

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO EXECUTIVE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

13TH MAY 2008

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF LAW AND DEMOCRACY

FEEDBACK FROM EXECUTIVE SCRUTINY AWAY DAY AND REVISED SCRUTINY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

SUMMARY

To consider feedback from the Executive Scrutiny Away Day held on 27th February 2008 and consider the content of the revised Scrutiny Improvement Plan for 2008/2009.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the feedback received from the Executive Scrutiny Away Day be noted and the content of the Scrutiny Improvement Plan for 2008/2009 be approved.

DETAIL

1. Following the introduction of the Council's new scrutiny co-ordination arrangements, a review was carried out, during the Autumn of 2006, using the Centre for Public Scrutiny's Self Evaluation Framework. This posed a number of questions based on the four principles of good scrutiny. A questionnaire was issued to all Members and discussion groups were held with Select Committee Members, Cabinet Members and Officers. As a result of the review a Scrutiny Improvement Plan was developed and progress against the improvement plan has been monitored by the Executive Scrutiny Committee.
2. Areas for development incorporated within the improvement plan included:
 - Raising the profile of scrutiny within the wider community
 - Engagement of the wider select committee membership
 - Developing links with the community
 - Making an impact on service delivery
3. At the time of the review, it was agreed that the questionnaire would be issued to Members each year to continue to identify areas for improvement and track progress.

FEEDBACK FROM THE AWAY DAY

4. An Executive Scrutiny Away Day was held on 27 February 2008, which discussed a range of issues regarding the developing role of scrutiny, pressures on the work programme and constitutional issues as well as feedback from Members on this year's self evaluation questionnaire.

5. A summary of the key points from the Away Day is set out below:

Structures and Capacity

- Scrutiny reviews should be prioritised on an Authority wide basis rather than be constrained by Select Committee “silos”
- More flexibility was needed within existing structures to enable Select Committees to consider items not falling within strict Select Committee remits
- The increasing workload of the Health Select Committee (and potentially of Housing and Community Safety Select with responsibility as Crime and Disorder Committee) was recognised
- There was a need for Executive Scrutiny Committee to review the work programme and re-prioritise the work programme on a more regular basis (especially with the potential for more referrals coming forward)
- A positive role for Executive Scrutiny Committee had been that it has ensured that there had been no duplication between Select Committees

Review Process and Work Programmes

- The consistent project planning approach was helpful – all Councillors were familiar with the format and working practices
- It was important to continue to encourage Select Committees to seek ways of allocating tasks to individual Members
- Information on the scrutiny work programmes of other North East Councils should be obtained in order to identify any opportunities for joint scrutiny working

Raising the Profile of Scrutiny

- Final Select Committee reports should be presented to Full Council to raise awareness of the outcome of scrutiny reviews with all Members
- There was a need to continue to engage with the public as part of the review process
- Although there had been improved coverage of scrutiny issues in the press over the past year, it was important to continue to raise the profile of scrutiny with regular articles in Stockton News and KYIT to seek views and publicise the outcome of reviews

Training and Development

- Training and development needs included health training for the wider membership and Members need to be reminded to have an open mind during the review process and not pre-judge matters before hearing all the evidence

Attendance

- In order to improve Member attendance at Select Committees, it was important to avoid changing dates and times from scheduled dates as far as possible

6. Based on the discussions, a revised scrutiny improvement plan has been drafted for consideration and approval by the Executive Scrutiny Committee. The Plan includes outstanding areas of work from last year as well as new suggestions proposed by Members (**attached at Appendix 1**).

CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES

7. In addition to the new areas for development, Executive Scrutiny Members proposed some immediate constitutional changes, recognising pressures on the scrutiny work programme, which needed to be approved before the Select Committee work programme for 2008/09 was confirmed. These changes have not been included in the improvement plan but have been approved by Cabinet and Council and are set out below:
 - Removal of the “adults” element from the Health Select Committee to the Corporate and Social Inclusion Select Committee to enable Health Select Committee to focus on an increasing health workload
 - Widening of the terms of reference of Select Committees to allow more flexibility to undertake reviews not falling strictly within the remit of individual Select Committees

8. In parallel with the constitutional changes, it was agreed that Scrutiny Liaison Forum be asked to prioritise the top 10 reviews for the Authority and that Executive Scrutiny Committee consider allocating just one review for the Health and Housing & Community Safety Select Committees in order to create capacity within the increasing workload of these committees. The Executive Scrutiny Committee, at its meeting held on 1st April 2008, subsequently considered the top ten topics identified as being of corporate importance, and allocated one topic to each of the Council’s seven Select Committees. The Health Select Committee has been invited to undertake a short review of Audiology; which will reflect on the outcome of a similar review undertaken by Middlesbrough Borough Council, due to end in May 2008, allowing much of its time to be reserved for the consideration of statutory health consultations. The Housing & Community Safety Committee has embarked on an initial review of Register Social Landlords (expected to last until November 2008) prior to the receipt of the required Guidance and the issuing of Regulations by the Secretary of State in the Autumn of this year defining the obligations to the authority for dealing with referrals arising from the implementation of the Police and Justice Act and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act.

