

SCRUTINY PROGRAMME BOARD

Monday, 20 September 2010

<u>Present:</u>	Councillor	H Smith (Chair)	
	Councillors	C Meaden S Mountney G Watt	G Davies M McLaughlin P Gilchrist
<u>Deputies:</u>	Councillors	L Rowlands (In place of J Hale) W Clements (In place of S Taylor)	

17 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST/PARTY WHIP

Members were asked to consider whether they had personal or prejudicial interests in connection with any item(s) on this agenda and, if so, to declare them and state what they were.

Members were reminded that they should also declare, pursuant to paragraph 18 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, whether they were subject to a party whip in connection with any item(s) to be considered and, if so, to declare it and state the nature of the whipping arrangement.

Councillor Mrs C Meaden declared her personal interest in agenda item 9 (Work Programmes of Overview and Scrutiny Committees) (see minute 25 post) insofar as it relates to the work of the Children and Young People O&S Committee, by virtue of her daughter's employment within the Children and Young People's Department.

18 MINUTES

Resolved – That the minutes of the meetings held on 3 June and 18 August 2010, be approved.

19 MEMBERS' QUESTIONNAIRE ON SCRUTINY

The Director of Law, HR and Asset Management presented a report, which highlighted the recommendations aimed at improving the scrutiny process that had been agreed by the Scrutiny Programme Board following the 2008/2009 questionnaire. He set out the reasons for the recommendations and provided details of progress since September 2009.

The Director's report also contained an analysis of responses that had been received to the 2009/2010 questionnaire, which had been circulated to all Members of the Council during April/May 2010. It was noted that Members may have been campaigning at the time the survey was distributed and this could have contributed to the disappointing response to it. Members were therefore requested to review the purpose and format of the questionnaire before any survey work was undertaken for 2010/2011.

A number of issues had been raised by those that had responded to the questionnaire and it was suggested that the Scrutiny Programme Board may wish to reflect on why a majority of participants in the questionnaire process were dissatisfied with Scrutiny arrangements.

The Scrutiny Workshop held on 1 September 2010 (see minute 20 post) gave Members further opportunity to discuss related issues and the views of the Board were sought as to whether, having regard of the responses to the questionnaire, it wished to prioritise the following areas for further work –

- Improve the engagement of Members with the scrutiny process
- Review the purpose and format of the Members' annual scrutiny questionnaire
- The current plans for scrutiny training
- The role and potential benefits of the Scrutiny Programme Board
- Review of the 'Call-In' process, including the current guidelines
- Review the use of the Forward Plan in the scrutiny process
- Encouraging more members to participate in working groups undertaking 'in-depth' reviews
- Consider the suggestions for potential improvements set out in paragraph 4.7 of his report.

Members considered the summary of responses to the survey and referred to ongoing discussions between the three political Group Leaders, specifically in relation to Overview and Scrutiny support arrangements. Members expressed the view that no further action should be taken until the outcome of those discussions were known.

Resolved – That the report be noted and that no further action be taken in relation to improving the scrutiny function until the outcome of the deliberations by Group Leaders is known and the matter considered by the appropriate Committee.

20 SCRUTINY WORKSHOP UPDATE

The Democratic Services Manager referred to the informal Overview and Scrutiny Workshop that had taken place on 1 September 2010 and thanked Members for their attendance. The aim of the workshop had been to develop an Action Plan for strengthening and improving the Council's Overview and Scrutiny function and it had been prompted by issues which came to light from the LGA Conference in 2009, and by the results from the 2009 Annual Centre for Public Scrutiny Survey. It provided an opportunity for those issues to be considered and the outcomes from the workshop included a shared understanding of the role of scrutiny, a suggested vision of the look and feel of an excellent Overview and Scrutiny function and the perceived barriers to it.

The Chair commented that a second meeting of the Workshop had been arranged for 5 October 2010 to continue discussions around possible options for strengthening the Overview and Scrutiny function and to draw up an Action Plan. However, he referred to conflicting views that had been expressed by Members as to the time the workshop should commence and sought the views of the Board.

Resolved –

- (1) That the update report on the informal workshop be noted.**
- (2) That the second meeting of the workshop on 5 October 2010 commence at 5.00pm and that all attendees be advised accordingly.**

21 SCRUTINY TRAINING

The Democratic Services Manager reported that the Members Training Steering Group had agreed that further Overview and Scrutiny training should be provided to all Members involved in the scrutiny function. The training would be provided at a cost of £824 by Professor Stephanie Snape of Warwick Business School. She had been provided with details of the work undertaken at the first Overview and Scrutiny Workshop and would be provided with the resultant Action Plan from the second meeting to be held on 5 October 2010. Based upon consideration of those matters the training would be tailored accordingly.

Resolved – That the report be noted and Members be advised of the arrangements for the training at the earliest opportunity.

