

## **Appendix 1**

### **Policy & Performance Committee Chairs' Meeting - 4.30 PM, Monday 20<sup>th</sup> January 2014**

#### **Note from Meeting**

#### **1. Lessons Learnt from new scrutiny arrangements**

##### **What has worked well?**

- The R&E Committee reviewed the Budget Options in detail to inform Cabinet's deliberations. Some of the recommendations from this review do appear to be reflected in the Council's decisions. A further piece of work to review the Council's car parking strategy has been commissioned following this review.
- The agenda setting meetings and the Task and Finish approach have been the key to things working well.
- The Families and Wellbeing Committee has benefitted from a collaborative approach between political groups and the experience has been much better than with previous committees.
- Bringing Childrens and Adults Services does have strategic value and this should not be lost. But there is a need to find a way to manage the size of the workload.
- Task and Finish work has proved to be very effective in getting scrutiny work completed outside formal committee meetings with Members being supportive of this approach.
- The shorter and sharper format to Task and Finish work has been successful and should be the way forward as it does not take as much time and delivers results more quickly. It is recognised that for some subjects an in-depth and longer approach is required.
- The R &E Committee has dealt with a number of Notices of Motion referred by Council and that has worked well.
- The proposal in the Task and Finish guidelines to widen involvement in Scrutiny Reviews to all non-Executive Members is seen as positive and will allow those with a particular interest or knowledge to get more involved.
- There has been lots of positive feedback from Members and more Members involved in scrutiny than ever before. Involvement in Review Panels is seen as the key to success.
- Due to the efforts that have gone into presenting performance information, some Members feel the scrutiny of performance is more insightful than it has been previously.

## **Areas for improvement:**

- There is a need for greater clarity on the level of time commitment required from Members as they do not always realise how much work is involved. Members are very busy and the lack of spare capacity is becoming an issue.
- The level of engagement by Members is patchy. It is often the same Members putting their hands up to support Reviews.
- There could be better attendance at the Chair's agenda setting meetings particularly for some Committees. These provide an opportunity for Chairs and Party Spokespersons to engage in defining the agenda. Dates were set early in the municipal year for relevant Members to have these in their diaries.
- The Families and Wellbeing Committee has a large Membership, scope and list of topics it would like to examine. It is a challenge at meetings to ensure that everyone is able to participate. For the next meeting, an extra date has been set just in case there is insufficient time to get through the agenda.
- The Budget Options review meeting does not work as well as it could, scheduled within the timeframe of the public consultation. It might work better either much earlier on in the process when options are being developed or after options have been agreed to consider the best way for them to be implemented.
- A recent Scrutiny Review 'Impact of Budget Options' commissioned by the Coordinating Committee did not progress successfully due to uncertainty about the intended objectives of this piece of work. It was suggested this could be avoided by committees receiving officer reports first as a means to inform the scoping of the review.
- There is a need to track recommendations that arise from reviews and committee meetings to close the loop and demonstrate the effectiveness of Scrutiny.
- In terms of Performance Monitoring, concern was expressed that the focus is on exception reports which runs the risk of missing other potential performance issues. It was also pointed out that Exception Reports could to be more specific in terms of the timetable for improvement when an indicator is under-performing.
- There is also a problem of duplication with exception reports being presented to the Coordinating Committee as well as their respective directorate Policy and Performance Committee.
- There is an opportunity for more scrutiny outside the Town Hall employing techniques such as mystery shopping and site visits – as it is the real life experience of service users that should be the priority when understanding the effectiveness of service delivery.

## **2. Tracking Recommendations**

- Mike Callon introduced the officer proposals for tracking recommendations. This would include those from committee meetings and completed scrutiny reviews. Suitable review dates would be set for recommendations and regular updates would be provided to each Policy and Performance Committee through a dedicated section of the work programme report which is a standing item at committee meetings.
- It was highlighted that recommendations need to be formally made to Cabinet and a report back on the outcome should be brought back to the Policy and Performance Committee.
- Task and Finish Groups provide an opportunity to engage with Cabinet Members on completion of the Scrutiny Review Report.
- Alan Veitch emphasised that there tends to be good dialogue with Cabinet Members at the end of a review but there would be benefit in more engagement at the start and scoping phase of a review.
- Following the Scrutiny Review of the Regeneration and Environment Budget Options, there was a reminder of the need for some analysis of the Council's budget to determine if we have any areas of spend that seem excessive to our comparators.

## **3. Work Programme**

- There was a brief discussion about the work programmes of the four Policy and Performance Committees. The range in terms of scope and size of these was acknowledged.
- It was suggested that across the four committees, there were a lot of items that might not particularly elicit much public interest other than Coastal Issues (as a result of the recent storm damage) and car parking. It was suggested the work programme could look to have more topics that reflect the public interest such as fracking.
- However, it was acknowledged there are items on the Families and Wellbeing work programme that have had a high media profile including the Francis Report a review of Standards in Care Homes. It was also suggested that other items on the Families and Wellbeing programme were considered to be crucial.
- It was suggested the programme should reflect a balance of both the crucial and topics of public interest. An area for future improvement could be to provide Members of the public with a request form for items to be included on the work programme.
- It was suggested there needs to be a clear rationale for an item to be included on the work programme and that normally when an item is requested, an officer report should be brought first to inform the best objective for further scrutiny.

- It was highlighted there are a lot of reviews in progress but only a small number that have completed so from Cabinet's perspective it might not look as productive as it is. It was suggested there is a need to find ways to speed up the review process.

#### **4. Managing Capacity to Deliver the Work Programme**

- Mike Callon highlighted some of the learning from this year to set out a number of ideas that could be developed to inform improved design of the work programme next year. This includes a workshop prior to the first committee meetings, consideration for looking at the work programme from a more corporate perspective, aligning officer and Member capacity more flexibly and prioritising reviews in line with corporate priorities.
- It was acknowledged there would be value in investing more time up front in the design of the work programme at the start of the municipal year.
- It was suggested that Committees should remain masters of their own work areas and priorities.
- There was recognition of the value of shorter pieces of work to better manage capacity and Members time.
- It was highlighted that Scrutiny at Merseytravel involves a workshop format so that Members can all receive information in a concentrated format and have opportunity for discussion. These events always report back to formal committee meetings.
- The issue of continuity beyond single municipal years was raised both in terms of committee membership and scrutiny reviews. It was highlighted that certain areas of scrutiny are quite specialised and this means there is value in Members sitting on a committee for longer than a single municipal year cycle. It was suggested that Chairs and Vice Chairs use their own informal networks to promote this idea to their own political groups.

#### **5. Partnership Scrutiny Arrangements**

- With the move towards more partnership working as Council's seek to find economies of scale across larger geographical footprints, Mike Callon provided a brief overview of proposed or potential areas for new scrutiny arrangements in the short to medium term.
- It was acknowledged that where there is a clear link to a Policy and Performance Committee, nominations for partnership scrutiny arrangements should come from that committee.
- New 'joint health scrutiny' arrangements will be required for proposed changes to Cancer Services in summer 2014 and a meeting of the Coordinating Committee should be scheduled to consider these proposals in sufficient time to meet this deadline.