

Overview and Scrutiny Committee
18 JULY 2022

Present: Councillors: Tony Bevis (Chairman), Ian Stannard (Vice-Chairman), Philip Circus, Paul Clarke, Ruth Fletcher, Richard Landeryou, Tim Lloyd, John Milne and Bob Platt

Apologies: Councillors: Billy Greening, Nigel Jupp, Josh Potts, Jack Saheid and David Skipp

SO/14 **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 6 June 2022 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

SO/15 **DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

There were no Declarations of Interest.

SO/16 **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

There were no announcements.

SO/17 **UPDATE ON THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMEE**

The sole item for the meeting was the consideration of the approach and priorities for Scrutiny going forward and the support and planning needed to achieve this to the greatest effect.

The Chairman invited an open discussion and the key points arising included:

- There was extended discussion about the parameters for the Scrutiny role and it was agreed that this should be demonstrably independent of influence from the Leader, Monitoring Officer or other influences, enabling it to pursue those areas perceived to be in need of attention.
- The extent to which Scrutiny can influence policy development as opposed to challenging decisions made prior to adoption or delivery was also debated. It was noted that the current advice relates to challenge to Cabinet and Council decisions but that this can be quite late to influence outcomes and direction effectively. There is a balance to be struck between considering policies at too early a stage where they may be insufficiently developed (which is where the PDAGs have a key role), and scrutinising at too late a point to have an effective influence.

- Wider knowledge of emerging and developing policy activity and service development was agreed as a key factor in identifying priorities for scrutiny and the Chairman advised that all committee members will now receive copies of PDAG agendas.
- It was also agreed that individual Cabinet members would be invited to attend Overview and Scrutiny meetings as a matter of routine, either in relation to a particular topic under discussion, or to provide an overview of issues in an area of interest.
- Whilst not currently enacted to a great extent, it was also noted that the Committee has powers to scrutinise services delivered by other public sector bodies that impact on the District's residents. A number of key areas of concern were identified but the manner in which this duty can be discharged, and the degree of influence the Council can exercise are less clear and good practice examples from other authorities would help to clarify this. It was also noted however that the primary purpose should remain the scrutiny of the Council's own services, policies and activities. The role is perceived as that of a "critical friend" to advise positively on policy development and delivery.
- It was agreed that the Chairman and Vice-Chairman should take a lead outside of the scheduled committee meetings on programming identified topics for consideration at appropriate points over the year and beyond. This kind of Business Planning approach is seen as a successful in focussing other committees and PDAGs and ensuring that key preparations and attendees are scheduled in good time.
- Many of the above points feed into the agreed need for Training – detailed in item SO/19 below, and are also reflected in SO/18 Task & Finish Groups.

SO/18 **UPDATE ON TASK & FINISH GROUPS**

It was noted that there are no active Task & Finish Groups commissioned by this committee. However proposals for focussing the scrutiny role on identified areas of concern or opportunity will inform the need for new groups to be constituted over the year.

SO/19 **TRAINING FOR COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

There was general agreement that Training, both at a base-line level for less experienced Members and also at a more developed level for effective challenge review, was a key necessity for the effective delivery of the function. It was agreed that the changes in Committee and PDAG membership, and in the Council as a whole, meant that more frequent training opportunities than the current four-yearly cycle would be beneficial.

It was noted that the level and manner of scrutiny functions varies considerably across Local Authorities. The Local Government Association provides training opportunities and can also point towards best practice examples in other authorities.

A useful Councillor's workbook on Scrutiny function is produced by the LGA:
[Click Here](#)

Democratic Services will research and advise on options for training, in whatever manner or combination seems most fit for purpose, with a view to a session or programme to be delivered for Members in the Autumn.

It was also suggested that a greater emphasis on Scrutiny in induction training for new Councillors would enhance understanding of the role and importance of this function.

SO/20 **CABINET FORWARD PLAN**

The current Forward Plan was noted

SO/21 **URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business raised.

The meeting closed at 6.35 pm having commenced at 5.30 pm

CHAIRMAN