22 FUTURE CHALLENGES FOR SCRUTINY

The Director of Law, HR and Asset Management submitted the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) Policy Briefing Note 'Future Challenges for Scrutiny', which was intended to provide information related to the development of Government policy around local accountability and transparency. The Briefing Note referred to the developing policy agenda of the coalition government and outlined those matters that, at this stage, had become clear in relation to the Health White Paper; abolition of the CAA; place-based budgeting/community budgeting; financial cutbacks and the Localism and Decentralisation Bill.

The Paper outlined the significant challenge for scrutiny and set out the practical contributions that scrutiny could make, particularly in the pursuit of openness in decision-making on behalf of local people.

The Chair of the Health and Well Being Overview and Scrutiny Committee referred specifically to the Health White Paper, which indicated that Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) and Strategic Health Authorities (SHAs) would be abolished. She commented that although, as part of the proposals, the existing statutory health scrutiny powers were being abolished, a more recent paper published by the Department of Health had indicated a continued role for the Health and Well Being O&S Committee in carrying out the health scrutiny function.

Resolved – That the content of the Briefing Note be noted.

23 THE FUTURE FOR SCRUTINY

The Director of Law, HR and Asset Management submitted a briefing note 'The Future for Scrutiny' from the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS), which referred to the significant pressure to find efficiencies and cost savings in all areas of the public sector. This was being felt particularly keenly in local government, which needed to battle to retain front line services while coping with significant reductions in funding from the centre. The briefing note referred to the need to work more in partnership

with other agencies and also to the Total Place programme, which had been about finding opportunities for radically different ways of working in local areas. The paper indicated that this was now the ideal time for scrutiny to be looking at commitments, responsibilities and capacity, in order to maximise value for money.

The briefing indicated that scrutiny needed to be responsive to change and commented that the Total Place programme, the need to demonstrate value for money and a decline in public trust all had an impact on the future of scrutiny. It indicated that there would be a need for more targeted, direct reviews and task groups looking at specific issues, and also a need to build relationships with local partners and other scrutineers, with whom joint scrutiny could be undertaken.

Resolved – That the content of the briefing paper be noted.

24 **GOOD SCRUTINY AWARDS**

The Director of Law, HR and Asset Management reported upon the annual Good Scrutiny Awards, which had recently been presented by the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS), and which provided examples of best practice in scrutiny achieved in some authorities. He provided an explanation of the categories in the awards and indicated that although the awards were national, five of this year's winners (out of ten categories) were geographical neighbours of Wirral.

Members referred to the substantial amount of scrutiny being undertaken in Wirral and expressed the view that the achievements in scrutiny should form the basis of a submission for the Good Scrutiny Awards 2011.

Resolved – That the officers be requested to present a report, highlighting examples of excellent scrutiny, to a future meeting of the Board, in time to prepare a submission for the 2011 CfPS Awards.

25 **WORK PROGRAMMES OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES**

Members received reports outlining the work programmes of the following Overview and Scrutiny Committees, which included indications of how each scrutiny topic was being dealt with, comments on progress and estimated timescales for work to be completed. –

- (a) Children and Young People
- (b) Council Excellence
- (c) Economy and Regeneration
- (d) Health and Well Being
- (e) Sustainable Communities

Updates were circulated for Members information following recent meetings of the Children and Young People, Economy and Regeneration and Health and Well Being Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

Resolved – That the reports be noted.

26 **REVIEW OF SCRUTINY PROGRAMME BOARD WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chair presented an updated Monitoring Report on the Committees Work Programme, in order to give Members the opportunity to review it and to ask for new

items to be added. The Democratic Services Manager referred to the significant work undertaken as part of the Alcohol Scrutiny Review and suggested that it could form the basis of a submission to the CfPS Good Scrutiny Awards 2011 (see minute 24 ante). She also sought the views of Members as to additional topics to form the basis of further scrutiny reviews.

Resolved –

- (1) That the Alcohol Scrutiny Review form the basis of a submission to the CfPS Good Scrutiny Awards 2011.**
- (2) That additional topics for review be considered at the Overview and Scrutiny Workshop to be held on 5 October 2010.**

27 **FORWARD PLAN**

The Director of Law, HR and Asset Management reported that the Forward Plan for the period October 2010 – January 2011 was published on the Council's intranet/website. Members had been invited to review the Plan prior to the meeting in order for the Scrutiny Programme Board to consider, having regard to the work programme, whether scrutiny should take place of any items contained within the Plan and, if so, how it could be done within relevant timescales and resources.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

28 **ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS APPROVED BY THE CHAIR - CONSULTATION TASK FORCES**

As an item of urgent business, the Chair referred to the four Task Forces, which had been set up to assist the Council in formulating a consultation document with a view to achieving budgetary savings. He proposed that the Scrutiny Programme Board should receive a detailed overview report upon the background to the task forces, the cost of them to the Council and upon the process that was followed in the selection and appointment of the Task Force members, together with any register or declaration of interests that may have been completed by Task Force members.

Members expressed the view that it may be more appropriate for such information as falls within their remit to be requested by the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

Resolved – That the matters referred to by the Chair in relation to the Task Forces be referred to each of the themed Overview and Scrutiny Committees and they be requested to seek information in relation to those issues which fall within their remit.
