

CABINET MEETING

22ND JUNE 2006

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. REVIEW OF SCRUTINY

1.1 Purpose of Report

To bring before the Cabinet the recommendations made following the review of the scrutiny process.

1.2 Background

1.2.1 The Review of Scrutiny was commissioned by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board (OSMB) to:

- Evaluate the effectiveness of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny arrangements
- Identify examples of best practice
- Highlight areas for development
- Propose a set of improvement measures based on Councillors' demands

1.2.2 The OSMB appointed a Working Group of three Councillors for the course of this project. The Working Group reported to OSMB in April 2006.

1.3 Key Findings

1.3.1 The role and function of Scrutiny as set out in the Council's Constitution was endorsed. The objective of Scrutiny is to make a positive contribution to the delivery of efficient and effective services that meet the needs and aspirations of local people.

1.3.2 The scope of Scrutiny will continually evolve in response to future changes in the way the Council delivers its services to local people. There may be a case in the future for considering changes to the structure of the Scrutiny Boards however the Group believed that at present this would be premature.

1.3.3 The setting and effective management of an appropriate work programme is one of the keys to success. The recommendations made look to ensure that the work of the Scrutiny Boards take account of corporate priorities and emphasise the need to more tightly define the scope of scrutiny reviews.

1.3.4 There had been some examples of good practice in scrutiny at Solihull and the Group made recommendations relating to these examples to ensure the continuing development of different techniques and ways of working. Member leadership and ownership of the Scrutiny process is considered to be particularly important in this context.

1.3.5 It was considered that communication between the Cabinet and the Scrutiny Boards could be improved so that they are both fully aware of each other's priorities and work programmes. It is recommended that regular meetings be held between Scrutiny and the Cabinet to facilitate this process.

- 1.3.6 Recommendations were made to ensure that Scrutiny Boards continue to develop ways of engaging the local community in their work, including holding meetings in venues away from the Civic Suite, and considering ad hoc co-option of individuals to take part in specific pieces of work.
- 1.3.7 Finally, it was recommended that training should be offered both to Members and Officers in order to develop skills and raise awareness of the Scrutiny role.
- 1.3.8 The Board supported these findings.

1.4 Financial Implications

- 1.4.1 There may be some cost implications inherent in these recommendations, for example, costs incurred in meeting away from the Civic suite.

1.5 Risk Implications

- 1.5.1 The Corporate Risk Management Approach has been complied with.
- 1.5.2 This assessment identified there are no net "red" risks that need to be reported.

1.6 Consultation Undertaken

- 1.6.1 The review included a postal questionnaire, providing an initial analysis to gauge Solihull MBC Councillors' ideal expectations and current perceptions of the Scrutiny arrangements. Desk-based analysis was carried out using documents such as Overview and Scrutiny reports, Cabinet reports, the scrutiny annual report and press releases.
- 1.6.2 Data was measured against a series of indicators used by national research to evaluate the effectiveness of overview and scrutiny.
- 1.6.3 Semi-structured interviews were held with Overview and Scrutiny Chairmen, Vice Chairmen, and Spokesmen, Cabinet Members, Chief Executive, Lead Officers and regular scrutiny witnesses.

1.7 Equality and Diversity Implications

- 1.7.1 There are no direct equality or diversity implications.

1.8 Background Papers

- 1.8.1 Published minutes of the Overview & Scrutiny Management Board.

FOR DECISION

The Cabinet is asked to consider the following recommendations made by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board:-

Setting the Work Programme

- R1 Scrutiny Work programmes should reflect the Council's priorities and each Board's programme should include one item for scrutiny per year drawn from the Council's objectives

- R2 To encourage more proactive working, each Board should monitor that part of the Cabinet Forward Plan relevant to their remit, selecting items for scrutiny as appropriate
- R3 Scrutiny Boards should develop a 'Cabinet style' forward plan to be reviewed on a quarterly basis
- R4 The outgoing Boards should set a provisional work programme for the newly appointed Boards for the first quarter of the forthcoming year

Ways of Working

- R5 Before each Scrutiny Board agenda is prepared the Chairman and Spokespersons should meet with the Scrutiny Officer to determine the structure of the meeting
- R6 To promote all party working in Scrutiny, any alterations to the Work Programme and pre-agenda meeting preparation will be decided by the Chairman in consultation with the Group Spokespersons and facilitated by the Scrutiny Officer
- R7 Scrutiny Boards should use the Scrutiny review scoping template to identify the objective of a review and define the way they wish to look at issues under review
- R8 Task and Finish Groups/ Working Groups should have a start and end date planned at the time of project initiation and must have a clearly stated objective
- R9 All Scrutiny Boards should be encouraged to experiment with different ways of working and develop and disseminate examples of good practice to other Scrutiny Boards
- R10 Individual Scrutiny Councillors or small working groups should be nominated to lead on specific items for scrutiny, working independently or with officers between meetings, so that they can report back to the Scrutiny Board. This could be an oral report, a presentation or a written report

Relationship with the Executive

- R11 It should be adopted as good practice that Scrutiny Chairmen are able to present their Boards' reports and recommendations to Cabinet at the appropriate time
- R12 Quarterly meetings should be held between the Cabinet and Scrutiny Chairmen to encourage collaborative working

Engaging the Public and Partners

- R13 There are examples of good practice of holding meetings away from the Civic Suite to make them more accessible to people; this good practice should be continued where appropriate
- R14 Opportunities should be sought, during the scoping of scrutiny reviews, to involve members of the community in the scrutiny process
- R15 Ad hoc co-option should be considered on a subject by subject basis as appropriate

R16 External organizations that deliver or provide services to Solihull MBC residents should be scrutinized

Support and Training

R17 The Group recognises that there is an ongoing need for training and awareness raising among both Members and officers, and recommend that training is provided in conjunction with the Member Development Programme