



Performance & Strategy Scrutiny Committee

Report of the Scrutiny Review Task and Finish Group

March 2013

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank all those who have attended our meetings and offered a response or explanation to our queries and observations; Members of the Council who have attended our meetings and shared their thoughts on what we have done well and not so well and how we can make improvements in future and also those Officers of the Council who have supported us in our work and those who have answered our questions and provided us with information.

We were very impressed with the enthusiasm of all those who have spoken to us and we were particularly pleased to have been able to learn about so many inspiring thoughts and ideas that we can build on for the future.

Members of the Task and Finish Group:

Councillor Tim Barker **Vice Chairman**

Councillor Martin Bennett

Councillor Aggie Caesar-Homden

Councillor Karen Calder

Councillor Ted Clarke*

Councillor Gerald Dakin

Councillor Hannah Fraser

Councillor Jean Jones*

Councillor Heather Kidd **Chairman**

Councillor David Lloyd

* Councillors Ted Clarke and Jean Jones had a shared responsibility for one seat on this Group

Report

Introduction

The Scrutiny Review Task and Finish Group was established in September 2012 by the Performance and Strategy Scrutiny Committee to:

- Consider the future role and remit of the Council's scrutiny arrangements in the light of the changes to the way the Council operates; and
- Examine the current remits of the Council's Scrutiny Committees in the light of the changes set out above and to consider how they may be amended to fit future need; and
- Design any necessary changes to increase the Council's accountability to the wider population of Shropshire and, if necessary, scrutiny should be re-branded and relaunched as an outward facing function.

It should be noted that our study was based largely on the experiences since the formation of Shropshire Unitary Council but with an eye to the inevitable change after the May 2013 elections when the focus will be on commissioning rather than provision of services.

This report sets out the findings of the Task and Finish Group and its recommendations, based on those findings.

The Scrutiny Vision

Scrutiny will help drive improvements to public services in Shropshire for the benefit of local people. It will be delivered by elected Members applying "critical friend" challenge in the development of policy and management of performance in the Council and its partners.

Scope and focus of the work

The Group has held 10 meetings and, during that time, has considered a gamut of information and undertaken considerable research, including:

- Development of a 'Vision for Scrutiny'
- Consideration of the recommendations of the IDeA Overview and Scrutiny Fitness Check report
- Development of a scrutiny questionnaire to all Members and Lead Officers via Survey Monkey

- Debated its views on the future role of the Local Joint Committees. Members acknowledged that the future role of LJC's will evolve in the move to local area commissioning and this will include enhanced local scrutiny

What has the Task and Finish Group done?

From its 10 meetings held over a 3 month period the Group has:

1. Understood the Council's scrutiny function as it currently operates and identified areas for future development, change and improvement for the future.
2. Concentrated particularly on its capacity to change the role and remit of the Council's scrutiny arrangements in the light of the changes to the way the Council operates.
3. Fully revisited the recommendations from the IDeA Overview and Scrutiny Fitness Check from February 2010.
4. Considered and taken into account a raft of information from the most recently elected Shropshire Councillors, members of Cabinet, current Scrutiny Chairs and the Council's Director of Operations and Director of Resources and Support.
5. Compiled an on-line survey to canvass the opinion and experience of all Members and lead Officers of the Council in the scrutiny process.
6. Developed conclusions and recommendations based on the evidence presented to the Group and found during the course of its work. The draft report has been developed with input from the Corporate Head of Legal and Democratic Services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The results of the Scrutiny Survey [see Appendix] showed overwhelming support for several issues that have been reflected in the Group's final recommendations, namely:

- **Non-executive Member Group**
- **Improved public engagement**
- **The need for a dedicated Scrutiny Officer**
- **Preference for Parliamentary Select Committee Style of working**

Structure and Organisation

- a) **The remits of the current Scrutiny Committees should be revisited to mirror changes within the Council and aligned with the Council's priorities and objectives.**

In particular, the remits of the current Safe and Confident Communities Scrutiny Committee should be changed to focus on Young People's and Children's Services. The current Healthy Communities Scrutiny Committee should include Health and Adult Social Care.

