

Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Coordinating Committee Meeting Thursday 21 March 2013

Attendees: Councillors Mrs Blackmore, Burton, English, Mrs Gooch, D Mortimer and Mrs Paterson

Officers: Angela Woodhouse and Orla Sweeney

Vision for Scrutiny

- It was felt that all the tools needed to make scrutiny work effectively were already in place.
- The existing vision for scrutiny was considered:
"To have an effective and well respected service that ensures the council's services are delivered equitably, effectively and efficiently to our residents."
- Members felt the vision concentrates on "scrutiny" and should include "overview".
- The following additions were suggested:
 - "To assist in the creation and development of policy and strategy"; and
 - "To hold to account the decision (makers) and service delivery/delivery of services."

It was recommended that the existing vision for scrutiny be sharpened using the additional wording suggested.

Model for Scrutiny

- It was agreed that options A, C and D be dismissed which left option B.
- Option B was considered:
 - It should be explicit that it involves both overview and scrutiny
 - Committees should be aligned to the Cabinet Portfolios
 - How many Committees – 4 or 5?
 - More resources equal more resilience?
 - Formal Overview and Scrutiny Committees were felt to increase involvement of more members and ensure credibility.

- The objective was to get more members involved which substantiated the argument for more committees?
- There was a preference for formal committees as opposed to ad hoc task and finish panels as members were more likely to engage
- Commissioning and partnerships/new ways of working provided scrutiny with a new challenge.
- Scrutiny should be looking at shared services
- The Mid Kent Improvement Partnership (MKIP) board met quarterly which provided a timeline for scrutiny's involvement.
- Scrutiny work programmes were considered too rigid.
- Interesting/Interested people and bodies should be included more using the power of co-option.
- The creation of the Spatial Policy Advisory Group (SPAG) and the Housing Consultative Board (HCB) duplicated and overlapped with overview and scrutiny. They should be subsumed into overview and scrutiny (members voted in favour of this with one abstention).

It was recommended that:

- a) Option B be taken with four scrutiny committee's on a 6 weekly cycle proposed for the 2013/14 Municipal Year;**
- b) Cabinet should revisit its portfolios to avoid overlap;**
- c) Spatial Planning Advisory Group and the Housing Consultative Board be subsumed into scrutiny to avoid duplication and strengthen the scrutiny process;**
- d) The new terms of reference include partnerships and shared services as well as explicitly stating the role of overview and scrutiny;**
- e) All new Members to attend a scrutiny committee meeting as part of the induction process;**
- f) Each Overview and Scrutiny Committee to identify training needs at the beginning of the year and then on a quarterly basis;**
- g) Where meetings are held outside the Town Hall meetings are recorded for the purposes of web casting; and**
- h) Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee meet twice a year to consider the Mid Kent Improvement Partnership in a similar manner to the way in which the present Communities**

Overview and Scrutiny Committee meet as the Crime and Disorder Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Support for Scrutiny

- There was a budget for two full time posts.
- Under the senior management restructure, currently in its consultation period, it is proposed that scrutiny will move to Democratic Services.
- It was felt that scrutiny required a different skills set from Democratic Services and there was a natural synergy with policy
- The scrutiny training and conference budget was discussed. **A request for information was made**: What could the scrutiny member training budget be used for and what it had been used for in recent years?

It was recommended that:

- a) Scrutiny remain with Policy as there was a natural synergy between the two services and closer matching of skills than in Democratic Services; and**
- b) Chairman allowances from the Spatial Planning Advisory Group Housing Consultative Board and overview and Scrutiny Chairmen be pooled and split between the four Overview and Scrutiny Chairmen for 2013/14.**

Member Engagement/Next Steps

It was agreed that member engagement should be the focus of the coordinating committee's next meeting. The following topics were put forward for the next agenda:

- Pre/post decision scrutiny
- Regular meetings with Cabinet Members (discuss bringing these back)
- Discuss a broad recommendation to political group leaders in relation to member engagement and reviewing the appointment process to scrutiny committees
- Committee pre meets. There are two schools of thoughts for this. Pre - meets could be included as an option on future work programming reports so each individual committee can decide if there is a need in preparation for its next meeting
- Presentation skills as training requirement/part of a member's continuous professional development, including mentoring

- Local Government Association and Parliamentary Outreach – what training is available?
 - Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme
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