

SCRUTINY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

15 SEPTEMBER, 2015 AT 6.00 P.M. AT THE COUNCIL HOUSE

Panel Members Present

- Councillor J. Murray (Chair)
- Councillor R. Burley
- Councillor B. Douglas -Maul
- Councillor E. Hazell
- Councillor M. Longhi
- Councillor M. Nazir
- Councillor I. Shires
- Councillor P. Smith
- Councillor P. Washbrook

Portfolio Holders: Councillor E. Hughes (Care and Safeguarding)

Officers Present:

- Rory Borealis - Executive Director (Change and Governance)
- Neil Picken – Senior Committee Business and Governance Manager

9/15 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Councillor Robertson.

10/15 SUBSTITUTIONS

None.

11/15 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest or party whip identified at this meeting.

12/15 MINUTES

Members considered the minutes of the meetings held on 6 July, 2015.

Councillor Nazir stated that he was present at the meeting but this was not reflected in the minutes.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 July, 2015, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record, subject to Councillor Nazir being added to the list of Panel Members present.

13/15 **FEEDBACK FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEE CHAIRS**

The Chair of each Scrutiny Committee provided feedback on the recent round of meetings.

The recommendations of the Scrutiny Overview Committee held on 6 July, 2015, were debated.

The main discussion points included:-

- The revised layout was generally accepted as a positive change but required tweaking to iron out minor issues. It was suggested that the 'horseshoe' be orientated toward the projection screen as this would improve the Chairs visibility of proceedings;
- The increased emphasis on Portfolio Holders was positive. It was important that Portfolio Holders are held to account, however, it was also important to allow them to request senior officers to contribute, as and when required;
- It was accepted that the layout could be intimidating for external witnesses but recognised that this was appropriate in certain situations. The Chair had a role in ensuring that witnesses were made to feel comfortable.

Resolved:

1. That the Chair of the Scrutiny Overview Committee writes to Cabinet Members for feedback on the new arrangements;
2. That the layout be amended so that the 'horseshoe' faces the projector screen;
3. That the revised layout be implemented for a further cycle of meetings with feedback provided at the Scrutiny Overview Committee Meeting to be held on 1 December, 2015.

14/15 **RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCRUTINY AND THE EXECUTIVE**

Members considered a report [annexed] which clarified the purpose of Scrutiny, the operation of call-in and the relationship between Scrutiny and the Executive.

Members were reminded that any proposed amendments to the call-in process would require approval by Council.

A Member stated that call-in had not been used very often in Walsall and suggested that the number of call-ins should be increased. A Member suggested that the Chair of each Panel should be monitoring issues and be in a position to debate at Scrutiny before the decision is taken in order to influence the outcome. It was important to ensure that call-in does not become a political tool to create difficulties for the administration

A further Member referred to the level of resource available within the scrutiny team. In doing so he noted that the recommendation from the Leach report, which

suggested a £20k budget to appoint experts, when required, had not been adopted by the council. The work of the scrutiny team was praised, however, it was acknowledged that with the resource available, there was a limit to the level of support provided. It was suggested that a Policy Officer would be useful within the Democratic Services Team to provide further advice to Chairs of Scrutiny Committees. The Executive Director (Change and Governance) advised that it would be useful to ascertain whether the need for additional support could be met using existing resources within each directorate. He agreed to feedback the comments of the committee to the Corporate Management Team and report back to the next meeting.

A Member suggested that the Cabinet decision list, circulated to Members, was not sufficiently detailed in order for the Chair to decide whether or not to 'call-in' a matter. The Senior Committee Business and Governance Manager offered to email all scrutiny panel members with a link to Cabinet papers, once published on the committee management information website.

The Executive Director (Change and Governance) advised that call-in was often used as a last resort. Call in prevented a decision being implemented until it had been considered by the relevant scrutiny committee and so it was important that the decision to call in was not taken lightly.

A Member suggested that a sub-committee should be established purely to monitor the Executive and advise on call-in. Following debate, it was agreed that, whilst the idea was sound, it would be better seeking methods to improve the visibility of Executive decision making for all Scrutiny Councillors. To this end, it was suggested that an email to all councillors would be sent with links to the Cabinet papers and decisions. The Committee agreed to pilot this approach before making a decision on establishing a sub-committee.

The Senior Committee Business and Governance Manager suggested that Committees could look to appoint some of its Members as 'specialists' who would lead on certain areas at Committee, undertaking research and providing challenge. Appointing a number of specialists would ensure that the Committee was knowledgeable and able to provide effective challenge.

Resolved:

1. That the Senior Committee Business and Governance Manager sends a link to all Scrutiny Members once Cabinet papers become available on the Committee Management Information System;
2. That the Executive Director (Change and Governance) consult the Corporate Management Team on resourcing scrutiny and provide feedback to the next meeting of the Committee.

15/15 **AREAS OF FOCUS 2015/16**

Members considered the areas of focus for each of the Scrutiny Committees.

Members were keen that the Education and Children's Services Committee consider child sexual exploitation (CSE) at a future meeting.

The Senior Committee Business and Governance Manager advised that he would discuss the work programme together with timescales within which CSE would be discussed, with the Chair of the Committee, once appointed by Council.

Resolved:

That the Senior Committee Business and Governance Manager discuss the work programme with the Chair of the Education and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, once appointed by Council to agree timescales within which Child Sexual Exploitation would be discussed.

16/15 **FORWARD PLANS**

Members considered the forward plan of key decisions from Cabinet and the Black Country Joint Executive (annexed).

The Committee requested that details regarding the operation of call-in of key decisions of the Black Country Joint Executive, be submitted to the next meeting.

Resolved:

That a report on the procedure to call in of decisions of the Black Country Joint Executive be submitted to the next meeting.

17/15 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next meeting was noted as 1 December, 2015.

The meeting terminated at 7.40 p.m.

Chair:

Date:.....