

15 June 2010

Consideration of Panel Work Programme for 2010/11

Ward(s) All

Portfolio Holders:

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 2010/11.

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 2010/11 along with any potential working groups and their membership.

Background papers:

Scrutiny Annual Report 2009/10
Minutes of previous meetings
Citizen Panel Consultations

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 2010/11. 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 and Local Area Agreement 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 24 and 26 May 2010. For information the Panels remit in Article 6 of the Walsall Council Constitution now reads as:

Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel

All aspects and general services related to the Councils corporate centre for example; financial services including the annual budget process and the Council wide financial position, corporate performance management, legal and constitutional services, services falling within the Councils transformation agenda within the functions set out in Section 21 of the Local Government Act, 2000.

Work Programme

In agreeing its work programme for 2010/11 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, Partners and the Public.

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 increased number of Panel's in this years municipal diary, it is suggested that each Panel should look to run only one working group at any one time. Panels that wish to operate more than working group during the year could 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. Last year 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

Appendix 1: RESIDENT CONSULTATION ACTIVITY FINDINGS

This briefing note sets out findings from the local place survey and budget consultation. Members may wish to consider the findings of this community engagement work and use it to influence the selection of work programme topics.

Further to this is a series of tables illustrating the outcome of the place survey consultation by question and neighbourhood management areas.

Suggested Items

Appendix Two 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-

- o **What the Issue Is**
- o **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,
- o **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.
- o **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.
- o **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.
- o **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
- o **Performance Information-** This includes any relevant performance indicators that can provide Members with a guide on current levels of performance and also give a benchmark to measure future improvement.

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 Three is a copy of the forward plan for May to September 2010.

Appendix Four is the outcome of a recent public survey on what local residents believe scrutiny and performance panels should consider. The survey closed on 31 May 2010 so the results of the survey will be tabled at the meeting.

BRIEFING NOTE**TO: COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL****DATE: 8 JUNE 2010****RE: RESIDENT CONSULTATION ACTIVITY FINDINGS****Purpose**

To inform the Panel regarding recent consultation activity which provides guidance regarding local residents views on what should be the council's priorities. The Panel may choose to use this guidance to inform their decisions in relation to the work programme for this year.

Consultation activity

A budget consultation event was held in October 2009. The attendees heard about the council's budget setting process as well as current and future spending and savings targets. Through informal discussion in small groups, local residents had the opportunity to give their views as to what should be the council's spending priorities for the coming financial year. In addition, between September and December 2008 the national Place Survey was undertaken. This was a statutory consultation used to identify, from the perspective of local residents, priorities for Walsall.

Findings**Budget consultation October 2009:**

Event attendees wanted a borough to be proud of, one where people respect one another and their surroundings, is safe, clean and easy to get around. Where young people and adults are aspiring and do well in education and training. Whilst continuing to deliver services to those who are vulnerable, attendees want to see a greater allocation of money to make the borough a more attractive place to live in, with the regeneration of all areas not just Walsall town centre. Clean streets and level of crime are both important to local quality of life.

The Place Survey 2008:

Respondents identified the following top 5 priorities for improvement:

- Activities for teenagers;
- Road and pavement repairs;
- Level of crime;
- Clean streets;
- Level of traffic congestion.

Respondents identified the following top 5 issues as most important for quality of life:

- Level of crime;
- Clean streets;
- Health Services;

- Affordable decent homes;
- Public transport.

A number of other issues and concerns were raised by respondents:

- Anti-social behaviour remains a concern for residents, with many feeling a lack of activities for children and young people in need of improvement;
- Residents want to see continued regeneration of the borough with a focus on stimulating a thriving economy. Residents are concerned that about the job situation and ensuring that buildings are not left derelict, and that empty shops are reused. Residents want to see investment across the whole borough;
- Investment and regeneration is thought to be a key catalyst for prompting community spirit and proactive behaviour, whilst also helping raise the aspirations of residents and the feeling of pride;
- Whilst views about the impact of the new Walsall ring road are generally divided, residents feel that further improvements to transport links and services could be made. Walsall bus station and town centre car parking being highlighted as particular areas requiring attention;
- Residents want a borough that is clean and tidy, a borough they can feel proud of. Litter picking and street sweeping in all areas of the borough is important to residents, as well as targeting run down areas and maintaining the borough's roads, pavements and footpaths;
- Whilst residents feel it is important to ensure a clean and green borough, it should not be at the detriment of other critical services e.g. care for the vulnerable, adults and children, which are seen as a priority. Residents are worried that cuts may lead to reduced services which then impact on the most vulnerable. Maintaining quality services, particularly in the current economic climate and the years ahead is of vital importance;
- Throughout the challenging economic climate, supporting people when they need it most and the delivery of preventative services is seen by some as a key area for investment. The community and voluntary sector want the council working hard to support families throughout the borough to help prevent them breaking down and prioritising those most at risk from harm;
- Investing in education is a top priority for many, particularly basic skills and life-long learning. Libraries are seen as a potentially vital resource;
- Concerns were expressed that young professionals and graduates may not take up jobs here. Regenerating the borough so that it is attractive to young qualified professionals and businesses is seen as a priority;
- When recruiting staff, businesses most frequently state that accessing the right higher level skills, lack of basic skills and recruitment costs are barriers;
- Businesses identify costs in the form of overheads including business rates, high cost of energy and premises costs as barriers to operating in the borough;
- Residents and representatives from the community and voluntary sector feel that there are emerging opportunities arising from the current economic climate. Investing in and supporting volunteering opportunities in the borough and working more closely with the voluntary sector was thought to offer many benefits and cost savings;

