

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

Meeting held 24 September 2014

PRESENT: Councillors Chris Weldon (Chair), Sue Alston, Steve Ayriss, Denise Fox, Gill Furniss, Alan Law, Cate McDonald, Pat Midgley, Mick Rooney, Sarah Jane Smalley and Cliff Woodcraft

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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ian Auckland, Cate McDonald and Jackie Satur

2. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

2.1 No items were identified where a resolution may be moved to exclude the public and press.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3.1 There were no declarations of interest.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

4.1 The minutes of the previous meetings of the Committee held on 19 February and 4 June 2014 were approved as correct records.

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

5.1 Public Question in respect of the Scrutiny Review

Mr Alan Kewley referred to a question he had asked at the meeting of the Committee in April which enquired when the public and community groups would have the opportunity to be involved in the Scrutiny Review. James Henderson, Director of Policy, Performance and Communications had previously stated that the intention was to engage with the public and community groups further into the process.

The Leader of the Council had also previously emphasised the important role that Local Area Partnerships (LAPs) could play in public engagement. However, Mr Kewley believed that the LAPs were not working as they had been intended to. Therefore, there was a gap in how the public could be engaged with the Council.

5.2 Public Question in respect of Access to Information

Alan Kewley asked how public access to information could be improved. He commented that most of the time members of the public had to undertake a lot of work to get access to the information they required. When they did manage to

access the information it was often too little or too much. Information published also needed to contain more plain English language as it was often difficult to understand. Mr Kewley finally asked if it was within the remit of the newly appointed Head of Communications at the Council to improve communications with the public.

The Chair of the Committee, Councillor Chris Weldon, requested that answers to the questions be provided under item 8 'Scrutiny Review – Progress Report' and a written response be provided and circulated to members of the Committee.

5.3 Public Question in respect of Scrutiny Review

Mr Nigel Slack, speaking on behalf of Sheffield for Democracy, commented that the group had submitted information in the early stages of the Scrutiny Review. He welcomed the latest report, on the agenda for the meeting under item 8, particularly paragraphs 2.5 and 3.4. However, there were some concerns over community engagement. Mr Slack asked why the public were not more engaged with the LAPs. Mr Slack also questioned whether the membership of Scrutiny Committees could be revised, particularly where there was evidence of a Member conflict of interest. Mr Slack concluded by urging the Committee to ensure the Scrutiny Review was a continuing process and was regularly reviewed to enable Scrutiny to respond to current issues such as the Jay report. Mr Slack also made a plea that word documents were not uploaded in the doc.x format as this made them unable to be downloaded for users of older word formats.

Councillor Weldon asked that the issues be addressed under the Scrutiny Review Progress Report item.

6. **SCRUTINY REVIEW - PROGRESS REPORT**

- 6.1 The Director of Policy, Performance and Communications submitted a report in relation to progress in respect of the Scrutiny Review. During 2013/14 a review of the Council's Scrutiny function was undertaken, with the aim of improving the impact and effectiveness of Scrutiny. The report outlined progress on implementing the review's recommendations.
- 6.2 Michael Bowles, Head of Elections, Equalities and Involvement introduced the report. He commented that the comments of Scrutiny had been fed into the report submitted to Cabinet. The Review itself was done. The Action Plan was submitted to this meeting and was not done fully and Members were able to add to it as issues emerged. This would hopefully address issues raised by Mr Slack and enable Scrutiny to respond to issues such as the Jay report.
- 6.3 Engagement with the public was a key aspect of the Action Plan. One of the biggest developments was the use of Task and Finish Groups where public engagement was key such as the recent Cycling Inquiry which involved substantial public involvement. Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees had also been in a number of reviews which involved going out of the Town Hall such as at St. Luke's Hospice.

- 6.4 There had been some engagement with outside bodies and some agreements had been reached for outside bodies to report back to Scrutiny such as a report back from a member of the Police and Crime Panel.
- 6.5 It was acknowledged that there was the potential for a conflict of interest for a Member, particularly if they were a member of other Scrutiny Committees. However, Members were aware of the boundaries and the principles of public life and this shouldn't exclude them when they may have a valuable contribution to make to a discussion.
- 6.6 In terms of public involvement in the Scrutiny Review, although the Review itself was completed, the Implementation Plan wasn't. Members of the public therefore had opportunities to become involved. Further work needed to be undertaken in respect of the public's involvement in LAPs. However, they didn't have a formal governance role within the Council.
- 6.7 Services were always encouraged to try to use plain English in reports. If the public had examples of where this wasn't the case, Scrutiny Officers should be informed.
- 6.8 The important role Scrutiny had to play was not just restricted to the formal meeting itself. Examples such as Task and Finish Groups and Walkabouts showed the importance of public involvement. The critical issue was around meaningful engagement and what it was the Council really wanted to know from people.
- 6.9 The report submitted to this meeting was not the end of the story. The most visible change arising from the Review thus far was the change to the membership of this Committee. Chair's were encouraged to share experiences and work programmes.
- 6.10 Members made comments and asked a number of questions and officers provided responses as follows:-
- The question to be asked around LAPs was whether issues raised there were suitable to be raised at Scrutiny Committees. LAPs were not the place to discuss strategic issues.
 - The Action Plan for the Review would be circulated to Members.
 - Scrutiny Committees had an important role in seeking further evidence from services to support their comments.