FINANCIAL AND LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

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

RISK ASSESSMENT

10. The review intended to assess the effectiveness of the new scrutiny co-ordination arrangements in Stockton and make appropriate recommendations for improvement.

COMMUNITY STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS

11. Service Delivery (Enhance Local Democracy).

Director of Law and Democracy

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

REVISED SCRUTINY IMPROVEMENT PLAN – MARCH 2008

| | Improvement Area | Key Actions | Responsibility | By When | Progress/Comments |
|----|--|--|---|---------------------------------|--|
| S1 | Strengthen Links with External Bodies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish points of contact with key external bodies and agree roles and working practices Develop mechanisms to involve partners in setting the scrutiny work programme/ engagement with reviews | <p>HODS Scrutiny Team Leader</p> <p>HODS Scrutiny Team Leader</p> | <p>Dec 2008</p> <p>Jan 2009</p> | <p>Last year action was delayed in order to take account of legislative changes in the LGPIH Act.</p> <p>A report was submitted to Renaissance Board in February 2008 to seek suggestions for the 2008/09 scrutiny work programme. Need to development mechanisms to involve partners further. Renaissance have also asked for a further report on the work programme when agreed.</p> |
| S2 | Engage Wider Select Committee Membership | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to consider allocation of roles to individual Members recognising different skills/ interests Experiment with ways of involving all Members in agreeing questioning plans prior to attendance by witnesses. | <p>Select Committee</p> <p>Select Committee</p> | <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> | <p>Potential for this is assessed as each review progresses.</p> <p>Select Committees have experimented with pre meetings to agree questions prior to meeting with external witnesses.</p> |
| S3 | Raise Profile of Scrutiny | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to publicise scrutiny reviews including regular articles in Stockton News and KYIT to seek input and report outcomes of reviews Consider submission of final Select Committee reports to Full Council to raise | <p>Scrutiny Team</p> <p>HODS/DOLD</p> | <p>Ongoing</p> <p>May 2008</p> | <p>There has been increased media coverage of recent scrutiny reviews. Need to find ways to develop this further.</p> <p>A report on options will be presented to the Members Advisory Panel.</p> |

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| | | <p>awareness of the outcome of reviews with the wider Council membership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further develop publicity material (posters, postcards, internet etc.) | Scrutiny Team Leader | Nov 2008 | To be undertaken as part of Democratic Services Community Engagement Strategy. |
| S4 | Develop Links with Community | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold awareness raising event (for partners, public, community/voluntary sector) | HODS/ Scrutiny Team | Dec 08 | A Democratic Services Open Day was held on 17 October 2007 to raise awareness of Democratic Services with the public. A more targeted approach with partners and third sector is yet to be held. |
| S5 | Making an Impact on Service Delivery | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote greater independent challenge through co-option of expert witnesses | Select Committee | Ongoing | This is considered as part of the scoping of each review. The Arts, Leisure and Culture Select Committee have recently co-opted Alan Slater (British Waterways) onto the committee for the duration of the River Based Leisure Review; and have previously engaged a consultant on street lighting and sought expert advice from a waste management consultant. |
| S6 | Continuous Improvement of Scrutiny Co-ordination Arrangements | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer Review of Scrutiny • Develop scrutiny training/ development programme including health training/awareness for wider Select Committee membership and refresh of skills training | <p>Scrutiny Team</p> <p>Scrutiny Team Leader</p> | <p>During 2009</p> <p>Nov 2008</p> | Health training awareness will be provided for all members regards the role of Primary Care and Acute Trusts; Social Care provision (including LINKs), statutory health consultations etc.. Further scrutiny training will also be provided following the receipt of guidelines and regulations arising from |

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| | | | | | Councillors Calls for Action. |
| S7 | Strengthen co-ordination of Select Committee Work Programme | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtain information from other North East Councils through the Scrutiny Network in order to identify any opportunities for joint scrutiny work • • • • • • Regular reports to be submitted to the Executive Scrutiny Committee on the various items being included on Select Committee agendas in order to keep workload and capacity under review. | Scrutiny Team Leader | April 2008 | Suggestion made to North East Joint Officer Scrutiny Network for database of both completed and on-going reviews. Joined up working planned for forthcoming Audiology Review with Middlesbrough Borough Council; who were already well advanced in carrying out a review in their area. Work has also been carried out in conjunction with Darlington Borough Council regards the implementation of the Partnership Arrangements. |
| | | | Scrutiny Team Leader | Each cycle | Chairs Update reports taken to each meeting of Executive Scrutiny Committee. |