

16 June 2011

Consideration of Panel Work Programme for 2011/12

Ward(s) All

Portfolio Holders: Councillor Ansell
Councillor Harris

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:

Environment Scrutiny and Performance Panel

All aspects and general services related to the environment such as waste management, highways maintenance, grounds maintenance and traffic management, and to review and scrutinise the exercise of flood risk management functions which may affect the local authority's area as required by the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 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, 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

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-

- 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.

- 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 it the item is particular 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 taking 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 June to September 2011.

Proposed Items for Scrutiny Work Programme

Issue	Waste Management					
Who from	Previous years panel	Individual Member	Officer	Public	Other Council Committee	Other
Why is it important?	<p>The Council is reviewing and updating its waste strategy and collection arrangements in association with new national guidelines and budget savings targets to become the cheapest spending metropolitan local authority by 2014.</p> <p>Scrutiny panel comments will be valuable in confirming the revised arrangements to be implemented before this date.</p>					
Who does it affect?	The revised waste strategy and collection arrangements will affect every resident within the borough					
Who needs to be involved?	All Scrutiny Panel Members with appropriate Waste Management Officers from within Street Pride					
How can scrutiny add value?	Scrutiny panel members will be able to use their experience and expertise to contribute to the proposed alterations to the waste collection service whilst considering the revised waste strategy guidelines and implications of budget reductions					
Timings	Revised waste strategy is anticipated in June 2011 with revised collection options available for consideration in July Scrutiny panel input will be required after this time					
Corporate Priority	Communities and Neighbourhoods					

Proposed Items for Scrutiny Work Programme

Issue	Flood Risk Management					
Who from	Previous years panel	Individual Member	Officer	Public	Other Council Committee	Other
Why is it important?	<p>Flooding itself has the potential to significantly impact on peoples' health and wellbeing, and can be devastating to businesses etc.</p> <p>Government have recently introduced new duties on some local authorities to manage surface water flood risk in their areas. Walsall has been identified as a Lead Local Flood Authority and one of the first duties has been to produce a draft Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment. This was approved by Cabinet in April and has now been formally submitted to the Environment Agency.</p>					
Who does it affect?	The report shows that there are areas of Walsall that could be significantly affected by flooding. This is spread across the borough and could therefore affect a large percentage of the borough's residents.					
Who needs to be involved?	<p>Members of the scrutiny Panel</p> <p>Portfolio Holder for Environment</p> <p>Relevant Officers</p>					
How can scrutiny add value?	By reviewing how officers are dealing with the new duties and add comments and issues that will help steer the delivery of the service.					
Timings	<p>The legal duties are being introduced on a rolling programme. DEFRA and the EA are due to approve the council's Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment in September 2011.</p>					

Corporate Priority	
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Proposed Items for Scrutiny Work Programme

Issue	Winter Service					
Who from	Previous years panel	Individual Member	Officer	Public	Other Council Committee	Other
Why is it important?	A report went to scrutiny earlier in the year to explain that due to a change of depot it was an opportune time to review the winter service provision. Scrutiny decided on a working party to look and report on any changes that were felt necessary.					
Who does it affect?	The winter maintenance service affects all residents of the borough.					
Who needs to be involved?	Members of the scrutiny panel and officers					
How can scrutiny add value?	To review the work by officers and add items or comments which will help delivery of the winter service.					
Timings	The work needs to be complete by the end of September 2011.					
Corporate						

Priority	
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