

WIRRAL COUNCIL

SCRUTINY PROGRAMME BOARD

27th MAY 2009

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE CHAIR - Cllr Dave Mitchell

MEMBERS QUESTIONNAIRE ON SCRUTINY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides details of responses to the members' questionnaire on scrutiny that has been recently undertaken.

1. Background

- 1.1 It was agreed by the Scrutiny Chairs Group in November 2008 that a questionnaire should be sent to all Council members to give members an opportunity to express their views on current scrutiny arrangements. The Scrutiny Chairs Group agreed a format for the questionnaire and also agreed that the questionnaire should be sent to all Council members towards the end of the 2008/9 municipal year. Members requested that the "anonymity of responses be assured".
- 1.2 The questionnaire was sent to members in April 2009 and responses have now been received. This report provides an update on the responses and requests that members consider the suggestions for improvement.

2. Responses to the Questionnaire

2.1 Participation in the questionnaire

Of the 66 members of the Council, **29 responses** were received.

Of the participants:

20 were on a Scrutiny committee during 2008/9 municipal year.

9 were NOT on a Scrutiny committee during 2008/9 municipal year, of which at least 5 were Cabinet members.

2.2 Detailed responses

The responses from all participants have been combined onto a single document (see Appendix 1). All responses have been made anonymous.

3. Summary of the Comments and matters for consideration by members

3.1 Satisfaction with the workings of Scrutiny Committees (Questions 1 and 2)

More members were either 'Fairly dissatisfied' (10) or 'Very dissatisfied' (2) than were 'Fairly satisfied' (7) or 'Very Satisfied' (1).

The Scrutiny Programme Board may want to reflect on why a majority of participants are dissatisfied with Scrutiny arrangements. (In addition, a majority of Council members did not respond to the questionnaire). The most frequent response to the question of 'How could we make our Scrutiny Committees more effective?' related to there being more working groups undertaking 'positive' scrutiny on a specific issue.

3.2 Satisfaction with Scrutiny Support (Questions 3 and 4)

Far more members were either 'Fairly satisfied' (8) or 'Very Satisfied' (8) than were 'Fairly dissatisfied' (0) or 'Very dissatisfied' (1). However, a variety of different comments were made regarding scrutiny support in the future.

3.3 The impact of scrutiny (Question 5)

There was a mixed response with a number of members recording that scrutiny had little or no impact on the services provided by the Council. However, approximately half of the recipients reported positive impact of scrutiny, with the reviews undertaken by Children's Services Scrutiny Committee (Fostering and Youth Outreach reviews) and by Social Care and Health Scrutiny Committee (Hospital Discharge review) being cited as examples by most of these members.

3.4 Importance of the different functions of scrutiny (Questions 6 and 7)

When asked to rank the different functions of scrutiny by importance, the vast majority of recipients selected either 'Holding the Cabinet to account' (12) or 'Policy and Service Review' (11). The function ranked least important by most recipients is 'Scrutinising external organisations' (15). The result regarding the scrutiny of external organisations is perhaps a reflection of most scrutiny committees having not dealt directly with external organisations. However, new legislation will widen the responsibilities of Councils towards the scrutiny of external organisations.

3.5 Helping scrutiny members to become more effective (Question 8)

The most popular suggestion to the question 'As a scrutiny member, how could you become more effective?' related to the provision of further training, increasing knowledge of scrutiny and being better prepared.

3.6 Suggestions of items to be included in the work programmes for the new municipal year (Question 9)

There were a significant number of suggested topics for further scrutiny. The Scrutiny Programme Board may wish to pass these suggestions to the five Scrutiny Committees for consideration when preparing their work programmes.

4. **Conclusion**

- 4.1 Members of the Programme Board may consider appointing three members to a Working Group to consider the responses in detail and report back to the next meeting. The responses to the questionnaire have generated a number of suggestions which members may want to discuss further.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That:

- (1) the Scrutiny Programme Board comments on the responses to the Members' Scrutiny questionnaire;
- (2) consideration be given to a working group of three members being appointed to reflect on the responses in detail and report back to the next meeting of the Scrutiny Programme Board;
- (3) the suggested topics for inclusion on the work programmes for the new municipal year be passed to the relevant Scrutiny Committee for further consideration.