Members then made further comments as follows:-

- Further clarity on what was meant by public involvement would be welcomed. There needed to be a sense of realism of what was being asked given the level of resources available. Members needed to be bold enough on occasions to say that things just weren't possible. Given the cuts to resources things could not be expected to remain the same.

- The Chair of the Committee commented that the Action Plan was a work in progress. The Chair's and Deputy Chair's had a responsibility to take this back to their own Committees. The Work Programmes should stay within individual Committees rather than be dictated to by this Committee. Some Committees had invited other Members and Committees to attend their meetings when discussing relevant issues and this should be encouraged.
- Scrutiny had tried to look at different ways of engaging the public such as taking meetings out of the Town Hall. The recent review of the Lettings Policy had invited a call for evidence and invited community groups to express their views which were incorporated into the final report.

RESOLVED: That (a) the above comments be taken into consideration when progressing the action plan for the Scrutiny Review; and (b) a further progress report be submitted to the Committee at a future date.

7. REVENUE BUDGET AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING - 2014/15, MONTH 3

- 7.1 The Executive Director, Resources submitted a report setting out the Revenue Budget and Capital Programme monitoring month 3 position inviting comment and discussion from the Scrutiny Committee.
- 7.2 Andy Eckford, Interim Director of Finance, presented the report. He commented that officers had had early sight of the figures for Month 5 and the £11.5m overspend looked to be reduced to around £5m. This was no different to the pattern in 2013/14 and officers were working on getting best estimates sooner. The figures would be much clearer in Month 6.
- 7.3 In terms of capital, the Bus Rapid Transit North was a major project which had uncovered a number of issues which officers couldn't have foreseen. There was a forecast underspend in housing as a result of a major project planned for 2014/15 for removing and replacing roofing.
- 7.4 Members made a number of comments and asked questions and officer's responded as follows:-
- The surplus in housing was ring-fenced and would be used in future years for the Housing Investment Programme.
 - The overspend in Learning Disabilities was caused by taking a longer time to move towards budget due to the sensitivities involved.
 - Officers would raise the issue of how useful the Cabinet report was for Scrutiny after it had been approved by Cabinet.
 - The transition to academies was undoubtedly a pressure on the budget. Officers were working on the implications if the Council was unable to financially support academies in the future.

- Every time a school became an academy the Council lost money. The Council was still responsible for children's educational outcomes even when they were at academies.

7.5 Members then made further comments as follows:-

- Members should consider whether in future they Scrutinised the budget itself or the consequences for people as a result of the budget and follow through the implications for people. Consideration should be given to this in the Scrutiny Review Action Plan.
- The Chair, Councillor Chris Weldon, commented that he had sat on Scrutiny Committees a number of times where the budget had been presented in this format. Officers would note the comments made by Members. It would be a decision for the Committee how they wanted the information presented and how they wished to Scrutinise the budget.

7.6 **RESOLVED:** That the report, now submitted, be noted.

(Note. Councillor Sarah Jane Smalley did not support the decision to note the report as she did not believe she had all the information available to her and asked for this to be recorded).

8. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FOR OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE - QUARTER 1 2014/15

8.1 The Director of Policy, Performance and Communications submitted a report outlining the performance management framework for the Council. He outlined the current performance challenges facing the Council and identified by EMT as follows:- (1) Assessments and Reviews in Adult Social Care, (2) NHS Policies and Pathways Impacting on Adult Social Care, (3) Sickness Absence Rates, (4) Agency Spend, (5) City Centre Vibrancy, (6) Capital Programme Profiling and (7) Educational Attainment.

8.2 In presenting the report, James Henderson, Director of Policy, Performance and Communications, commented that the report focused on the key challenges facing the Council rather than a comprehensive overview of performance at the Council. There was an emerging challenge of fixed term exclusions in schools which may be included in future reports.

8.3 Members then asked a number of questions and answers were received as follows:-

- Discussions were ongoing as to the need for performance management statistics of external contractors such as AMEY.
- Officers were aware that statistics in relation to exclusions were being skewed by one particular school and discussions were being held in that respect with management at the school.

- Further discussions would be held between officers as to the most appropriate format to present performance management reports to future meetings of the Committee.

8.4 **RESOLVED:** That the report, now submitted, be noted.

9. UPDATE ON SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMMES

9.1 The Head of Elections, Equalities and Involvement submitted a report outlining the current work programmes of all the Scrutiny Committees.

9.2 Emily Standbrook-Shaw, Policy and Improvement Officer, presented the report and asked the Committee to identify any further opportunities for joint working or issues that should be picked up by a specific Committee.

9.2 Members then made a number of comments as follows:-

- The Chair commented that he had requested that the work programmes be submitted to this Committee in response to suggestions that this Committee may want to consider managing the work programmes of the Scrutiny Committees. He did not believe that this was the role of this Committee and gaining an overview of the work programmes and identifying opportunities for joint working was the way forward.
- Good examples of joint working between Committees had already taken place and opportunities for this would continue to be examined in the future.

9.3 **RESOLVED:** That the work programmes for the Scrutiny Committees, now submitted, be noted.

10. DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME 2014/15

10.1 The Head of Elections, Equalities and Involvement submitted a report outlining the current work programme for the Scrutiny Committee for the municipal year 2014/15.

10.2 **RESOLVED:** That (a) the report be noted; and (b) consideration be given to the inclusion of an item on Voter Registration following the Police and Crime Commissioner election.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

11.1 It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Wednesday 26 November 2014 at 4.00p.m. at the Town Hall.