

AGENDA ITEM

**REPORT TO EXECUTIVE
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

17 SEPTEMBER 2007

**REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF
LAW AND DEMOCRACY**

FEEDBACK FROM EXECUTIVE SCRUTINY AWAY DAY

SUMMARY

To present feedback from the Executive Scrutiny Away Day and proposed actions for discussion by the Committee.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Executive Scrutiny Committee are asked to consider and approve actions arising from the Executive Scrutiny Away Day.

DETAIL

1. An Away Day for Executive Scrutiny Members and all Chairs and Vice Chairs was held on 11 July 2007. The Away Day provided a refresher on the principles of good scrutiny, scrutiny roles, scrutiny structures and the review process as well as providing a discussion on the implications and opportunities arising from national scrutiny developments.
2. A summary of the feedback arising from Members discussion is attached at Annex 1 together with proposed actions to address the issues raised.

FINANCIAL AND LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

3. There are no direct financial or legal implications at this stage.

Director of Law and Democracy

Name of Contact Officer: Margaret Waggott
Telephone No: 01642 527064
Email Address: margaret.waggott@stockton.gov.uk

Name of Contact Officer: Judy Trainer
Telephone No: 01642 528158
Email Address: Judith.trainer@stockton.gov.uk

Background Papers: None
Ward(s) and Ward Councillors: Not Ward Specific
Property Implications: None

Executive Scrutiny Away Day Feedback

Discussion Area Feedback	Proposed Action
<p><i>Strengthening Scrutiny Roles</i></p> <p>Good communication between scrutiny and cabinet was essential in bringing the scrutiny process together whilst maintaining the independence of scrutiny committees</p> <p>More involvement of Cabinet Members during in-depth policy reviews was proposed. Former Cabinet members reported that they had felt frustrated that they had not been given the opportunity to share their views with the Select Committee as part of the review process. Although there were informal tri partite meetings, this should not replace attendance at formal Select Committee and questioning by the full committee</p> <p>The usefulness of the call in process was questioned.</p> <p>Skills – Members felt that there was a need for greater questioning of the reliability and validity of evidence provided by witnesses. This could be achieved through seeking a balance of views and expert opinion</p> <p>Press involvement caused concern as issues could be made public before a balance of views had been obtained</p> <p>Budget scrutiny – could develop this – possibly through a special meeting or split into smaller groups to scrutinise specific areas</p> <p>A good understanding of budget pressures was identified as important</p> <p>Need to have up to date performance information</p>	<p>None required.</p> <p>Relevant Cabinet Member to be invited for their views as part of the evidence gathering. Could also invite as a matter of course to the meeting when the final report is agreed following the tri -partite meeting to enable a wider discussion on any areas of disagreement.</p> <p>Review of Call In is included in Ethical Governance Action Plan and Scrutiny Improvement Plan.</p> <p>Continue to be mindful to achieve a balance of evidence throughout scrutiny reviews.</p> <p>Publicity protocols are to be reviewed under the Ethical Governance Audit</p> <p>Executive Scrutiny Committee receive quarterly performance reports but there is scope to strengthen scrutiny of performance and finance at Executive Scrutiny Committee and by thematic Select Committees.</p>

<p><i>Role of Executive Scrutiny Committee</i></p> <p>Formalise how we share best practice – not just internally – Could be a standing item on Executive Scrutiny Committee</p> <p>Reflect on the good and bad at the end of each review and feed this into Executive Scrutiny Committee</p> <p>Chairs to highlight training and development needs for their committees with Executive Scrutiny Committee</p> <p>Consider developing the review action plan at an earlier stage and this could accompany the Select Committee report when it is presented to Cabinet</p> <p>How are quasi – judicial committees asked for review topics</p> <p>How do we consider requests from Cabinet/Council?</p>	<p>Include a standing item on the Executive Scrutiny agenda to deal with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • feedback from Nereo officer and member joint scrutiny networks • recent publications, guidance, good practice guides etc. • Learning points during reviews and at the end of the review process • Feedback from officer and member training events • Training and Development needs <p>The new action planning and progress reporting arrangements have only recently been introduced. Propose that these should be given a chance to “bed in” and consider further the value of earlier action planning in due course.</p> <p>The terms of reference for Executive Scrutiny Committee enable the Committee to receive and consider requests from quasi judicial bodies. However, this could be promoted through an agenda item on quasi-judicial bodies at the relevant time.</p> <p>All requests should be referred to Executive Scrutiny Committee as co-ordinating committee.</p>
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<p><i>Scrutiny Developments – The Way Forward</i></p> <p><i>Issues</i></p> <p>Workload/ capacity – member and officers – Need to rethink whole situation. Do members have the time to do everything expected of them? Consider more flexible working, mini reviews etc.</p> <p>Take account of other scrutiny activity elsewhere and complement this</p> <p>CCFA could be de-railed by “serial complainers”</p> <p><i>Opportunities</i></p> <p>Duty to co-operate give scrutiny greater weight</p> <p>Role for Exec Scrutiny to co-ordinate with other scrutiny activity externally</p> <p>Scrutiny Achievements – need to capture outcomes. Always thinking what would we put in our DVD? Don’t just publish these annually – Select Committee chairs could give a brief 3-5 minute presentations to Council</p> <p>Present Scrutiny reports to Council – there should be full recognition of achievements</p> <p>Find opportunities for more flexible working to issues raised during the year perhaps through task and finish groups – this could be a small group of interested councillors from across the Select Committee membership electing their own chair rather than be confined to Select Committee “silos”</p>	<p>Further consideration as part of discussion on national developments and need to take into account in future work programming.</p> <p>Scrutiny Officers to liaise with other Local Authorities and bodies as part of the process for setting the work programme and consider joint reviews where appropriate.</p> <p>Need to take into account as procedures are developed following guidance</p> <p>Consider options for presentation of Scrutiny Review reports to Council with Executive response.</p> <p>For Executive Scrutiny Committee to consider on receipt of requests for scrutiny.</p>
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<p><i>Key Roles for Chairs</i></p> <p><i>Members identified the following key roles for Chairs:</i></p> <p>Agenda Control</p> <p>Ensure that key points are highlighted and recorded</p> <p>Hold briefings with “witnesses” on broad areas for questioning and if they are to give a presentation to ensure that it is brief and focused and establish that information requested will be available at the meeting</p> <p>Hold private sessions prior to formal meetings - agree lines of questioning with the whole committee ensuring that this remains focused</p> <p>Background research/ networking complementing the work of the scrutiny officers</p> <p>Tease out recommendations – some sessions can be informative but members need to be reminded of the reason for doing the scrutiny</p> <p>Preparation/ planning – keep review on track</p> <p>Handling the meeting – keeping it on focused</p> <p>“Go between” role can be difficult</p>	<p>(The key roles for Chairs need to reinforced through regular chairs training and briefings)</p> <p>Trial at evidence gathering meetings</p> <p>Democratic Services Officers to schedule pre agenda meeting prior to Select Committee despatch involving Chair, Vice Chair, Scrutiny Officers and Link Officers and other officers as appropriate.</p>
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