

Overview and Scrutiny 'fitness check' - Improvement Plan

Recommendation	Reference(s) from report	Sub action	Resp & timescale
Suggestions for further improvement			
Roles and responsibilities			
<p>a) Allied to a review of the meeting cycle for scrutiny committees (see b) below) consider extending the role of the Scrutiny Management Committee in monitoring the Forward Plan and key decisions by Cabinet on behalf of the others scrutiny committees; in quality assuring recommendations made by those committees and offering critical friend challenge to colleague scrutineers before their work is seen by a wider audience.</p>	<p>The Management Committee could continue to meet more frequently to enable scrutiny to continue to track Cabinet decisions. Further use should be made of the Chairs' meetings to reflect on practice and learn, extend this into the scrutiny committees and strengthen organisational memory.</p>	<p>Monitoring of the Forward Plan and key decisions of the Cabinet is existing practice of the Management Scrutiny Committee.</p> <p>Quality assurance of future scrutiny recommendations made by the six other Scrutiny Committees along with the critical friend challenge to colleague scrutineers to be explored further by Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs, as part of the on-going of the Council's Scrutiny arrangements during the 2010/11 Municipal Year</p>	<p>Charlotte Burnham April 2011</p>
Process and practice			
<p>b) Consider a review of the current meeting cycle and the further use of task and finish groups.</p>	<p>It may be time to review the cycle of formal meetings, so these are less frequent with more task and finish groups. Consideration should given to the role of committees and the Management Committee in quality assuring the recommendations of task and finish groups and committees respectively to ensure they are 'smart' and make a difference.</p>	<p>A review of the current four week scrutiny meeting cycle recently considered by Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs and in light of tight timescales in finalising the Council Diary for 2010/11, agreed to re-visit such recommendation (to include greater use of Task and Finish Groups) as part of the on-going development of the Council's Scrutiny arrangements at a future Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs Away Day in November/December 2010. In doing so, this will allow sufficient lead in time to introduce, if appropriate, any changes to the current cycle of scrutiny meetings in the following 2011/12 Municipal Year</p>	<p>Charlotte Burnham April 2011</p>
<p>c) Ensure that all councillors have sufficient opportunity to influence scrutiny work programmes.</p>	<p>The council needs to ensure that all councillors feel they have sufficient opportunity to influence work programmes.</p> <p>Councillors need to ensure that they scrutinise the effectiveness of partnerships and the outcomes they achieve – scrutiny is not an alternative governance body for external agencies.</p>	<p>Annual Scrutiny Conference reviewed to allow scrutiny members to influence more than one work programme through the introduction of the World Café workshops in replace of Breakout Sessions</p> <p>Scrutiny members also given opportunity to influence the work programme at first meeting of 2010/11 municipal year which is now standard practice</p>	<p>Charlotte Burnham June 2010</p>

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<p>d) Ensure the implementation and impact of scrutiny recommendations is monitored and managed effectively, building on the pilot arrangements and use of the Performance Plus system for the Prosperity and Economic Development Scrutiny Committee.</p>	<p>The council needs to ensure that it does effectively track recommendations made by scrutiny, the response by Cabinet and in turn implementation and impact. Evidence of this will be important in demonstrating the value of scrutiny within the council and externally.</p> <p>The scrutiny team is piloting the use of the Performance Plus performance management system to more rigorously follow-up and monitor the implementation and impact of scrutiny decisions, beginning with the Prosperity and Economic Development Committee. Performance Plus is used across the council and to monitor the LAA so this approach should further integrate scrutiny with Sunderland's wider performance management arrangements. The council should build on this pilot to ensure it can clearly demonstrate the impact that scrutiny is having and communicate this within the council, to partners and the wider public.</p>	<p>Pilot undertaken with the Prosperity & Economic Development Scrutiny Committee in January 2010. To be rolled out to all scrutiny committees at April 2010 cycle of meetings. This will monitor progress and performance of all scrutiny committee recommendations from 2008/09 onwards.</p> <p>Six monthly progress reports to be issued thereafter.</p> <p>Future policy review final reports submitted to Cabinet to be accompanied by service directorate response (known as the action plan) which outlines how the proposed recommendations would be delivered, by when and by whom to assist Cabinet in its determination of either accepting or rejecting the proposed recommendations</p> <p>Portfolio Holders to be invited to attend the relevant Scrutiny Committee to formally feedback the Cabinet's decision on the policy review's recommendations and supporting action plan.</p> <p>Scrutiny Officer Liaison Group to monitor progress of scrutiny recommendations and ensure the appropriate officers attend the Scrutiny Committees to respond to any questions in relation to the delivery of agreed scrutiny recommendations</p>	<p>Charlotte Burnham / Nigel Cummings April 2010</p> <p>Charlotte Burnham / Nigel Cummings Six-monthly thereafter</p> <p>June 2010 and annually thereafter</p> <p>July 2010 and annually thereafter</p> <p>SOLG Ongoing</p>
<p>e) Strengthen the communications strategy, highlighting the impact that scrutiny is having and the opportunities for the public to be engaged with scrutiny.</p>	<p>Engagement with the public remains a challenge for scrutiny at Sunderland.</p> <p>Like many other places, Sunderland is not yet fully exploiting the potential of scrutiny to enhance public engagement.</p> <p>Partners have high expectations of overview</p>	<p>To work with the public to ensure greater public awareness, consultation and involvement in the Scrutiny process through the development of a Communications Strategy for Scrutiny, as part of the Community Leadership Programme's Communications Strategy and Action Plan.</p>	<p>Charlotte Burnham July 2010</p>