Dave Mitchell
Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Board
19/05/09

WIRRAL SCRUTINY MEMBERS ANNUAL QUESTIONNAIRE – APRIL / MAY 2009

The responses to each question are analysed below. The responses from all participants have been combined onto this single document. All responses have been made anonymous.

General Comments on responses

Of the 66 members of the Council, **29 responses** were received.

Of the participants:

20 were on a Scrutiny committee during 2008/9 municipal year

9 were NOT on a Scrutiny committee during 2008/9 municipal year, of which

5 were Cabinet members

Of the participants:

4 were members of the Conservative group

10 were members of the Labour group

10 were members of the Liberal Democrat group

5 were unknown

The answers to each question are detailed below:

1. How satisfied are you with the workings of our Scrutiny Committees?

Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	No response
1	7	7	10	2	2

2. How could we make our Scrutiny Committees more effective?

Get involved in more real scrutiny of issues other than items from Cabinet.

.....
Full engagement of **ALL** councillors

.....
Longer briefings to include all members of that committee

.....
More formal Chairs Group
De-politicised scrutiny officers
On-going training

.....
They cannot be made more effective because members will not vote in opposition to their colleagues in cabinet.

.....
Keep Scrutiny Support Officers well informed.

.....
They need to more focused and less overtly party political.

.....
Each committee offering appropriate scrutiny agenda.
More working groups, leading to a greater variety of themes.
Support staff committed to scrutiny.
Public involvement in scrutiny needs increasing.
Listening / information and experience exchange with other groups, for example, Older Peoples Parliament, Charity groups.
Visits to other Councils recognised as delivering good scrutiny.

.....
Get more members involved in wanting to take part.

.....
No response

.....
Members need to take greater responsibility for the identification and investigation of items and issues for scrutiny. This needs to be an **active** process looking forward to fulfil the Corporate Plan. It need not involve the whole committee except when a decision or recommendation needs to be made – the use of small **working parties** has been very successful in some scrutiny areas such as Children’s Services. More items might receive in-depth consideration if the committees delegated work between members. Issues could be considered and discussed prior to their submission to Cabinet, who would then be in a better-informed position to come to a decision.

.....
In my case limited experience, only chairing Finance and attending Customer Engagement. As Scrutiny Committees have ‘no power’ they are ignored.

.....
By reducing the number.
Becoming more focused.
To tell one political group to stop politicising the committees.

.....
From my observations, the Scrutiny Committees that work best are those such as Children’s Services which has identified a clear work programme and has produced useful pieces of work in a cross-party, non-partisan way. Regrettably, too many Scrutiny Committees have been politicised and used for largely party

political purposes.

No response

The agendas are (usually) comprehensive and well constructed. There is, however, a perception that committees 'go through the motions' but that major concerns registered in Scrutiny Committees are not always properly acted upon by officers or Cabinet.

The new, more clear roles and functions should help to achieve this.

More proactive, than reactive.
Produce a year plan and see it through.
Give recommendations on service improvement
Less aggressive at Call-Ins.

More thorough investigation by members of scrutiny topics, with recommendations to Cabinet of areas of improvement. Some committees do this well, others simply receive reports from Officers, criticise areas of concern without giving any positive recommendations. Holding the Cabinet to account is very important but so is active engagement in policy review and improvement.

Better use of Scrutiny Support officers?

Make them scrutinise issues.
I'm still not convinced they work as real scrutiny committees.

More engagement in scrutiny projects – Children's Services and Adult Social Care & Health have both produced Scrutiny Reports – but the output from all the other committees has been zero. The unwillingness of some committees to engage in this type of work is a disgrace.

No response

Is it possible?

I feel that the OSC I chair operates well.
I get all the support I need from the officers.

Ensuring that all political parties are on board with the correct application of scrutiny.

Members taking more ownership and responsibility for what is discussed and agreed.

Members ensuring that there is continuity between meetings by using the minutes more actively to trace and follow through decisions.
Chairs being more forceful and generally better at chairing
Doing less things more thoroughly.

