

MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY HANDBOOK – SCRUTINY CHAIRS AND VICE CHAIRS ROLE DESCRIPTORS

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

22 OCTOBER 2009

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide the Scrutiny Committee with a progress report on the refresh of the Council's Handbook for Overview and Scrutiny specifically in relation to role descriptions for Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs.

2. Background

- 2.1 During the last 2008/09 Municipal Year, a Scrutiny Review Working Group carried out a Review of the City Council's Scrutiny arrangements which produced a final report with a number of recommendations. One of those recommendations was to develop role descriptors for key scrutiny roles to outline expectations and achieve consistency of approach.
- 2.2 Initial consultation was carried out with all Chairs and Vice-Chairs in May 2009. Recently, the latest role descriptors were further considered at the informal meeting of Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs on 12 October 2009.
- 2.3 The latest draft of the role description together with role descriptions for Chairs and Vice-Chairs are attached as **Appendix A**.

3. Purpose of the Role Descriptions

- 3.1 The main purpose of descriptions is to provide a defined framework that is understood across the Council.
- 3.2 Each individual Scrutiny Member has a role in ensuring robust Scrutiny although it is recognised there are different levels of responsibility and involvement. For example, the role of the Chair of the Management Scrutiny Committee may involve taking the lead in co-ordinating scrutiny issues, negotiating where problem-solving is necessary, and engaging others in the scrutiny process over and above the key tasks for all Scrutiny Chairs.

- 3.3 An understanding of each role will help to clarify and embed these sometimes challenging roles and recognise the responsibilities. The roles will hopefully contribute to all scrutiny members being more involved in leading and owning the scrutiny function. Members will be aware that similar role descriptions are being developed for other roles, such as Area Chair and Executive Members.

4. Recommendations

4.1 It is recommended:

- (a) That the draft role descriptions are referred to all Scrutiny Committees in the next cycle of meetings for comment. Substantive suggestions for change will be referred back to this Committee; and
- (b) Subject to the comments received from the Scrutiny Committees, the role descriptions will be endorsed and included in the new Handbook.

5. Background Papers

Overview and Scrutiny Handbook report to MSC 16 July 2009
Scrutiny Review Final Report June 2009

~~Contact Officer:~~ Charlotte Burnham, Head of Overview and Scrutiny
0191 561 1147
charlotte.burnham@sunderland.gov.uk

ROLE DESCRIPTION OF CHAIR OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Chair provides leadership to the Scrutiny Committee:

- When chairing and managing meetings, including ensuring that high standards of conduct and courtesy are maintained
- By keeping the Committee focussed in pursuit of its priorities, ensuring the work is constructive and adds value to the Council and the community
- By effectively managing the business of the meeting including: providing sufficient time for effective scrutiny of each item; handling conflict; including everyone in the discussion; summarising to confirm agreement and ownership of actions/decisions/important points and to refocus discussions as necessary.
- When building good working relationships with Executive Members and Senior Officers, through securing their engagement in discussions about Work Programmes
- When making sure officers, members and other witnesses appearing before the Committee are treated with courtesy and consideration
- By leading the committee in ensuring that it fulfils its responsibilities for policy development and review and scrutiny, and maintains the integrity of policy development and review
- When acting as the spokesperson for the committee in publicising the findings of major policy reviews and being the lead member for the Committee on disseminating findings and conclusions from delivery of the Work Programme.

The Chair leads and manages a member led work programme:

- By ensuring that the work programme is developed with input from committee members, the Cabinet, Officers and the community.
- When working with the scrutiny officer to plan activities, decide on the business to be undertaken at each meeting and the methods to be employed.
- When making best use of the time and skills of committee members as well as specialist expertise inside and external to the Council to deliver the work programme

- By considering and using various methods to encourage and enhance community participation in the development of topics and policy options
- By leading targeted reviews of existing policies and the development of new policies.

The Chair promotes a robust and open scrutiny function:

- By holding Executive to account in respect of decisions taken
- By ensuring the Committee monitors the Councils decision making process
- When overseeing call-ins
- By ensuring the Committee monitors the council's performance
- When leading Scrutiny of external reports on council performance
- By keeping abreast of the work of any short life task and finish groups
- When identifying training and development needs that apply to the Committee and to individual members and take action to enable them to access the appropriate support
- By keeping up to date on national and local issues and consider impact on work programme

The Chair ensures compliance with the constitution and protocols for scrutiny:

- By ensuring that meetings take place in accordance with the arrangements set out at the start of the year
- When liaising with officers to ensure that agendas are available in a timely way, advising interested parties and participants of the business to be addressed at each meeting
- When managing any finances made available to the Committee in order to deliver its Work Programme
- By making the annual report to full Council on the workings of their Committee, making recommendations for future work programmes, and amending working methods if appropriate
- When requesting full Council to approve the cooption of members as required for a limited time or for a specific purpose

- When reporting back to the Committee on any decisions that the Chairs and Vice Chairs have taken where relevant
- By attending bi-monthly meetings of the Chairs and Vice-Chairs and those held quarterly with the Executive liaising with Executive Members at appropriate times on significant issues which are relevant to their portfolios and the work of scrutiny.
- By attending the Management Scrutiny Committee when requested to coordinate progress on work programmes.

Skills and Knowledge For Chair of Scrutiny Committee

Leadership Skills

- Leadership of the scrutiny committee within, and outside the council.
- Leadership of the Scrutiny Committee as a team.
- Ambassadorial/Diplomacy??? skills through the representation and championing of the scrutiny function inside and outside the authority.
- Objective setting and progressing those objectives on behalf of the scrutiny function.

Chairing Skills

- A high level of chairing skills.

Team Working & Relationship Building

- Relationship building with Management Committee colleagues, EMT/senior officers, Panel Lead Members, Cabinet, partners etc.
- Building effective relationships with other parts of the political management structure e.g. Cabinet, Full Council, and Area Committees etc.
- Ensuring effective contributions from each member of the Scrutiny Committee.

Communication Skills

- A high level of listening and questioning skills.
- A high standard of communication skills with officers, councillors, co-optees, partners, external bodies and members of the public.
- A good level of presentation skills.
- A god level of public speaking skills

Organisational Skills and Personal Effectiveness

- Assimilating and analysing complex information.
- Overseeing and prioritising scrutiny work, taking account of available resources.
- Planning and co-ordinating the work of the Scrutiny Committee and its agenda.

Other Skills and Abilities

- Ability to deal with complex strategic issues and problems on behalf of the Management Committee and the scrutiny function as a whole.
- Ability to obtain and weigh up evidence and make decisions and recommendations based on that evidence.

Knowledge

- A detailed awareness of the strategic importance of the scrutiny function within the council.
- A detailed awareness of the constitutional arrangements relating to the scrutiny function and particularly those of the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee.
- A detailed awareness of the Sunderland approach to overview and scrutiny and its relationship with the other parts of the council's decision-making structures.
- Detailed knowledge of the challenges facing the scrutiny function and the role of the Chair in addressing them.
- An awareness of changes facing local government and an understanding of how these might impact on the council's scrutiny function
- An understanding of project management principles.

ROLE DESCRIPTION FOR VICE CHAIR OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The role of the Vice Chair is to support the Committee Chair in their management role and to promote the development of the overview and scrutiny function.

The Vice Chair is effective:

- When chairing and managing meetings in the Chair's absence
- When playing a leading role in scoping overview and scrutiny reviews
- When playing a leading role in evidence gathering and consultation to support overview and scrutiny reviews
- When playing a leading role in Task and Finish Groups set up by the Committee

The Skills (Person Specification) for Vice Chair of Scrutiny Committee is as Chair.