The remaining Committees should cover, as follows:

- Corporate Issues, Commissioning, Finance and Performance and overall scrutiny activities**
 - Business Growth and Prosperity, including Public Protection and scrutiny of the Police and Crime Commissioner**
 - Provision of Housing, Environment, Planning**
- b) **The current titles of the Scrutiny Committees are vague, unclear and confusing and need to be clarified and brought into alignment with the Committee remits.**
- c) **Continued use be made of the Task and Finish style of working as an accepted method of positive engagement between Members, Officers and those outside the Council.**
- d) **The Parliamentary Select Committee style of meeting should be the default except where it would not be appropriate or constructive. It will also be important that provision is made for those who receive the services to give their evidence in private should that be considered necessary.**
- e) **The need for all contracts for the commissioning of future services to include the requirement for the service providers to be available for scrutiny as much as the Council may require.**
- f) **The Group further recognises:**
- The need to be cautious on the number of Groups working at any given time bearing in mind Member and Officer capacity**

- That those with an interest in and /or knowledge of the subject matter be assigned to work on any given Task and Finish Group
 - That relaxation of the political balance rules in the allocation of seats to Task and Finish Groups be considered on a case by case basis with all political groups having the opportunity to be represented. The decision to be jointly made by the Scrutiny Chair and the Operations Director
- g) All Scrutiny Committee Work Programmes to be considered fully by the appropriate Scrutiny Committee at each meeting to improve transparency of decision making.
- h) The introduction of a non-executive Member Group for a regular scrutiny session informed, in part, by Cabinet's Forward Plan between the Scrutiny Chairs and all non-Executive Members to allow a two way exchange of items for potential scrutiny intervention/consideration. This will provide clarity of the process to be followed by all Members to promote items for inclusion on scrutiny committee agendas and particularly to encourage non-scrutiny Members to get involved.
- i) Improvements to all aspects of two way communication relating to scrutiny, to include:
- Scrutiny Chairs to take ownership and encourage Member attendance to their respective Committee meetings by the use of appropriate promotion of agenda items
 - Increased use of social media including the Shape My Shropshire Facebook page
 - Promotion of scrutiny's achievements [promotion of good practice as well as investigating things that could be done better], management of expectations and improved meeting promotion to generate interest and increase attendance by Members and the general public
 - Holding meetings at venues within the community as appropriate to the subject matter being considered
 - Briefings continue to be given to LJC's on the role of scrutiny

Support and Training

j) The Member Induction Programme for all Members to include:

- An introduction to scrutiny [to include a general introduction to the role of scrutiny and guidance on the practical application of the scrutiny committee processes to include the Select Committee meeting style]
- Training on a range of chairing, listening and questioning skills

** The above training is considered to be essential for all Members on Scrutiny Committees and desirable for all Members. Group Leaders to manage their Member attendance as appropriate **

k) Under the overall responsibility of the Director of Resources and Support, a lead officer will be assigned to take on the duties of the statutory Scrutiny Officer.

l) Officer report writing training to be provided in order to improve the standard of reports being put forward to Committee; future report techniques to include the use of case study examples to bring issues alive.

Monitoring of Recommendations

m) That a Task and Finish Group be convened 12 months after the election of the new Council:

- To monitor the implementation of recommendations a) to l) above and
- To consider the scrutiny role of the LJs following the implementation of local area commissioning

Background information

- One Page Strategy
- Minutes of meetings of the Scrutiny Review Task and Finish Group dated 29th October 2012, 19th and 26th November 2012, 3rd, 10th and 17th December 2012, 14th, 24th and 29th January 2013 and 7th February 2013
- 'Survey Monkey' Scrutiny Survey and associated feedback report
- IDeA Overview and Scrutiny Fitness Check dated February 2010
- Centre for Public Scrutiny document entitled 'Local Healthwatch, Health and Wellbeing Board and Scrutiny'
- Cornwall Council Annual Scrutiny Report 2011- 2012
- Council report on the role of the Statutory Scrutiny Officer