For members of committees to understand what scrutiny is and to develop ways of doing it effectively via agreed scrutiny programmes.

The committees are being used by one party to promote the political ambitions. I

think the number of Call-Ins is clear indication of this and Scrutiny Committees should take a stronger line to avoid this. Some in-depth scrutiny has been done by some Committees, but in the main they have not developed this.

.....
I think we have made the first steps by reducing the amount of committees. We need to start effective scrutiny by choosing topics for genuine scrutiny.

3. How satisfied are you with the support that you receive for doing scrutiny work?

Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	No response
8	8	7	0	1	5

4. How can the support you receive be improved?

No real scrutiny has been undertaken

Do not align the scrutiny officers to political parties

WHO can support us?

De-politicised scrutiny officers

The support from officers is first class

No response

Our Scrutiny Support officer is great – no knowledge of other officers – except of course enormous support given by Mike on fostering.

More support staff – working to support scrutiny only.

Training for support staff re. scrutiny

Some financial / budgetary support, for example, Wirral NHS (PCT) financed research for the hospital discharge review. Unable to employ professional company if no finance available.

As at the present time, my select have not done any scrutiny, we are having a working group to look into flooding.

Group training

Officers (not just Scrutiny Officers) and others might identify examples of good scrutiny practice to facilitate the work programme identified by members. These could be from within our Council or elsewhere. They may include in-depth review of specific issues; working groups with delegation from the main committee to investigate and report back; contacts with other authorities / departments; commissioned reports

I did not make use of 'support' but recognise that our Scrutiny Support Officer has provided considerable support to projects they have been involved in.

By reducing the number of Committee Officers and admin staff, can offer a greater range of support.

This is not relevant to my role as a Cabinet member, but I feel that there is generally good support for scrutiny committee members.

No response

Recommended actions should be far more specific and prescriptive. The recommendation that the information should be 'noted' is inadequate and does not encourage proper involvement in the scrutiny role. It is my belief that the Chairman may need to be more proactive in this role – but officers who prepare the actual agenda should also encourage proper scrutiny of cabinet decisions.

We will have to see how the revised structure works out.

.....
Not sure

.....
No response

.....
I'd need to devote more time to it and ask questions.

.....
I cannot comment on this personally – however members do report to me a high degree of satisfaction with the work of our Scrutiny Support Officer.

.....
No response

.....
By providing it!!

.....
I get all the support I need from the officers.

.....
Our scrutiny support Officer has been excellent during this past year.

.....
Officers explain more clearly why things are on the agenda – what members are expected to do.

Ensure non-spokes members understand their role

Make reports clearer, more concise and with clear key points brought out

More information about best practice and new stuff being tried elsewhere.

.....
By appointed scrutiny officers dedicating their time to that function.

.....
No response

.....
I am satisfied with the support from our Scrutiny Support officer. I have seen little or no support from the other parties support officers.

**5. Does Scrutiny have a positive impact on the services provided by the Council?
(Please give examples).**

Don't know of any personally
.....
Yes – the Children's Services Scrutiny exercises have brought about changes.
.....
No response
.....
Yes, work undertaken by Children's Services.
.....
Very little
.....
Sometimes yes; sometimes no.
.....
Not much. Cabinet have no real method of using the Forward Plan to ensure a rational decision-making process.
.....
Review of hospital discharge process led to change of practice across hospital / DASS and GP's.
Opportunities for members of public to present their experience of services.
.....
Yes it should, of the pieces seen to date, Children's Services and social services have both done good work.
.....
Yes, Call-In on external housing changes or policies where we can ask and identify weakness of any changes that may have impact on residents.
.....
It can do, but the impact is limited. Areas where committee members want to take a positive role have greater impact than those where the role is reactive to reports from officers and decisions already made by cabinet.
.....
Believe that work on hospital discharges influenced policy but not aware of 'positive' impacts elsewhere.
.....
Yes, it does when used constructively through a work programme.
.....
Yes for those committees that take their scrutiny role seriously. No, for those committees whose members use scrutiny to mount party political campaigns, for example, the SAR process.
.....
No response
.....
I am not sure that it does. For example, little account appeared to be taken of the major concerns expressed by scrutiny committees involved in the (allegedly) flawed SAR process. Constructive recommendations on how to overcome some of the financial problems appear to have been studiously ignored – or am I being cynical.....
.....
We will have to see how the revised structure works out.
.....
Education – about the best.
Others cannot remember a positive outcome.

