

WIRRAL BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL EXCELLENCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 8TH JULY 2010

WORK PROGRAMME FOR THE 2010 / 11 MUNICIPAL YEAR

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an update on the current status of the Council Excellence Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme for the previous municipal year (2009 / 10) and invites suggestions from members regarding the work programme for the new municipal year (2010 / 11).

1. Background

- 1.1 The Council Excellence Scrutiny Committee was introduced in May 2009 as part of a re-structuring of the Scrutiny Committee arrangements in Wirral. Among the functions of the Council Excellence Committee is to scrutinise the work of the following portfolio holders:
 - Community and Customer Engagement;
 - Corporate Resources;
 - Finance and Best Value.
- 1.2 It is expected that members of the Council Excellence Scrutiny Committee will generate their own work programme which takes the functions listed in paragraph 1.1 into account. The Council Excellence work programme for the previous municipal year (2009 / 10) is attached, as Appendix 1, to familiarise members with the previous and ongoing work.
- 1.3 It is anticipated that group Spokespersons will meet to discuss suggested items for the work programme for the forthcoming municipal year.

2. Selection of Topics for Scrutiny Review

- 2.1 Topics selected for further scrutiny can be handled in different ways. Some may be best dealt with by departmental officer reports or presentations. Positive scrutiny is most likely if scrutiny committees are agreeing recommendations which can be sent to the Cabinet (rather than simply agreeing "reports to be noted"). Some topics may warrant an in-depth scrutiny review where a small panel of members gather detailed evidence and subsequently produce a report which is discussed by the committee.
- 2.2 A topic chosen for an in-depth review must have the potential to make a difference and should therefore be carefully chosen with reference to objective criteria. The review must also be conducted methodically and efficiently.

When selecting a topic, a set of criteria can be used to assess the key elements of the topic under the following headings:-

- **Public Interest** – members' representative roles are an essential feature of Overview and Scrutiny. Being the eyes and ears of the public, members can ensure that policies, practices and services delivered to residents, by both the Council and other external organisations, are meeting the local needs and are to an acceptable standard. Consultations and other surveys are also extremely important and can provide useful information.
- **Impact** – not all issues of concern will have an equal impact on the well being of the community, which should be considered when selecting a topic for review.
- **Council Performance** – scrutiny is about improving performance and ensuring that the community is well served. Members will need good quality and timely information to identify how the Council and other external organisations' performance can improve.
- **Keeping in context** – to avoid duplication or wasted effort. Members should take into account what else is happening in the areas being considered. Is the service about to be inspected by an external body? Are there any major legislative or policy initiatives already resulting in change about to impact on the service? If these circumstances exist, members may decide to link up with other processes, defer a decision until the outcomes are known or conclude that the issue will be addressed as part of other work.

3. Sources of ideas for topics

The following sources may help members to identify suitable topics for detailed scrutiny:

- The issue is identified as being important to the public (through area forums, members' surgeries and other contact with constituents)
- Poor performing service (evidence from performance indicators / benchmarking)
- Service ranked as important by Council's community
- High level of user/general public dissatisfaction with services (for example, through surveys, area forums, complaints)
- Public interest issue covered in the local media
- High level of budgetary commitment
- Regular patterns of budgetary overspends
- Council corporate priority area

- Central government priority area
- Issues raised in external audit reports
- New government guidance or legislation
- Issues identified in the Council's Forward Plan

4. Reasons for rejection of suggested topics

Discussions on proposals may reveal that the topic is not a priority for scrutiny. Potential criteria for rejecting a topic might include:

- Issue being examined by an officer group and changes are imminent, that is, changes are planned to take place within the next six months.
- New legislation or guidance expected within the next year

5 Financial implications

Scrutiny reviews should be managed from within existing resources.

6 Staffing implications

See paragraph 5 above.

7 Equal Opportunities implications

None

8 Community Safety implications

None

9 Local Agenda 21 implications

None

10 Planning implications

None

11 Anti-poverty implications

None

12 Human Rights implications

None

13 Social Inclusion implications

None

14 Local Member Support implications

None

15 Background Papers

None

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) That the Council Excellence Committee develop a work programme for the new municipal year.