

Part 1, Section A, Item 1

Update on the modernisation of the scrutiny process and work programme development.

Purpose of Report

Following consultation with the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee, to seek approval of the Committee's Forward Work Programme for Autumn 2014.

Background

The existing Cabinet and Scrutiny system was introduced by the Local Government Act 2000. This was a fundamental change in the way in which the business of councils was conducted.

In Neath Port Talbot, a set of principles were developed to underpin the new arrangements to ensure:

- Decision making was open and transparent;
- The Executive and other Members worked together in partnership for the community, albeit each had different roles and responsibilities;
- There was effective partnership working between Elected Members and officers, although again, each has different roles and responsibilities; and
- Resulting administrative processes were efficient and effective.

The system has worked satisfactorily with little change over time. However, the scale and pace of change introduced in recent years; technological advances; changing expectations of Welsh Government; and different expectations amongst local Members indicate a review is now appropriate. The Leader and Chief Executive therefore decided to conduct a review of arrangements in Summer 2013. The outcome of that review and the proposals in this paper were presented and endorsed by full Council in June 2014. The first phase of change includes modernisation of scrutiny arrangements across the Council.

First Phase- Modernising and Strengthening Scrutiny

The review found that “Pre-scrutiny arrangements are a strength, however, too much time is devoted to pre-scrutiny of executive decisions with insufficient time available to discharge the other roles and responsibilities of scrutiny committees”

The proposals for improvement in this first phase are listed below:

1. Each scrutiny committee to agree its own work programme;
2. Agenda planning meetings between chairs/vice chairs and officers to replace existing briefing arrangements;
3. Scrutiny committees to hold a briefing session immediately before the commencement of the meeting;
4. Scrutiny members identify lines of enquiry to chairs/vice chairs in advance of the meeting;
5. Information only items to be reduced to a minimum;
6. Member development programme to support scrutiny work programmes and improve members understanding of committee procedures;
7. Guidance to be issued to officers to improve the clarity of reports;
8. Standards for minute taking to be finalised;
9. Clarification to be provided to scrutiny committees as to where decisions on major policy are to be taken to provide opportunity for pre-scrutiny by the subject committees; and
10. Scrutiny arrangements for public protection and schools performance to be enhanced.

The most urgent point is for each scrutiny committee to agree its own work programme for this civic year. A workshop took place on 7th July 2014 that allowed elected Members to consider issues that are in their purview.

The outputs from the workshop have been captured in a draft Forward Work Programme which is attached at Appendix 1 for the Committee’s approval.

Recommendation

That the Scrutiny Committee reviews and if appropriate approves the Forward Work Programme contained in Appendix 1.

Appendices

Appendix 1- Draft Policy and Resources Scrutiny Forward Work Programme,

Background Papers

Report to the Modernisation Group on 25th April 2014

Wales Audit Office report on Scrutiny in Local Government – “Good Scrutiny? Good Question!”

COMPLIANCE STATEMENT

DEVELOPMENT OF THRID SECTOR GRANT MAKING POLICY

(a) **Implementation of Decision**

The decision is proposed for implementation after the 3 day call-in period.

(b) **Sustainability Appraisal**

Community Plan Impacts:

Economic Prosperity	Positive
Education and Lifelong Learning	Positive
Better Health and Well Being	Positive
Environment and Transport	Positive
Crime and Disorder	Positive

Other Impacts:

Welsh Language	Positive
Sustainable Development	Positive
Equalities	Positive
Social Inclusion	Positive

(c) **Consultation**

There has been no requirement under the Constitution for external consultation on this item.

Appendix 1

Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee Draft Forward Work Programme Autumn 2014

Date of Meeting	Agenda Item	Potential Lines of Enquiry
04.09.14	Quarter One Performance Monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To identify specific areas within Chief Executives and Finance and Corporate Services for in-depth scrutiny. <p>Two suggested areas for consideration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Housing benefit – to consider the comments made in the Annual Improvement report and understand the issues facing the service;○ Contact Centre performance – What is the volume and nature of the calls? What areas get the most calls? What is the current performance and what are the future plans for the contact centre. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To consider whether current performance confirms/challenges the overall priorities of the Council.• To consider if there any performance issues in addition to the six priority areas of the Council. <p>Officers to attend: Head of Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services,</p>

		Head of Finance, Customer Services Manager, and Housing Benefits Principal Officer.
	Sickness Absence	<p>The Committee will consider a short report that will contain data in relation to sickness absence across the Council</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the current level of sickness across the Council? • What is the cost of that absence? • Which areas have the highest absence rates? • What are the causes of the absence rates? <p>The Committee will also hear from senior officers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What strategies are being implemented to address absence rates? • What is working in reducing sickness absence? • What is not working? <p>Officers to attend: Director of Environment, Head of Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services, Head of Human Resources,</p>
	Scrutiny Work Programme	The Committee to consider and agree the draft work programme.

	Cabinet Board Items	To select appropriate items from the Cabinet Board agenda for pre-scrutiny
13.10.14	Special Budget Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To consider the new budget proposals contained within the Cabinet report of 1st October. To identify specific areas for further in depth scrutiny. <p>Officers to attend: Director of Finance and Heads of Service from Chief Executives and Finance and Corporate Services</p>
16.10.14	Sickness Absence	<p>Follow up report in response to the discussions held at the September meeting which will include any specific information that is requested particularly in relation to specific services.</p> <p>Officers to attend: specific managers identified at the meeting held on 4th September.</p>
	Budget Proposals	To consider specific budget proposals in-depth identified at the Special budget meeting held on 13 th October.
	Cabinet Board Items	To select appropriate items from the Cabinet Board agenda for pre-scrutiny
27.11.14	Quarter Two Performance Monitoring	To identify specific areas within Chief Executives and Finance and Corporate Services for in-depth scrutiny.
	Contact Centre	To consider a report and recommendations developed following a half day inquiry.

	Budget Monitoring	To consider any budget issues highlighted in the Cabinet report of 5 th November that are in the purview of the Committee.
	Budget Proposals	To consider specific budget proposals in-depth identified at the Special budget meeting held on 13 th October.
	Cabinet Board Items	To select appropriate items from the Cabinet Board agenda for pre-scrutiny

Note:

Welfare Reform – an all Member seminar to be held highlighting what the Council has done in relation to the reforms and any areas that require additional work. This may allow for additional areas of scrutiny to be identified for later in the year.

Follow up work will be required in relation to the ICT Strategy of the Council and how this can have a positive impact on other services. A particular reference to how if the Council’s website is improved this would result in less demand on areas such as the contact centre.

Procurement – a seminar for Members highlighting what the Council spends on goods and services, items that achieve value for money and providing information to Members on any checks that are in place to ensure that we are spending the right amount of money on difference goods/services.

Treasury Management – Members need a fuller understanding of the issues relating to Treasury Management – a seminar should be held in the New Year.

There needs to be additional seminars on budget scrutiny and performance scrutiny particularly in relation to budget scrutiny as the process has now changed.