters to check that the preferred option and processes are fit for purpose.

Report of Select Committee Chairs on Scrutiny Reviews

The Chairman of the Adults, Leisure and Culture Select Committee Councillor Fletcher updated Members on the review of Preston Hall and Park.

As Councillor Mrs Rigg was not in attendance at the meeting the Team Leader for Scrutiny updated Members on the review of Teenage Pregnancy being carried out by the Children and Young People Select Committee.

The Chairman of the Corporate Policy Review Select Committee Councillor Woodhead updated Members on the review of Corporate Consultation.

The Chairman of the Environment and Regeneration Select Committee Councillor Mrs Beaumont updated Members on the review of Street Lighting.

The Chairman of the Health Select Committee Councillor Mrs Womphrey updated Members on the review of NHS Dentistry.

The Vice Chairman of the Housing and Community Safety Select Committee Councillor Roberts updated Members on review of Access to Services – Tristar Homes Ltd.

The previous Chairman of the Housing and Community Safety Select Committee Councillor Mrs Fletcher outlined the executive summary and recommendations of the Monitoring Report of the review of Anti Social Behaviour.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The updates on the scrutiny reviews be noted.
2. The review of Anti Social Behaviour Monitoring Report be forward to Cabinet for consideration.