.....
Sometimes, for example, youth service provision.
.....

No – Opportunity for political point-scoring
.....

Not sufficient – engagement in scrutiny projects would result in greater innovation and ideas that could be presented to Cabinet.
.....

No response
.....

The only time I have seen and experienced it working was a couple of years ago when we scrutinized a problem with Oaklands.
.....

If the OSC does as described then yes.
.....

Yes, we have secured a Section 106 officer and there is a process in place for planning-out Crime (Section 17) as a result of scrutiny. Both issues are related to Housing and Community Safety.
.....

The only one I'm aware of is the fostering report from Children's and Young Peoples.
.....

Need to get the public more engaged.
.....

Yes – Fostering and Adoption, Youth Services and Hospital discharge.
.....

Very limited impact so far.
.....

Yes, see Children's Services
.....

6. Please rank the following Scrutiny functions in importance. ('1' being the most important; '5' the least important)

The number of members who put '1' (that is, they think that this function is most important):

Scrutiny Function	
Holding the Cabinet to account	12
Policy or Service review	11
Performance management	2
Policy Development	3
Scrutinising external organisations	1
No response	4

The number of members who put '2' (that is, they think that this function is second most important):

Scrutiny Function	
Holding the Cabinet to account	4
Policy or Service review	4
Performance management	8
Policy Development	9
Scrutinising external organisations	2
No response	4

The number of members who put '3' (that is, they think that this function is third most important):

Scrutiny Function	
Holding the Cabinet to account	5
Policy or Service review	3
Performance management	7
Policy Development	5
Scrutinising external organisations	3
No response	4

The number of members who put '4' (that is, they think that this function is fourth most important):

Scrutiny Function	
Holding the Cabinet to account	2
Policy or Service review	7
Performance management	2
Policy Development	7
Scrutinising external organisations	2
No response	5

The number of members who put '5' (that is, they think that this function is least important):

Scrutiny Function	
Holding the Cabinet to account	2
Policy or Service review	0
Performance management	4
Policy Development	0
Scrutinising external organisations	15
No response	8

7. For the function you selected as '1', how could we improve?

THOSE MEMBERS WHO THINK THAT 'HOLDING THE CABINET TO ACCOUNT' IS MOST IMPORTANT REPLIED THAT IT COULD BE IMPROVED BY:

There is a lack of a clear common understanding of the systems which result in decisions, which results in too many ad hoc decisions.

.....
Only if the cabinet were genuinely interested.

.....
Making sure the relevant Scrutiny Committee is well read on the subject matter and understands the decision of Cabinet with relation to its own work programme.

.....
The key challenge is to persuade senior politicians to take the role of scrutiny seriously. Could IDEA help?

.....
By ensuring that Cabinet takes notes – and is seen to take note – of constructive recommendations made. Particularly where the scrutiny committee recommendations are not overtly 'political' but are for the general benefit of the community at large.

.....
Ask Cabinet members to genuinely react to Scrutiny's views.

.....
Hold to account against Corporate Plan.

.....
Self explanatory.

=====
THOSE MEMBERS WHO THINK THAT 'POLICY OR SERVICE REVIEW' IS MOST IMPORTANT REPLIED THAT IT COULD BE IMPROVED BY:

Select a few key areas for review

.....
Improve our scoping technique

.....
More time given to it

.....
Each committee needs to focus on issues, for example, where performance indicators are not being met.
Committee need to ensure residents have their concerns addressed.

.....
Simply doing more studies

.....
By learning about scrutiny and developing a proper scrutiny programme

.....
We need a seed change within elected members to show a desire to undertake genuine scrutiny.

=====

THOSE MEMBERS WHO THINK THAT 'PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT' IS MOST IMPORTANT REPLIED THAT IT COULD BE IMPROVED BY:

Take on board ideas from other councils who do things better.

