

13 June 2011

Consideration of Panel Work Programme for 2011/12

Ward(s) All

Portfolio Holders: Councillor A. Andrew - Regeneration

Summary of report:

The purpose of this report is to provide relevant background information for Members so that the Panels work programme can be agreed for 2011/12.

It is important for Members to consider the wide range of potential issues within their remits that they could consider during the year which could range from council specific to completely external issues.

When agreeing items it is important that consideration is given to what value the Panel can add and what tools and performance measures are available to support them in their work.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That Member's consider the range of items within their remit available to them and agree a work programme for 2011/12 along with any potential working groups and their membership.

Background papers:

Scrutiny Annual Report 2010/11
Minutes of previous meetings

Resource and legal considerations:

In terms of resources it is important that the right balance and number of items and working groups are selected so that the work programme can be completed during the year without placing undue pressure on Member capacity.

Legal considerations for specific items will need to be addressed as and when necessary based on the items that are selected for inclusion on the work programme.

Citizen impact:

An effective work programme will enable the Panel to focus its work on the most important issues within its remit. Consideration of these issues and subsequent recommendations, if accepted, could improve the quality of services delivered to local residents.

Environmental impact:

The level of environmental impact will be dependant on which issues are selected to become a part of the panels work programme for 2011/12. The borough's Sustainable Community Strategy places an importance on considering the impact of present decisions on future generations which includes environmental issues.

Performance management:

The report asks Members to consider performance management information when deciding on their work programme, and also to consider how they wish to use performance management information and tools in assisting them with their work over the course of the year.

Equality Implications:

Ensuring equality for all is a key theme in the boroughs Sustainable Community Strategy as well as being one of the Council's core values. Members are advised to consider what, if any, equality implications there are for any items on their work programme.

Consultation:

Members may wish to consider the results of any formal or informal consultation exercises, including that with the public and partners, when considering what items they wish to include in their work programme. Whilst Council officers carry out a range of consultation activity on behalf of the Council, Members themselves engage with the public on a much more frequent basis and it is valuable to consider feedback from these sources as well.

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Introduction

At the start of each municipal year it is good practice for scrutiny and performance panels to spend some time discussing and agreeing its work programme for the year ahead for issues within its remit.

As Members will already be aware scrutiny and performance panel remits were amended by Council at its meeting on 23 and 25 May 2011. For information the Panels remit in Article 6 of the Walsall Council Constitution now reads as:

Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel

All aspects and general services related to regeneration for example: economic, environmental and physical regeneration, planning, land and property, partnership working and strategic housing matters within the functions set out in section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000.

Work Programme

In agreeing its work programme for 2011/12 the Panel will be informed from a range of sources, including all 60 Members, last years Panel work streams and suggested carry over items, Council Officers, and Partners.

When agreeing the items to be included in its work programme focus should be given to the range of performance management information available that could assist the Panel with each particular issue. A whole host of performance information is available on a range of subjects that Members could utilise to measure success or otherwise.

Working Groups

Members need to decide whether they want to operate any working groups for this year. Working Groups are at their most effective when they are considering broad policy areas that require detailed investigation time that cannot be completed at Panel level. The Panel will set the working group remit, its membership and once a working group has completed its investigations it will report its findings and recommendations to the Panel for consideration and adoption.

It is very important that Member capacity is considered when deciding on what working groups are formed as many members sit on more than one panel and their respective working groups. As such getting suitable dates in the municipal diary and getting suitable attendance at those meetings is difficult if too many working groups are formed. In previous years experience and given the number of Panel's in this years municipal diary, it is suggested that each Panel should look to operate one working group at any one time. Panels that wish to operate more than working group during the year should timetable the second to start as the first finishes.

A copy of the councils working group toolkit has been despatched separately to Members and is available to members of the public by request. Member's are asked to familiarise themselves with this toolkit ahead of deciding what, if any, working groups they wish to run.

Value for Money Service Reviews

The Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel has developed a value for money (vfm) toolkit to assist Members if it is decided to complete a service review. Previously, the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel used the value for money toolkit to review the Councils Communication and Payroll and Pensions services. The two reviews were well received by both Members and Officers and resulted in positive recommendations for both services. The Corporate Panel recommended that other Panel's also look to use this toolkit and this recommendation was endorsed by the scrutiny working group of Chair's and Vice-Chairs.

