

New scrutiny structure

From: Cllr Rob Garnham, Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The current scrutiny structure with six committees has worked well and has allowed a number of members to be involved in detailed scrutiny reviews of specific issues. The council's scrutiny activities have been recognised nationally in recent years, most notably in winning the Centre for Public Scrutiny's 2012 'overall impact' award for the Severn Estuary Scrutiny Commission.
- 1.2 The current structure is largely based around the council's directorate structure which came to an end in December 2011. A new structure needs to be developed which takes account of the following changes:
- a) The council's new operating model that splits commissioning from the delivery of services.
 - b) The reduction in the number of councillors from 63 to 53 in May 2013
 - c) The introduction of the Police and Crime Panel, a joint committee of the seven councils, to scrutinise the activities of the Police and Crime Commissioner from November 2012.
 - d) Reducing staff resources in Democratic Services and across the council

2 Members' views

- 2.1 The views of all members have been sought on the future of scrutiny and a number of comments were made in response to the paper published in January 2012. These are summarised below:
- a) The proposals were logical and tidied up the current arrangements.
 - b) Need to ensure that scrutiny looks at the right issues. It should concentrate on resolving problems and tackling specific issues rather than trying to look at everything.
 - c) For scrutiny reviews, follow the successful approach used for the Severn Estuary Scrutiny Commission. The review was undertaken on one day and all the stakeholders were invited to attend.
 - d) More opposition members should have the opportunity of becoming involved in chairing committees and task groups.
 - e) The committees had too wide a remit. There was particular concern at the lack of coverage of adult social care issues by the Health, Community and Care OSC.

- f) There should either be a larger number of committees covering each council area or just one with a series of task groups looking at specific issues.
- g) Differing views on the need for the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee. Some members felt that it did not provide a useful function whilst others felt that it was essential in co-ordinating the scrutiny process.
- h) Some concern that Community Safety OSC might no longer be within the structure, despite being recognised nationally as an example of best practice. Fire and rescue, trading standards, emergency management, registration, coroners and road safety should clearly be signposted as being under the remit of the Environment and Communities OSC.
- i) Differing views on setting up task groups. Some members believe that individual committees should be able to commission groups but others felt that the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee should still 'sign-off' new groups to provide consistency of approach.
- j) 'Call-in' does not help the scrutiny process. Can we find a way of doing it in a better way?
- k) The new structure needs to reflect the reduction in staff resources across the council.
- l) The opportunity should be taken not just to review the number of scrutiny committees but also the frequency of council meetings generally.

3 New structure

- 3.1 Having considered the views expressed by members, a suggested new structure for scrutiny is attached at appendix A. This builds on the success of our current arrangements whilst taking account of the changes highlighted in a) to d) in paragraph 1.2.
- 3.2 There is still a need for a body that fulfils the role of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee to ensure that limited scrutiny resources are deployed in the most effective way. There may be scope to combine the committee with the strategic performance and budget monitoring role of the Budget and Performance OSC.
- 3.3 The call-in process by its nature is always likely to be adversarial and the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee provides a forum for call-ins to be dealt without impacting on the other scrutiny committees.
- 3.3 The Environment OSC should be renamed Environment and Communities OSC and take on a wider remit including the fire and rescue service, trading standards, libraries and the local economy.
- 3.4 The Health, Community and Care OSC (*renamed Health and Care OSC*) and Children and Young People OSC (*renamed Children and Families OSC*) would continue largely unchanged. Although it has been suggested that

health and adult care should be scrutinised separately, this would make little sense at a time efforts are being made to integrate health and social care activities. The new work planning approach adopted by the committee has allowed key issues to be identified and specific reviews to be undertaken.

- 3.5 The new Police and Crime Panel is a statutory requirement and will take on the crime and disorder aspects of the former Community Safety OSC alongside scrutiny of the Police and Crime Commissioner. This is a joint scrutiny committee of the seven councils.
- 3.6 To make this structure successful meeting arrangements will need to be more flexible with more meetings being arranged as necessary. Task groups looking at specific issues have proved to be a real success story for scrutiny in recent years. They need to continue but there may be opportunities to adopt new approaches to undertaking reviews such as one day scrutiny commissions.
- 3.7 Meetings should not be held for the sake of holding meetings and it is suggested that a minimum of four meetings of each scrutiny committee should be held each year. This principle could be extended to full council, reducing the number of scheduled meetings to four each year – February, May, September and November. This would not prevent additional meetings being arranged as business dictates.

4 Next steps

A new scrutiny structure will be considered by the Constitution Committee before a formal recommendation is made to full council on 21 November 2012. The new structure will become effective from May 2013 when the new council is elected.