.....

=====

THOSE MEMBERS WHO THINK THAT 'POLICY DEVELOPMENT' IS MOST IMPORTANT REPLIED THAT IT COULD BE IMPROVED BY:

More time given to it.

.....

More 'constructive' criticism and policy development – would welcome good ideas to take forward.

.....

Start to do more work on specific policy areas.

.....

=====

OTHER RESPONSES:

Noted rated the 5 functions because I don't think it makes sense – they're all important. We could improve 'Holding Cabinet to account' by group members acting independently of group leaders and cabinet membership. The other areas, I don't think members understand their role.

.....

I think the answer (regarding the ranking) alters depending on the Scrutiny Committee.

.....

8. As a Scrutiny member, how could you become more effective?

More in-depth training
.....
Increase my knowledge and expertise
.....
More general knowledge of subject
.....
Training.
Looking at good practice
.....
No response
.....
No response
.....
There is a need to work towards an agreed agenda which will involve all members. A good start would be for training in decision-making systems.
.....
Budget / resources to finance scrutiny, for example, use of outside bodies, transport.
.....
By having the time and support of other members.
.....
Not applicable
.....
By taking a more active role in persuading others to adopt an active role.
.....
By seeking an improved call-in procedure so that challenges to Cabinet decisions receive full and proper scrutiny, with the committee able to question the proponent of the call-in and, rather than relying on the caller-in or portfolio holder to do this, to invite witnesses who are able, in the committee's expectation, to shed light on the issues.
.....
This is in member's hands, applying themselves fully and asking awkward questions.
.....
By being better appraised of the subject matter.
Read all relevant papers and be better prepared.
.....
Not applicable
.....
No response
.....
I believe that I already do all that I can.
.....
Not sure on this one.
.....
Not applicable
.....
No response
.....
Put more effort in when I have time to.
.....

I am not a scrutiny member

.....
No response

.....
I just generally think that scrutiny is a charade

.....
No response

.....
No response

.....
Working more closely / subtly with the chair to get genuine scrutiny on the agenda.

Getting common goal for committee to unite behind and work towards

.....
Not applicable

.....
No response

.....
No response

9. **Are there any items you feel should be included in the Scrutiny Committees' work programme for the new municipal year?**

Quality control of services at the delivery point
.....
In Children's – Deprivation money review Teenage pregnancy Alcohol-related issues
.....
No response
.....
Council complaints procedure Customer Satisfaction
.....
No response
.....
No response
.....
The working of the Cabinet The interface between the Cabinet and senior officers How the community are involved in the work of the Council
.....
Dementia support and services Alcohol issues, for example, hospital admissions, underage drinking, possible improvements to prevention services Homelessness and health Working with outside groups, for example, LINKS, Citizens Advice Bureau.
.....
Yes. Reduction of killed and seriously injured on our roads.
.....
No
.....
I don't know yet on which committee(s) I may serve in the coming year. If it were <i>Council Excellence</i> , then a review of call-in arrangements; continuing input to accommodation use; investigation of sharing assets (and costs) with partners for greater service efficiency; barriers to shared use of council assets.
.....
I am not taking any committee places this year in order to devote time to work in my community, to help it recover from damage done by the cabinet, so do not wish to comment.
.....
Not applicable
.....
Not applicable
.....
No response
.....
Keeping within budget whilst providing the most cost effective services possible. Avoiding wastage of resources at all levels
.....
No
.....
Protecting the Council's image; after all we are all in the same team.

.....
No response
.....

No response
.....

This is for scrutiny members to decide.
.....

No response
.....

No – you will gather that I am not a fan of scrutiny
.....

No response
.....

The impact of the increase in the availability of alcohol, as a result of the
Licensing Act 2003, and the effects on the residents of Wirral.
.....

The website – how does it work to assist the residents of Wirral.
.....

Council communications – Are we any good at it?
.....

Getting the public more engaged in democracy
.....

Cycling – how do we get Wirral to be a cycling borough. Why aren't they cycling?
.....

Road safety policy
.....

No response
.....

Alcohol misuse across all age groups
.....
.....