The vfm assessment tool provides a framework for members in partnership with services to work through and is divided into 3 broad themes:

1. What does it cost to provide this service? (economy)
2. How is this service performing? (efficiency)
3. What quality is the service being provided? (effectiveness)

For each of these themes there is the opportunity/potential for scrutiny panels with the service being assessed to benchmark with other service providers to give a clearer picture of relative performance.

The aim is that on completing this assessment scrutiny members will be able to make a judgement regarding the vfm provided by the service and identify and recommend any potential further action.

The vfm toolkit can be used to support the investigations of working groups or independently. When used independently the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel appointed a lead member who liaised with the service area whilst the toolkit is completed and then reports back their findings to the Panel for agreement of recommendations and any other further action that may be necessary.

Appendices

Suggested Items

Appendix One contains a number of suggested items completed on a standard template to assist Members with deciding what they wish to include on their work programme. This template requires the following points to be considered-

- ø **What the Issue Is**
- ø **Where it has come from-** for example it could be a carry over item from last year's panel, a suggestion from a Councillor or member of the public or it could be a new item officers are aware of that is coming up this year,
- ø **Why it is important-** with limited time available to Members they need to be able to prioritise their work and concentrate on those things that really matter.
- ø **Who it affects-** Does it impact on any particular ward or user group? Does it concern partner agencies or staff groups? Any potential equalities issues may be highlighted here if the item is likely to have a disproportionate affect on any particular group.
- ø **How can scrutiny add value-** What specifically can Scrutiny do? E.g. provide feedback and recommendations ahead of a Cabinet (or partner executive) decision, support the development of policy, service review, public engagement etc. Suggestions have also been made here for if the item is particularly suited to a particular method of scrutiny such as a working group or value for money review.
- ø **Timings-** This will highlight any critical timings that would need to be taken into consideration such as statutory deadlines which would dictate when scrutiny would need to have considered the item by if they are to have any valuable input

The items highlighted at appendix one are not an exhaustive list, but only those that it is possible to provide in advance of the meeting. Members should consider these alongside any items they wish to raise themselves and use them to develop a balanced work programme that concentrates on what is important to them and on where they believe they can make a difference.

Appendix Two is a copy of the forward plan for May to September 2011.

Appendix Three is the outcome of the suggested items from the scrutiny survey that fall in the remit of the Panel.

Proposed Items for Scrutiny Work Programme

Issue	Housing strategy					
Who from	Previous years panel	Individual Member	Officer	Public	Other Council Committee	Other
Why is it important?	<p>The Council is responsible for the preparation of a Housing Strategy which assesses housing needs in the area, across all tenures. Although the Council produces it, it is a result of working together with other housing providers, services within the Council, agencies such as NHS and the public. It is a planning document. Its purpose is to set out how we intend to tackle housing problems within Walsall. It sets out what needs to be done to alleviate the housing problems in Walsall, the resources that are needed and the time in which the various tasks need to be completed.</p>					
Who does it affect?	Everyone in housing need.					
Who needs to be involved?	Comments will be sought from members of the public, housing providers, social care and children's directorates and the voluntary sector.					
How can scrutiny add value?	Scrutiny will be able to comment of the direction of the strategy and take an objective approach as to whether the document delivers the right approach to meeting the housing needs of the residents of Walsall.					
Timings	The strategy will be completed for public consultation at the end of June 2011, before going to September cabinet.					

Corporate Priority	Community and neighbourhoods Health and well being

Proposed Items for Scrutiny Work Programme

Issue	Monitoring the implementation of the recommendations of the Business Start Up Working Group					
Who from	Previous years panel	Individual Member	Officer	Public	Other Council Committee	Other
Why is it important?	<p>The Business Start Up Working Group made a series of recommendations in April 2011 that would seek to improve the number of business start ups in the borough. These recommendations are likely to be reported to Cabinet in July.</p> <p>It is important that Scrutiny and Performance Panels review the outcome of recommendations reported to Cabinet as part of their role of holding the executive to account and providing critical friend challenge to policy and decision makers.</p>					
Who does it affect?	All residents					
Who needs to be involved?	Scrutiny Members and relevant portfolio holder.					
How can scrutiny add value?	It is important that Scrutiny and Performance Panels review the outcome of recommendations reported to Cabinet as part of their role of holding the executive to account and providing critical friend challenge to policy and decision makers.					
Timings	<p>At least six months after reporting to Cabinet.</p> <p>Potentially 19 January 2012.</p>					
Corporate	Economic					