Appendix 1

- There is widespread consensus that the council needs to do more to tap into the expertise, knowledge and skills of the community and voluntary sector, which would in turn help the council achieve its efficiency targets and help this sector survive.
- Residents expressed the view that they were generally unable to influence decisions in their local area;
- Considering the role of local people in decision-making, a majority of respondents to the Place Survey feel that they currently are not adequately informed about local public services. Research has highlighted the link between the extent to which residents are informed about local services and their level of satisfaction;
- Representatives from the community and voluntary sector feel that local people don't adequately understand what services the council provides. Having a better understanding is thought to benefit local people and the council;
- There was strong consensus that working more closely with the community and voluntary sector is very important and that this sector can help spread information about council services to the people and communities they work with.

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Proposed Items for Scrutiny Work Programme

Issue	Working Smarter: A new and substantial change programme having widespread impact on the council's organisational design and service delivery mechanisms. A means of securing the £60m budget savings of the next few years.					
Who from	Previous years panel	Individual Member	Officer	Public	Other Council Committee	Other
Why is it important?	<p>This programme will enable the council to achieve the draft organisational purpose as set out by the Cabinet Members who were at the Leadership event in Blakenhall Village Centre in May. That is:</p> <p>Maintain and improve the physical and economic environment for the health and wellbeing of all our residents within financial constraints. Operate efficiently and collaborating within a one council model and with partners to ensure value for money for tax payers and other funders.</p> <p>This is a draft organisational purpose as it has yet to be approved by Cabinet, the Conservative Group and Council.</p>					
Who does it affect?	<p>The programme will have wide-ranging impact. The proposed lead objectives and areas of main focus and effort for Working Smarter are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximise the value and efficiency in vital council services for the benefit of customers; to enable • The council to set a budget within resources available • Develop a new operating model and system design for the council. 					
Who needs to be involved?	Working Smarter has already engaged the Leader and Cabinet; the Chief Executive; all executive directors and assistant directors. Given the scope and likely complexity of the changes that may emerge, full engagement across the Council is essential.					
How can scrutiny add	Provide a forum for communication, debate and challenge.					

value?	
Timings	Due to the significance of this agenda Members should consider the need to timetable consideration of this item at the majority of their meetings throughout 2010/11.
Performance Information	<i>This programme supports the current requirement to reduce the council's budget by £60m over the next 5 years.</i>

Proposed Items for Scrutiny Work Programme

Issue	Overview of Local Area Agreement					
Who from	Previous years panel	Individual Member	Officer	Public	Other Council Committee	Other
Why is it important?	The Local Area Agreement (LAA) is the delivery vehicle for Walsall's Sustainable Community Strategy and sets out the strategic targets for the local area. Successful achievement of the targets in the LAA will result in positive outcomes for Walsall and create 'a great place to live, work and invest'.					
Who does it affect?	All residents					
Who needs to be involved?	Walsall Partnership Officers					
How can scrutiny add value?	By taking an overview of the LAA the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panels can monitor progress with the achievement of these important aims and refer poorly performing areas to relevant scrutiny and performance panels for more detailed investigations.					
Timings	At intervals to be agreed by Members. LAA performance is updated quarterly, however, information for different indicators is collected at different periods, for example, quarterly or annually.					
Corporate Priorities	Pride in Walsall Improving Health Reducing Crime and Feeling Safe Developing Strong and Dynamic Communities Improving Education and Skills			Improving Housing Choice Improving the Quality of our Environment Reducing Worklessness and Creating Opportunity and Potential Increasing Enterprise and Making Walsall a Vibrant		

	Borough Working Smarter
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Proposed Items for Scrutiny Work Programme

Issue	Recommendations made by the Previous Panel					
Who from	Previous years panel	Individual Member	Officer	Public	Other Council Committee	Other
Why is it important?	<p>It is important that scrutiny and performance panels revisit previous recommendations that they have made to ensure that suitable action has taken place on the topics concerned.</p> <p>Previously considered topics that Members may wish to revisit include:</p> <p>Welfare Advice Working Group Recommendations Print and Design value for money review recommendations Procurement value for money review recommendations</p>					
Who does it affect?	All residents					
Who needs to be involved?	Varies by topic, typically council officers, partners and stakeholders.					
How can scrutiny add value?	Scrutiny can add value by maintaining momentum and progress in topics that they've previously considered.					
Timings	TBC					