

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO EXECUTIVE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

24 NOVEMBER 2015

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF LAW AND DEMOCRACY

SCRUTINY DEVELOPMENT SESSION – JANUARY 2016

SUMMARY

This report summarises Stockton's Scrutiny Arrangements including recent changes to Committee Structures, an assessment of the effectiveness of our arrangements against the national picture, details of recent scrutiny training and some suggested areas which could form part of an Executive Scrutiny development session in January 2016.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Executive Scrutiny is asked to consider the information and areas for the proposed scrutiny development session in January 2016.

DETAIL

The Journey to Date

1. In 2006 Stockton introduced new Scrutiny Co-ordination arrangements following a review of the scrutiny function. The new arrangements have been subject to continuous review and improvement and following Efficiency, Improvement and Transformation (EIT) reviews have been prioritised across the whole of the organisation. The Scrutiny Co-ordination arrangements introduced thematic Select Committees, Executive Scrutiny Committee as the co-ordinating body for the function and a Scrutiny Liaison Forum (SLF) to enable discussion of the scrutiny work programme with Cabinet Members and Corporate Management Team. Key features of Stockton's arrangements which have stood the test of time include:
 - A collaborative approach to working with Cabinet and Council services (this includes mechanisms for dialogue through SLF, link officers for reviews and tri partite meetings between Select Committee Chair and Vice Chair, Cabinet Member and Corporate Director)
 - A strong emphasis on in depth policy review and development and efficiency
 - A strong project management approach to managing reviews
 - Flexibility built into the programme
 - Robust performance monitoring and holding to account
2. Other improvements to the function have included strengthened monitoring arrangements for completed reviews, the introduction of Overview Meetings to allow Members to receive updates on the full range of services falling within the remit of each Select Committee and scrutinise Council and Cabinet performance. More recently efforts have focused on improving the information presented to Children and Young People Select Committee and Adult Services and Health Select Committee to enable them to scrutinise the quality and safety of these important services and provide opportunity to visit frontline services and meet with service users to underpin this role. These critical areas continue to be the focus of attention for strong and robust scrutiny,

particularly in the light of high profile media coverage where serious failings were identified on the part of public services but also Elected Member scrutiny (e.g. Mid Staffordshire, Rotherham).

3. In 2016, in line with the reduction in Cabinet Member posts the number of Standing Select Committees was streamlined from seven to five whilst retaining Executive Scrutiny Committee as the co-ordinating scrutiny body. Whilst the frequency of meetings was increased to monthly, from 6-weekly it enables Members to devote sufficient time to Select Committee work and develop specialisms.
4. The Children and Young People Select Committee, Crime and Disorder Select Committee and Adult Services and Health Select Committee are responsible for the priority issues for scrutiny and Members serving on these Committees have, or are developing a robust knowledge of the services and legislative framework in relation to matters falling within their remit. The Committees also have a detailed understanding of the performance framework within the context of their Committees.
5. The People and Place Committees undertake scrutiny reviews within these themes, and continue to allow Councillors to sit on Committees where they have a particular interest in the subject matter. With the retained flexibility Select Committees can still undertake review work outside of their remits where priorities dictate.
6. Select Committees have undertaken a wide range of reviews over the years and these have been summarised in Annual Reports since the new scrutiny co-ordination arrangements were introduced. In 2009 a decision was taken to focus the scrutiny work programme on supporting the Council's Value for Money Programme. Scrutiny Committees were involved in all EIT reviews either leading the work or providing robust challenge to officer led work. Once again, this close working and involvement of all Councillors has helped the Council to tackle challenging issues and enabled difficult decisions being taken by Cabinet regarding future service provision.

National Recognition

7. The Council's scrutiny function has received positive feedback from external inspection. The corporate assessment in 2008 stated that Scrutiny provided rigorous policy review and had made a significant contribution to service improvement. It concluded that the scrutiny process was robust and resulted in improved outcomes.
8. In 2010, the Care Quality Commission Inspection stated that Overview and Scrutiny Committees were effective with Members giving detailed attention to key policy issues through the EIT process. The safeguarding inspection by OFSTED stated that good scrutiny arrangements were in place with good examples of the engagement of children and young people in reviewing processes leading to change and that scrutiny arrangements have had an impact on developing services and achieving cost effectiveness. An Audit Commission Value for Money inspection stated that Executive Scrutiny Committee was challenging and effective. The Centre for Public Scrutiny has also featured several of the Council's scrutiny reviews in their publications.
9. Also in 2010, Stockton Council was one of the 12 local authority Overview and Scrutiny Committees in the North East that came together to carry out a review looking into the health needs of veterans and their families. Recommendations for improvements were made across 47 areas of work, were supported at national level for inclusion into the proposed military covenant, and the Minister for Care Services committed to ensuring the recommendations are considered by regional Armed Forces networks. The Review subsequently won two Centre for Public Scrutiny awards, in June 2011, one in the joint working category, and the second overall award for the Impact of Scrutiny which gained regional media coverage.