Priority	
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Proposed Items for Scrutiny Work Programme

Issue	Impact of the Localism Bill – David Elsworthy (Mike Smith)					
Who from	Previous years panel ✓	Individual Member	Officer	Public	Other Council Committee	Other
Why is it important?	<p>The Localism Bill currently proposes major changes in respect of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the roles and responsibilities of local authorities; - the 'empowerment' of communities; - the operation of local authority housing functions; and - the operation of local authority town planning functions and the introduction of 'neighbourhood planning'. 					
Who does it affect?	<p>All of those concerned with the operation of council services and relationships with other bodies and with local communities.</p> <p>Local communities and businesses (not just in the Borough, but across England).</p>					
Who needs to be involved?	Officers from the Regeneration Directorate, plus Legal & Constitutional Services.					
How can scrutiny add value?	Scrutiny can consider the implications of the emerging legislation in detail and make recommendations to Cabinet to inform any possible council response and council involvement in contributions from others (such as representations from the Local Government association or responses from Walsall Chamber of Commerce to approaches by Government).					
Timings	<p>When it published the Bill in December 2010 the Government said it wanted to have the Bill receive Royal assent before the end of 2011. This is now looking uncertain as the Bill has generated considerable controversy and many amendments are being considered. The passage of the Bill through Parliament is recorded at: http://services.parliament.uk/bills/</p>					

	2010-11/localism.html The Bill will have to go through a Committee Stage and 3 rd reading in the Lords before final consideration of the draft legislation. It would be appropriate to review whether a presentation to Scrutiny Panel should be scheduled for 22 September 2011.
Corporate Priority	<p>The vision in the Regeneration Portfolio Medium Term Service Plan is <i>"To achieve the sustainable development and regeneration of the Borough of Walsall for the benefit of our diverse communities"</i>, and the Council's corporate objectives now concentrate on health and well-being, neighbourhoods and community, and the economy. It remains to be seen how the proposals of the Localism Bill and other 'reforms' fit with these objectives.</p>

Proposed Items for Scrutiny Work Programme

Issue	Employment Support – Understanding the support available for local people to gain employment and for local businesses to create jobs.					
Who from	Previous years panel x	Individual Member	Officer	Public	Other Council Committee	Other
Why is it important?	<p>Walsall's economy is suffering more than most due to a range of factors set out within the Local Economic Assessment (LEA). Some of the key issues include; Addressing Worklessness and supporting employers to grow and thrive etc.</p> <p>Our WNF programme is one of the key funding streams that aims to support these agenda's, together with other complementary programmes. This is a vital avenue for local people to access employment and for businesses to create jobs.</p> <p>With the advent of the Governments new Work Programme and the new ESF funding, we will now have a significant new supply chain operating throughout Walsall. It's key that scrutiny panel understands the nature and scope of this intervention against the scale of the problem.</p>					
Who does it affect?	All companies and residents of Walsall					
Who needs to be involved?	Key members, officers and partners.					
How can scrutiny add value?	Understanding the key issues and the variety of funding and support available throughout Walsall. Then commenting on and shape solutions, together with scrutinising the scale of the issues against the levels of intervention.					

Timings	On-going throughout the year, reviewed half yearly with reports brought to appropriate meetings etc.
Corporate Priority	Yes – The Economy

Proposed Items for Scrutiny Work Programme

Issue	Walsall's Economy – The Local Economic Assessment (LEA)					
Who from	Previous years panel x	Individual Member	Officer	Public	Other Council Committee	Other
Why is it important?	Walsall's economy is suffering more than most due to a range of factors set out within the Local Economic Assessment (LEA). We now need to utilise this understanding to shape solutions / work streams, which start to frame out how we and our partners could start to address this economic decline. These will be formed and captured within the Walsall Economic Framework. If we do not address this, we are in danger of sustained economic decline.					
Who does it affect?	All companies and residents of Walsall					
Who needs to be involved?	Key members, officers and partners.					
How can scrutiny add value?	Understanding the key issues, helping to comment on and shape solutions, together with scrutinising the scale of the issues against the levels of intervention.					
Timings	On-going throughout the year, reviewed quarterly with reports brought to appropriate meetings etc.					
Corporate	Yes – The Economy					

Priority	
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