

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

AUDIT COMMITTEE

MONDAY 24 MARCH 2014

REPORT OF HEAD OF POLICY AND COMMUNICATIONS

Report prepared by Angela Woodhouse

1. UPDATE ON ENHANCED SCRUTINY ARRANGEMENTS AND PUBLIC MEETINGS

1.1 Issue for Decision

- 1.1.1 The Audit Committee requested an update on the enhanced scrutiny arrangements and the public meetings cited in the Annual Governance Statement.
- 1.1.2 In 2012/13 The scrutiny coordinating committee commissioned a small Member working group to undertake a review of the Council's corporate governance model, to consider whether the current model was still appropriate or if the Council should consider an alternative model.
- 1.1.3 In February 2013 full Council considered the report on models of governance and concluded that the Cabinet system be retained with enhanced scrutiny. The Scrutiny Coordinating Committee were then tasked with developing the model. The new model was approved by Council in April 2013. The report of the Coordinating Committee is attached at **Appendix A for reference**

1.2 Recommendation of the Head of Policy and Communication

- 1.2.1 That the Audit Committee notes the review of the enhanced scrutiny model, the update on public meetings and makes recommendations as appropriate.

1.3 Reasons for Recommendation

Review of the Enhanced Scrutiny Model

- 1.3.1 In order to assist the review of progress a short survey was undertaken of all members- to which 19 responses have been received. It should be noted that that survey only represents the views of less than half of Members. Only 6 respondents believe that

members do not own the scrutiny process and 10 out of the 19 respondents thought there had been an improvement in scrutiny since the changes.

1.3.2 The following comments were received in respect of how the system could be improved:

Establishing a pre meet prior to a scrutiny committee meeting to inform members of the subject which would enhance the actual meeting and overall debate. Perhaps this could be offered by the chair when discussing the future work programme.

2/19/2014 10:50 AM



Find a way to ensure members (a) are given more time to prepare for meetings and (b) lack of preparation has consequences.....

2/14/2014 2:07 PM



They need to be more pro-active in finding out what issues cabinet are considering, and doing pre-decision work to make sure councillors get to make their input. It's no good waiting until the decision is made, or even 2 weeks before the decision is due to be made.

2/12/2014 9:41 AM



Director should attend agenda setting meeting with Chairman and Group(s) spokesperson.

2/11/2014 9:13 AM



Do away with it

2/10/2014 10:28 PM



Make the other committees function better

2/10/2014 5:00 PM



It's about right

2/10/2014 3:36 PM



Keep verbal reports short and force members to read papers and prepare questions. Also, cuts down meeting time

2/10/2014 2:55 PM

But was not in scrutiny in 2012/13. There is no need to-repeat in detail the background to a decision. A simple reference to the appendix is sufficient m

2/10/2014 2:22 PM

To a certain extent, Cabinet members are involving themselves, but they could do a lot more

2/10/2014 2:07 PM

1.3.3 Interestingly 14 respondents believe they have enough time for scrutiny. The majority of those who answered the survey believed that the number of scrutiny committees and frequency of meetings is right.

1.3.4 With regard to question 8 any comments on the system, the following comments were received:

Return to the committee system.

2/19/2014 10:50 AM

Are Cabinet members obliged to attend their relevant Scrutiny meetings? Should be an essential if not.

2/14/2014 2:07 PM

Scrutiny is what members make it. If they want to be subservient, then that is how they'll be. But, if they want to take responsibility and bite the bullet - they can (and should) do that.

2/12/2014 9:41 AM

Scrutiny uninspiring

2/11/2014 9:13 AM

Under Item 6 I believe at least one Scrutiny Committee has grown in stature and been accepted by outside bodies as progressive and determined to improve the functions of the Borough.

No

2/10/2014 3:36 PM

Re q 8 - it depends entirely on the subject matter as to the frequency and length of meetings Re q 8 frequency of meetings should be dictated by each subject being discussed

2/10/2014 2:22 PM



No

2/10/2014 2:07 PM

1.3.5 The Scrutiny Coordinating Committee reviewed the progress made with the recommendations for the enhanced model and their findings are outlined below:

Recommendation	Progress
a) Option B, be agreed with four Overview and Scrutiny Committees meeting on a calendar monthly cycle for the 2013/14 Municipal Year. Scrutiny Coordinating Committee to monitor and review this. b) Cabinet should revisit its portfolios to avoid overlap, for example Cobtree and Maidstone Leisure Centre between the Economic and Commercial Development and Community and Leisure Services Portfolios.	Put in place. The portfolios have not been reviewed.
c) Spatial Planning Advisory Group and the Housing Consultative Board be subsumed into scrutiny to avoid duplication and strengthen the scrutiny process.	This has happened.
d) A phased approach is taken to the induction for new Members e) Information supplied to new Members is accessible including contact details for key staff and information on the services provided by the Council, and who to contact regarding those services and alignment to Cabinet Portfolios. f) A glossary of acronyms and terminology and a Frequently Asked Questions list be made available to all Members using the expertise of current Members to identify common areas. g) The development needs for scrutiny and an appropriate	Democratic services have been reviewing the induction process with learning and development. It will be improved as per the recommendations. The glossary has not been developed, the policy team have been asked to action this as soon as possible. This has happened, the Scrutiny officer identified with Chairmen appropriate