10. Councillor Nigel Cooke was awarded the LGIU Scrutineer of the Year in 2014 for playing a vital role in developing the Affordable Warmth Strategy at Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council. He also set up and chairs the Fuel Poverty Partnership, which aims to reduce the effects of fuel poverty on the health and well-being of local people, as well as working to ensure more homes meet the Decent Homes Standard. Cllr Cooke was commended by judges for his collaborative approach in working to end fuel poverty.
11. At a national level the model developed by Stockton Council is being promoted as a way in which scrutiny can successfully assist to address the challenges faced by councils undergoing major changes. Developed prior to the Centre for Public Scrutiny's change agenda Stockton's model is becoming recognised as being amongst the most advanced and effective use of non-executive Members time for dealing with transforming services. The consistent prioritisation of work programming developed from consultation and negotiation with the membership and Senior Officers ensures reviews are focussed and the evidence base provides deliverable outcomes. The Cabinet values the scrutiny work and regularly requests its involvement in policy development recognising the flexibility it offers as well as drawing on wider officer support to develop relationships with external partners that helps broaden scrutiny and can provide public accountability.

Scrutiny training

12. An in-house training session, Ingredients of a Good Scrutiny Review, was developed and delivered to all scrutiny members in 2012. Specific training sessions on health scrutiny were arranged for Stockton Councillors and a practical exercise held on questioning and challenging skills, including a mock committee meeting. As part of the Member Induction Programme in 2015, the Scrutiny training was refreshed, with all scrutiny members receiving Challenging and Questioning Training, which introduced the Scrutiny Toolkit, highlighted the role of scrutiny in reviewing the performance and quality of services, provided guidance on key issues to focus on, and provide practical help and support. Due to the specific responsibilities of the Adult Services and Health Select Committee and the Children and Young People Select Committee, and taking into account the role of scrutiny in national safeguarding issues, the training was tailored to ensure that members on these committees had the necessary skills to challenge and question reports that are presented to the Committees that concern services provided to children, young people and vulnerable adults.
13. Following a regional Home Care and Human Rights training held in Gateshead by the Equality and Human Rights Commission and Cornwall Council, a session on this subject specific to Stockton was developed for all members in September 2014. The training covered the Human Rights Act and relevant duties of public authorities, and with an emphasis on how it relates to the commissioning and provision of home care services.
14. Members involved in health scrutiny have also attended 'market place' and stakeholder events linked to the development of local NHS Trust Quality Accounts, along with Health Scrutiny Regional Event organised by CfPS. The Chair and Vice-Chair also attend update meetings with directors at the CCG and local Trusts to maintain links and communication.
15. Scrutiny Members not only continue to attend meetings of the North East Joint Scrutiny Network but also a Stockton Member is currently Chair of the Network, having first been vice-chair for two years. More recently Stockton Council now provides the Chair of the Officer Network which supports the Member Chair. The purpose of the Network is to discuss national and regional developments and share best practice, recent issues discussed have included Combined Authorities, Care Quality Commission updates, Equality and Human Rights Commission, and OFSTED.
16. The training and development opportunities for scrutiny members ensure that members are fully supported to carry out robust scrutiny of key services provided by the Council and its stakeholders to the public, including the most vulnerable residents.

17. To further complement the recent challenge training delivered as part of 2015 induction, discussions are taking place with a training provider to provide further training for Children and Young People Select Committee and Adult Services and Health Select Committee to provide Members with the confidence to provide effective challenge when scrutinising the quality of safety of services failing within the remit of these Committees.

Executive Scrutiny Committee

18. In summary, key aspects of the role of the Committee relate to:
- Keeping under review the overall effectiveness of the scrutiny process
 - Inviting input on suggested areas for scrutiny work
 - Prioritising, developing and co-ordinating the scrutiny work programme
 - Monitoring performance to inform the scrutiny work programme
 - Call In
 - Supporting the delivery of overview and scrutiny training
 - Considering valid petitions under the Council's Petition Scheme/ reviewing the way a petition has been dealt with

January 2016 Development Session

19. Areas which Members may wish to cover as part of a development session on 26 January 2016 for Executive Scrutiny Committee could include:
- Work Programme – setting the Select Committee Work Programme topics in 2016, reflecting on what scrutiny has already reviewed and the overview of services.
 - The Effectiveness of the Scrutiny programme – How does Executive Scrutiny Committee monitor the effectiveness of Select Committees and support them in their role?; the role of Chairs Updates/ feedback at Executive Scrutiny Committee
 - Performance Monitoring – How can we improve challenge? How can we disseminate this information?
 - Call in – how it works?

FINANCIAL AND LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial or legal implications.

RISK ASSESSMENT

It is vital to set a realistic and value adding work programme to make best use of resources and improve service provision.

Director of Law and Democracy

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<u>Background Papers:</u>	None
<u>Ward(s) and Ward Councillors:</u>	Not Ward Specific
<u>Property Implications:</u>	None