

SCRUTINY PROGRAMME BOARD

Tuesday, 26 October 2010

Present: Councillor H Smith (Chair)

Councillors C Meaden S Taylor
J Hale G Davies
S Mountney P Gilchrist

Deputies: Councillors A McArdle (In place of M McLaughlin)
J Keeley (In place of G Watt)
D Mitchell (In place of A Bridson)

29 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 6 – Work Programmes of Overview and Scrutiny Committees (see minute 34 post), insofar as it relates to the work programme of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, by virtue of her daughter's employment in the Children and Young Peoples Department.

30 MINUTES

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2010, be approved.

31 SCRUTINY WORKSHOP UPDATE

Further to minute 20 (20 September 2010), the Democratic Services Manager presented an update note in relation to the second Overview and Scrutiny Workshop, which had been held on 5 October 2010. Its aim had been to develop an action plan for strengthening and improving the overview and scrutiny function and it had provided an opportunity for the exploration of practice from other local authorities. Members had considered information presented from Blackpool, Hartlepool and Hertfordshire and the Democratic Services Manager outlined the outcomes from the second workshop.

Those outcomes included a suggestion that the Overview and Scrutiny undertaken at Wirral Council should be more widely promoted and that a leaflet/booklet detailing success stories should be produced. Chairs of Committees had agreed to give serious consideration to future topics for review for inclusion in the Scrutiny Programme Board's Work Programme and to send ideas/suggestions to the Democratic Services Manager by email. Members also agreed that an internal "buddying" scheme should be considered to support Councillors new to the Overview & Scrutiny role. It was also agreed that Overview & Scrutiny Committees and the Scrutiny Programme Board's agendas would be Member led rather than determined by officers. Consideration was given also to Members' training requirements (see minute 32 post).

Members commented also, having regard to the number of meetings of the Cabinet, that there were not enough meetings of overview and scrutiny committees to ensure/enable effective scrutiny of Cabinet decisions. Members also expressed the view that a return to the Committee system may improve local accountability.

Resolved – That the Scrutiny Workshop Update be noted.

32 SCRUTINY TRAINING

Further to minute 21 (20 September 2010), the Director of Law, HR and Asset Management reported that the Member Training Steering Group had agreed that training for all Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members was a priority and that Dr Stephanie Snape, Research Director of the English Regions Network Research & Development Programme at the Institute of Governance & Public Management, University of Warwick, should be commissioned to provide it. Dr Snape had provided Wirral with training a few years ago and refresher training was seen as best practice. The cost of training by Dr Snape was £824 and could be open to all Members of the Council. The Democratic Services Manager presented Dr Snape's short CV, together with examples of past and present work she had undertaken in relation to scrutiny.

However, at the Informal Overview and Scrutiny Workshop (see minute 31 ante), Members had considered the proposed training arrangement. In the light of comments made by Members at the workshop, guidance was sought on how to proceed. Members commented specifically that it would be more cost effective for scrutiny training to be provided in-house. Members recognised the need for continued learning and expressed the view that Wirral should adopt best practice from other forward thinking and progressive local authorities. Members referred to the scrutiny of health from 2011 and referred specifically to the successful external scrutiny developed by Kirklees Council.

Although Members regarded the health scrutiny training requirement as being a matter for the Health and Well Being O&S Committee, they expressed the view that an overview for all Members of the Council could be provided by the Director of Public Health.

Members referred also to minute 19 (20 September 2010), which indicated that no further action should be taken in relation to improving the scrutiny function until the outcome of the deliberations by Group Leaders was known and the matter considered by the appropriate Committee.

Resolved –

- (1) That in-house scrutiny training be provided on a political group basis, by the Scrutiny Support Officers, to be based on the I&DeA document ‘A hard nut to crack? Making overview and scrutiny work’ produced by Dr Snape.**
- (2) That the Democratic Services Manager be requested to present a report to the next meeting of the Board upon research undertaken into the external scrutiny function at Kirklees Council, with a view to a visit to Kirklees by Board Members.**
- (3) That the Director of Law, HR and Asset Management be requested to ascertain from the Group Leaders the outcome of their deliberations in relation to the scrutiny function and report his findings to the next meeting.**
- (4) That the Health and Well Being Overview and Scrutiny Committee be requested to invite the Director of Public Health to provide an overview of health scrutiny and to invite all Members of the Council to attend.**

33 FORWARD PLAN

The Director of Law, HR and Asset Management reported that the Forward Plan for the period November 2010 to February 2011 had been 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 its 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 content of the Forward Plan be noted.

34 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

Members highlighted the need for more meetings of overview and scrutiny committees and expressed the view that there was no effective input to the Cabinet, with options open to O&S committees being limited to either calling-in decisions or examining them once they had been implemented. However, Members accepted that effective scrutiny could be undertaken by a small group of Members, rather than by a whole committee.

Resolved – That the reports be noted.

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. Chairs of Committees had agreed to give serious consideration to future topics for review for inclusion in the Scrutiny Programme Board's Work Programme and to send ideas/suggestions to the Democratic Services Manager. Members had also agreed that an internal "buddying" scheme should be considered to support Councillors new to the Overview and Scrutiny role (see minute 31 ante) and consideration had also been given to Members' training requirements (see minute 32 ante).

Resolved – That the work programme be updated, having regard to additional topics for review, notified to the Democratic Services Manager.