<p>programme be developed by the Overview and Scrutiny Chairmen and the Scrutiny Team. This could include an annual event with other Councils and use of the Parliamentary Outreach support.</p> <p>h) All new Members to attend a scrutiny committee meeting as part of the induction process.</p> <p>i) Mentoring of Members be encouraged.</p> <p>j) Each Overview and Scrutiny Committee to identify development needs at the beginning of the year and then on a quarterly basis via the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee.</p>	<p>training.</p> <p>This has been included in the induction programme 2014.</p> <p>For Groups.</p> <p>This has happened.</p>
<p>k) Cabinet Members attend Committee meetings to present completed Scrutiny Committee Recommendation Action Improvement Plans and the action that will be taken following recommendations; and</p> <p>l) The Scrutiny Coordinating Committee meet quarterly and monitor Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommendations as part of its role.</p>	<p>Cabinet members have been invited to update the committee on the progress of actions following review work.</p> <p>The Coordinating Committee have met twice this year at each meeting they have considered the progress of recommendations.</p>
<p>m) Cabinet Member decision reports are amended so they contain contact details for the Cabinet Member and Officer.</p> <p>n) Cabinet Members make themselves available to discuss forthcoming decisions with Members.</p> <p>o) The decision notice for Cabinet Member decisions contains a section summarising any views put forward by other members on the decision and how these have been taken into account in the decision.</p> <p>p) That Overview and Scrutiny Chairmen be encouraged to include visiting members at committee meetings.</p> <p>q) Cabinet Members seek to involve scrutiny pre decision wherever possible</p>	<p>This has not been included to date.</p> <p>Cabinet Members are available.</p> <p>No views have been put into reports but it is not clear whether any Members have tried to put views forward for consideration by Cabinet.</p> <p>The rules on visiting members have been updated and Chairmen have taken this on board.</p> <p>This has happened, however, it is not across the board.</p>

r) That Party/Group Leaders continue to improve the appointment process to Overview and Scrutiny Committees to encourage the right Members	Scrutiny Chairmen indicated this had been improved.
s) pre-meetings be used for Overview and Scrutiny Committees where appropriate.	This has happened where the Chairman has identified it to be appropriate.
t) Cabinet Members attend scrutiny at three points during the year to discuss their portfolio and progress made.	This has happened with varying degrees of success.
u) That each Overview and Scrutiny Committee meet individually to set their work programme with the relevant Cabinet Members invited to give their forward plan for the year ahead. v) The Scrutiny Coordinating Committee meet following the individual Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings to review the work programmes to address overlap and identify opportunities for joint working.	This has happened. This has happened.
w) Scrutiny remain with Policy because there is a natural synergy between the two services and closer matching of skills than in Democratic Services	This has remained the case and policy officers have assisted with scrutiny as 1 scrutiny officer can not support four scrutiny committees effectively. Democratic services have assisted with scrutiny meetings as well. With four committees meeting monthly plus additional meetings this support was welcomed and required.

Public Meetings

- 1.3.6 The Corporate Governance Working group has considered the requirement to hold two public debate meetings per year as outlined in the Council's Constitution. This follows the review of the annual governance statement 2012/13 which identified that these meetings have not been held for a number of years.
- 1.3.7 The Council is looking at how we engage with residents and the new communication and engagement plan for 2014/15 identifies communication activities for the next year. Within the plan we identify

whether the purpose of the activity is to engage/inform or consult to indicate the different levels of resident engagement.

1.3.8 There are examples of good engagement with individual services across the council for example a recent project with schools on litter whereby young people were given access to funding to implement their own ideas to reduce litter. We also have a number of activities where by residents and businesses can engage on decisions relating to key issues such as the Local Plan, the New Economic Development Strategy and our New Strategic Plan including the recent residents survey.

1.4 Alternative Action and why not Recommended

1.4.1 The Committee could choose not to review public meetings or the enhanced scrutiny model, however, both areas strongly link to the Committee's governance responsibilities

1.5 Impact on Corporate Objectives

1.5.1 Strong governance and good engagement is critical to the achievement of the Council's corporate priorities.

1.6 Risk Management

1.6.1 If the Council has a governance model which is not fit for purpose there will not be an effective check and balance on those making decisions.

1.7 Other Implications

1.7.1

1. Financial	
2. Staffing	
3. Legal	x
4. Equality Impact Needs Assessment	
5. Environmental/Sustainable Development	
6. Community Safety	
7. Human Rights Act	
8. Procurement	

9. Asset Management

1.7.2 Legal

If the decision is made not to continue with public debate meetings then the constitution will need to be amended to reflect this.

1.8 Relevant Documents

1.8.1 Appendices

Appendix A – Enhanced Scrutiny Model – Scrutiny Coordinating Committee Report

<u>IS THIS A KEY DECISION REPORT?</u>		<u>THIS BOX MUST BE COMPLETED</u>	
Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If yes, this is a Key Decision because:			
.....			
Wards/Parishes affected:			
.....			