

MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY HANDBOOK

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

16 JULY 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.

2. Background Information

- 2.1 Since 2003, an Overview and Scrutiny Handbook has been produced to help to promote the scrutiny function. The Handbook is intended to highlight the value of overview and scrutiny and provide general advice on the Council's Scrutiny Committees to the public and expert witnesses. It also includes protocols providing unambiguous procedure for the operation of scrutiny within the Council.
- 2.2 The Handbook is circulated widely to all Members, external partners, Directors and Heads of Service and other stakeholders.
- 2.3 The Handbook is refreshed annually, or as necessary in accordance with new developments in scrutiny or external changes influencing the provision of scrutiny services. An example of this would be the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 which gives scrutiny committees the ability to scrutinise any public service partner signed up to the Local Area Agreement. This also introduced new powers for councillors designed to help them solve problems in their wards known as the 'Councillor Call for Action' (CCfA).
- 2.4 The Committee is aware that over the last year a major review of scrutiny was undertaken through a sub-group of the former Policy and Coordination Review Committee. At the same time as the review the IDeA conducted a peer review through self-evaluation undertaken by Council Members and officers based on the Centre for Public Scrutiny's four main principles of good scrutiny. A number of workshops and events were also held over the year to consult on and engage others in scrutiny. Collectively, this resulted in a modernised scrutiny function with new committees, new terms of reference and alignment to the strategic priorities of the Sunderland Partnership.

3. Current Position

- 3.1 At its meeting on 23 April 2009 the Policy and Coordination Review Committee was provided with the latest draft Handbook, taking into account all of the required changes. At that time Members were asked to note that the draft will require further refinement to reflect Member comment and to ensure the detailed arrangements link to and complement arrangements developed for Area Committees and other developments within the Community Leadership

Programme. At the meeting of the Policy & Coordination Review Committee, members requested further review of the draft handbook.

- 3.2 The Councillor Call for Action Protocol was approved by Cabinet on 11 March 2009 and referred to all the Review Committees for consultation and comment prior to its implementation on 1 April 2009. This Protocol will be included in the next edition of the Handbook.
- 3.3 A first draft of a Protocol to guide committees through the process of co-option of representatives of outside organisations has been produced. This will help guide each Scrutiny Committee in considering the circumstances in which it may want to pursue cooption, and if so, how to proceed. Currently, the Children, Young People and Learning Scrutiny Committee is the only Scrutiny Committee to include co-optees in its membership. This includes a number of statutory co-optees (for education issues), and a number of non-statutory co-optees. There will be a review of the non-statutory co-opted posts on that Committee to reflect its new terms of reference, and to coordinate its membership with other potential co-options. The Protocol is being finalised for inclusion in the new edition of the Handbook. Council will make appointments to the Scrutiny Committee in accordance with the Constitution.

4. Next Steps

- 4.1 Taking into consideration the number of the changes required to the current edition of the Handbook, and the need for Scrutiny Members to be fully consulted and involved, it is proposed that revisions to the Handbook be taken in a phased approach with priorities to be addressed as follows:-
- 4.2 Immediate implementation:
- (a) Inclusion of new Scrutiny Committee titles and terms of reference
 - (b) Inclusion of current Committee Memberships
 - (c) Inclusion of contact details for key officers
 - (d) Include Councillor Call for Action Protocol
- 4.3 For endorsement by September 2009
- (e) Final Draft of the Co-opted Representatives Protocol
- 4.4 Remaining additions to the Handbook to be completed by year end:
- (f) Inclusion of Role Descriptions for Scrutiny Chairs, Vice-Chairs and Scrutiny Members (arising from recommendation of the Scrutiny Review)
 - (g) Inclusion of Task and Finish Group Working Protocol
 - (h) Inclusion of External Scrutiny Protocol
 - (i) Inclusion of Area Committees Protocol

Communication Techniques

- 4.5 The Scrutiny Handbook is a valuable means of communication both internally, to provide everyone involved in scrutiny with a shared understanding of procedures, and externally to give access to the scrutiny function to witnesses and organisations. It is however just one method of communication and, as well as providing a new edition of the Handbook, other techniques of communication will be explored.
- 4.6 Members may recall that the Scrutiny Review included a recommendation for a shared understanding of the profile of scrutiny through the development of a communication strategy for scrutiny which should include a re-branding of scrutiny to allow it to deliver the 4th block of good scrutiny i.e. to give a voice to the concerns of the public and its communities. The Scrutiny Review Working Group also considered tools and techniques to enable community engagement and Annual Reporting.
- 4.7 Sunderland's Scrutiny function has its own website which can be accessed at www.sunderland.gov.uk/citycouncil/review/reviewcommittees.asp This includes all policy review reports, committee memberships and previous work programmes.
- 4.8 A quick guide to scrutiny is currently being produced which will be widely circulated in public buildings to highlight the role of scrutiny and how to get in touch.

5. Recommendations

- 5.1 The Scrutiny Committee is asked to:
- (a) Endorse the phased approach to refreshing the new Handbook; and
 - (b) Support use of all seven Scrutiny Committees' budgets, in equal portion, to publish the new edition of the Handbook.

6. Background Papers

2008-09 Overview and Scrutiny Handbook
Policy & Coordination Review Committee Scrutiny Review

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