

FEEDBACK FROM SCRUTINY DEVELOPMENT DAY

SUMMARY

1. To provide Executive Scrutiny with a briefing note of the content and discussion from the Scrutiny Development Day on 26 January 2016

DETAIL

1. The overall scrutiny role for Stockton Council was set out to reaffirm the structure and roles of the committees, the types of work that is undertaken not only in-depth reviews but also performance monitoring, quality assurance, and site visits, before considering the process of setting the work programme.
2. The Development Day gave Members the opportunity to reflect on previous good work of the committees and allowed the Chairs of the committees to present outcomes of reviews from their perspective. The reviews chosen reflected a wide variety of Council services and included its oversight of health services in the borough. The reviews were:
 - Transition from Primary to Secondary Schools
 - The effects of arts, leisure, and culture on wellbeing
 - Access to GP, Urgent and Emergency Care
 - Street Café Furniture and A-Board Advertising
 - Affordable Warmth
3. Members considered the topics under review during 2015/16 providing feedback on the current year's work programme. The breadth and depth of reviews was recognised as was the way in which Members approached scrutiny and their willingness to develop their skills to further improve the process.
4. It was recognised that committees have built good relationships with partners and other external organisations not legislatively required to be scrutinised which is bringing benefits to the way in which services are being provided and relationships with Stockton Council.
5. The Development Day gave the opportunity to consider how the Executive Scrutiny Committee monitored the effectiveness of the select committees, how it could support them, and how the committee Chairs could develop and provide detailed updates and feedback.
6. Chair's updates on the Executive Scrutiny Committee agendas have provided a brief resume of the most recent actions of select committees. A more detailed reporting format was discussed that would provide more information than previously and in particular provide exception reports to highlight difficulties / problems in a review. The Members agreed that this should be introduced for future meetings of the Executive Scrutiny Committee.
7. Members considered the committees' relationship with the Cabinet Members and their involvement within reviews. As Cabinet Members have a role within the tripartite

meetings at the outset and conclusion of a review it was thought that as portfolio holders they could have information relevant to a review and/or provide committees with an understanding of the policy decisions being taken so should provide evidence on a more frequent basis than might currently take place.

8. To improve the knowledge and leadership role of committee Chairs and Vice-Chairs the Members were informed that information was available from the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) web site on a regular basis that would help inform Members. It was agreed that information publications/guides be added to Executive Scrutiny Committee agendas when these are published.
9. The Members were informed that Stockton Council currently has the Chair of the North East Scrutiny Network (Councillor Brown) until July 2016, and the Officer Chair of the North East Scrutiny Network (Graham Birtle) until 2017. The Network meetings are available for all scrutiny Members to attend and can provide information and debate at a regional level so could be a useful learning opportunity. It was agreed that the minutes and other relevant material from the North East Scrutiny Network be added to Executive Scrutiny Committee agendas.
10. Members were informed that following a meeting of Members Advisory Panel (MAP) that it had been agreed that as a way of maintaining a focus on improvement within existing resources smartpens would begin to be used at select committee meetings. Smartpens have the ability to record the audio of a meeting. Its use at select committee meetings is to provide accurate evidence gathering for a review as well as support the production of minutes.
11. Members queried the length of retention of the audio recording and it was suggested that it is kept until the review has concluded and reported to Cabinet. Although the recordings will not be made public Members asked whether they would be available through a Freedom of Interest request. A definitive answer could not be given so would be explored further.
12. The Development Day provided an opportunity to remind Members about the Call-in procedure that is available to Members. This is a little used process in Stockton Council and Members were informed that the CfPS considers Stockton Council as an exemplar in the way in which scrutiny is structured allowing for greater collaboration to produce better outcomes, reducing and almost negating the need to call-in Cabinet decisions.
13. In conclusion Members were reminded of the role of scrutiny in challenging and driving improvement throughout all reviews and the tools which they can employ.
14. Subsequent feedback from Members to the session provided a positive response to the Development Day. Comments included:
 - Information was useful – good to discuss issues with other Committee Members
 - Gave clarity to what the committee should be doing and liked the new suggestion re chair's reports.
 - Added to my knowledge of issues under discussion
 - Useful refresher

AGREED

- A more detailed reporting format for Chair/review updates should be introduced for future meetings of the Executive Scrutiny Committee.

- To investigate inviting Cabinet Members to select committee meetings to give evidence on a more frequent basis.
- Information publications/guides be added to Executive Scrutiny Committee agendas when these are published.
- The minutes and other relevant material from the North East Scrutiny Network be added to Executive Scrutiny Committee agendas.
- More information regarding Freedom of Interest requests of smartpen recordings is provided.

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