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	<p>and scrutiny, including its ability to engage with and express the views of the public.</p> <p>In order to increase engagement with members of the public more work on a communications strategy is required. This should emphasise the outcomes from scrutiny activity and its impact, which will also be helpful within the council and among partners.</p>	Production of a combined Annual Scrutiny Report for 2009/10 to demonstrate the outcomes arising from the work of the Scrutiny Committees during the last 12 months	Charlotte Burnham May 2010
Skills and support			
f) Consider the use of co-optees across other committees, building on the experience gained by the Children, Young People & Learning committee.	More should be done to develop the trust and confidence to increase the use of co-optees across other scrutiny committees, building on the experience of Children, Young People and Learning.	As part of policy review scoping, consideration to be given to the use of co-optees for the municipal year to provide expertise to the chosen policy reviews at Scrutiny Committee and / or Task and Finish Groups	Scrutiny Committees July 2010
g) Explore the use of third party organisations to help scrutiny reviews engage with 'hard to reach' groups.	The council should examine its ability to commission third party work on behalf of scrutiny, for example to engage with and research 'hard to reach' groups.	As part of policy review scoping, consideration to be given to the use of hard to reach groups (in consultation with key individuals) for the municipal year to provide expertise to the chosen policy reviews at Scrutiny Committee and / or Task and Finish Groups	Scrutiny Committees July 2010
h) Review member development to ensure that it remains well focused and includes coverage of the roles and responsibilities of partner organisations and basic scrutiny skills such as questioning and the evaluation of evidence.	Member development activities should be reviewed to ensure that they remain well focused and include the roles and responsibilities of partner organisations and key skills such as effective questioning and use of evidence.	<p>Member development opportunities for 2010/11 were reviewed and agreed with Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs in March 2010</p> <p>Agreed scrutiny member development opportunities incorporated into the Corporate Member Development Programme 2010/11</p>	Charlotte Burnham June 2010
i) Make further use of the Chairs and Vice Chairs' meeting to reflect on practice and share learning across all scrutiny committees.	Informal meetings of scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs are used to share experiences and good practice across committees and to help shape the future direction of scrutiny in Sunderland.	<p>Quarterly meetings continue to be held, with additional meetings held where required to cover issues of an urgent nature</p> <p>Chairs and Vice Chairs Away Day to be held in May 2010 and six monthly thereafter to consider the ongoing development of the scrutiny function</p>	<p>Charlotte Burnham Ongoing</p> <p>Charlotte Burnham May 2010 and six-monthly thereafter</p>
Other considerations from report			
j) Further develop how area committees	We were made aware of some concerns	Area Co-ordination Manager to attend all	Allison Patterson

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<p>work effectively alongside the council's partners and scrutiny committees, and the associated relationships</p>	<p>among partners regarding their role in these new arrangements. Developing this relationship and how area committees work effectively alongside the council's partners and scrutiny committees is recognised as a key area for development.</p>	<p>LSP Delivery Boards updating on Area Arrangements thus far, the LSP rep. role and opening up discussion on how the links can be further developed.</p> <p>Area Co-ordination Manager to attend the LSP Delivery and Improvement Board to discuss further development</p> <p>Hold a Member Workshop to review Area Committee agenda and meeting arrangements which will provide a more focussed approach for partner attendance/engagement with Area Committees</p>	<p>February 2010 – April 2010</p> <p>Allison Patterson May 2010</p> <p>Allison Patterson May 2010</p>
<p>k) Assist local residents to have a better awareness of scrutiny meeting representatives and a greater understanding of scrutiny meeting discussions</p>	<p>From our meeting observation, it may not have been clear to a member of the public who were councillors, officers of the council, partner representatives or specialist witnesses etc, and the use of acronyms in presentations and reports may present a barrier to understanding by a lay audience.</p>	<p>Introduce name badges for all councillors, officers of the council, partner representatives or specialist witnesses etc attending scrutiny committee</p> <p>Introduce a consistent approach to the meeting room layout</p> <p>Reinforce the need for reports to comply with the council's corporate report writing guidance with the Scrutiny Officer Liaison Group.</p> <p>Ensure scrutiny committee reports and presentations are in line with the council's corporate report writing guidance.</p>	<p>Democratic Services June 2010</p> <p>Democratic Services / Scrutiny Chairs June 2010</p> <p>Charlotte Burnham Ongoing</p> <p>Democratic Services Ongoing</p>