



Committee and date

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7

Public

Scrutiny Review Task & Finish Group

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Summary

This report summarises the recommendations of the Scrutiny Review Task & Finish Group following an Overview & Scrutiny 'Fitness Check' undertaken earlier this year by the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA).

Recommendations

The Task and Finish Group recommend that Council:

- A. Approves the revised Scrutiny and Overview Committee Structures as set out at Appendix B
- B. Approves the recommendations of the Task & Finish Group as set out in the Action Plan at Appendix A with the new structures in place by October 2010

Report

Background

1. Council on 25 February approved a recommendation from the Political Structures Monitoring Group (PSMG) that a review of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Structure be undertaken. The recommendation was made following a suggestion from the Scrutiny Chairs that more frequent meetings of the Scrutiny Committees be introduced as a result of increasingly heavy agendas. Also, under the terms of the One Council business case, it was understood that 12 months after the establishment of the new council a review of scrutiny working practices would be undertaken.
2. To oversee the review, Council approved the establishment of a seven Member Task & Finish Group, politically balanced (Tim Barker - Chair, Mrs J Barrow, Mrs K Calder, G Dakin, R Evans, J Hurst-Knight and A Mosley) with the following terms of reference:
 - To ensure that the overview and scrutiny function is outward facing and responsive to changing priorities that may arise from external influences, e.g. a change of government

- That the overview and scrutiny function is strongly customer focussed concentrating on making a positive difference to the lives of local people
 - To ensure that work programmes are tightly focussed and deliver clear outcomes on the corporate priorities that are grounded in the day to day experiences of local people
3. The IDeA was engaged to assist, using revenue support grant funding available to new unitary councils. The IDeA's summary of approach was approved by the Task & Finish Group on 10 February 2010.

IDeA – Overview & Scrutiny Fitness Check

4. In a workshop on 13 April 2010, the IDeA presented their Overview & Scrutiny fitness check report with a number of recommendations and suggestions on further development for consideration and discussion by the Task & Finish Group. The report had been reviewed by the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) to ensure the findings were in accordance with good practice.
5. The IDeA's method of approach, using external peer challenge and practitioner input had been based upon a *Fitness Check* that was conducted in February and March, 2010, to help assess current strengths, potential improvement areas and capacity to change. The CfPS four principles of good public scrutiny were used as a benchmark for comparison. Following a review of documentation, and a series of meetings with internal and external stakeholders and focus groups, the IDeA provided initial feedback on 24 February 2010. To further inform the review the IDeA conducted a survey of all Members and co-opted members.

Taking the Scrutiny Review forward

6. The Task & Finish Group has met on 11 February, 17 February, 24 February, 27 April, 17 May, 8 and 10 June 2010 to consider how the recommendations of the IDeA should be taken forward and a 10 point action plan (Appendix A) has been produced to develop the effectiveness of overview and scrutiny at Shropshire. The Group has considered the need for scrutiny to be a more integrated part of how the Council develops policy, takes key decisions, and delivers improvement. Members have taken into account the need for scrutiny work to be more external and 'thematic' focussed, to meet the expectations set out in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. In order to make further progress, the Group have looked at structures for scrutiny and overview and recommend the following structure, as set out in detail at Appendix B:
- Five Committees, based upon the themes of the three priorities of the Community Strategy with a separate Committee taking responsibility for health matters and a further Committee on Performance and Strategy with responsibilities that include corporate governance and monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of Shropshire Partnerships. The chairs of the other four committees would sit on the Performance and Strategy Committee. Committees would meet six times a year at venues which may extend beyond the 'Council Chamber', taking meetings out to the community.

Scrutiny Chairs Group

7. The Group recommend that in order to focus on strategic issues for overview and scrutiny and maintain regular dialogue and engagement with Cabinet and senior officers, that a Scrutiny Chairs Group be established, meeting bi-monthly and chaired by the chair of Performance and Strategy, who would also be the Council's Scrutiny Champion. The group would have overall co-ordination and management of the Council's scrutiny function with the following remit:-
- Co-ordinating, guiding, monitoring and management of the Council's Scrutiny function through planned work programmes that are sustainable and focus on improvement and outcomes which make a difference to local people
 - Co-ordinating arrangements for joint scrutiny on cross cutting issues
 - Co-ordinating arrangements for the appointment of co-opted members
 - Co-ordinating arrangements for matters referred from Local Joint Committees and Councillor Call for Action

Task and Finish Groups

8. If each committee undertook around 6 reviews in one year via Task and Finish Groups, taking a few months to complete a review, this could mean between 24 and 30 reviews in a year which the Group have considered to be sustainable. There would also be an opportunity to involve other Councillors with an interest, ie Member Champions and those who have developed a specialism and Member champions would be expected to attend where O & S matters appropriate to their specialism were being reviewed.
- Task and Finish Groups should be appropriately politically balanced (given their relatively small size) which means that they will normally comprise a minimum of five Members.

Co-opted Members

9. There is a statutory requirement to appoint co-opted members for education matters. Others are discretionary and are appointed by Full Council. The Group recognise there is now an opportunity to introduce flexibility in the appointment of co-optees to add value to the work of O& S Committees and Task & Finish Groups so that they are supported by those with specialist knowledge and expertise, appropriate to the subject under review. The Group recommend that co-optees do not need to be appointed by Full Council but can be appointed by scrutiny committees as and when required. These statutory co-optees will sit on the Safe and Confident Communities Committee for the relevant matters.

Officer Support for Overview and Scrutiny

10. In order to support the new ways of working, particularly in supporting Task & Finish Groups and managing work programmes, the Group have considered the recommendations of the IDeA that officer support be reviewed and developed to take on a more corporate and strategic role (as set out at

recommendation 5 in the Action Plan and as promoted by the CfPS). The Group recommend this role is undertaken within Democratic Services.

Timescales

11. If Council is minded to approve the recommendations of the Task & Finish Group, it is intended to implement arrangements set out in the action plan by October 2010.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Political Structures Monitoring Group Report to Council – 25 February 2010

One Council – Business Case

Overview & Scrutiny Fitness Check Report of the IDeA February 2010

Human Rights Act Appraisal

The recommendations contained in this report are compatible with the provisions of the Human Rights act 1998

Environmental Appraisal

There are no environmental issues relating to this report.

Risk Management Appraisal

An effective structure for scrutiny can provide a key improvement tool for the Council in delivering better outcomes for the people of Shropshire.

Community / Consultations Appraisal

Consultation with all Members, co-opted members, and key partner organisations has informed the recommendations of the review.

Cabinet Member

All

Local Member

All

Appendices

Appendix A - Scrutiny Review Action Plan

Appendix B - Proposed Overview & Scrutiny Committee Structures