

# **MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

## **IDEA SCRUTINY FITNESS HEALTH CHECK FOLLOW-UP REPORT AND PROPOSED IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

**REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

**29 April 2010**

### **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To provide Members with the opportunity to consider the findings of the IDeA Scrutiny Fitness Health Check Follow-up Report along with the proposed Improvement Plan, to address the suggested areas for improvement.

### **2. Background Information**

- 2.1 Members will recall that the Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government (IDeA), undertook a Peer Review into the Council's Scrutiny arrangements back in September 2008 which identified key areas for development and fundamental to the effective and future operation of Overview and Scrutiny in Sunderland.
- 2.2 More recently a Follow-up Scrutiny Fitness Health Check was undertaken on 15 and 16 February 2010, with a particular emphasis on partnership scrutiny.
- 2.3 Prior to the IDeA's return visit, a short self-assessment was prepared outlining the changes made since the Peer Review undertaken back in September 2008, along with an assessment of where the City Council's scrutiny arrangements were in respect of partnership scrutiny against the criteria identified in the Centre for Public Scrutiny's Principles of Good Scrutiny (which also included roles and relationships, process and practice, skills and support).
- 2.4 To recap, the IDeA on-site Team comprised of David Armin, IDeA Improvement Manager and Robin Stonebridge, Ex-Member and IDeA freelance consultant.
- 2.5 The IDeA spent a day and a half on-site, meeting with a range of stakeholders as outlined below and observed the meeting of the Environment and Attractive City Scrutiny Committee. The IDeA on-site team provided feedback to a roundtable meeting at the end of their visit, followed up by a written summary of key messages:-
  - (a) Group discussion with partners;
  - (b) Group discussion with Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs

- (c) Group discussion with Scrutiny Members;;
- (d) Interview with the Chief Executive;
- (e) Interview with the Leader;
- (f) Group discussion with officers supporting Scrutiny across service departments; and
- (g) Group discussion with Scrutiny Team.

### **3. Feedback and Recommendations**

3.1 Following the IDeA Team's return visit on 15 and 16 February 2010, a report was published outlining their findings and recommendations for further development (**Appendix A refers**).

3.2 In summary, the published report outlined:

- (a) Clear message of a mass perception of change within the Scrutiny Function, although acknowledged that still in period of transition with encouraging signs: clearly member-led, much more business like approach, outward focused as a result of the new thematic scrutiny structure, increased capacity within Scrutiny Team; good mechanisms in place to ensure constructive dialogue / relations are established and maintained, major revisions on public information on Scrutiny with a good range of processes and practices introduced;
- (b) Work Programmes much clearer and outcome focused, however suggest balance to be struck between formal scrutiny committee meetings and working group activities which have presented different ways of working. Suggest reducing the current frequency of formal scrutiny committee meetings supported by working groups in between formal committee meetings;
- (c) Significant work has been undertaken to develop links with the Sunderland Partnership. As a result of this, Scrutiny is valued by partners, its purpose is largely understood and involvement is welcomed, however, a balance and understanding is required of scrutinising partnership activity and partnership agencies;
- (d) More innovative approaches should be introduced to engage with the public and the use of co-option across all Scrutiny Committees should be encouraged;
- (d) Greater take-up of commissioning external advice / pieces of work to support the evidence gathering processes for the policy reviews should be explored;

- (e) Much improvement with Member and officer development in relation to understanding the role and benefits of Overview and Scrutiny. Acknowledged work in progress with longer term benefits / outcomes yet to be realised; and lastly
- (f) Demonstrating the 'value added / outcomes' arising from the scrutiny policy reviews should be realised through the work currently being undertaken with Performance Plus, the new corporate performance management system to be rolled out across all of the Scrutiny Committees in April 2010.

3.3 To build on the progress made and further strengthen the City Council's Scrutiny arrangements, eleven recommendations were made by the IDeA Team, in accordance with the CfPS's principles of effective scrutiny. Such recommendations are outlined in the proposed Improvement Plan (**Appendix B refers**) along with the associated actions and delivery timescales, which have been considered and fully supported by Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs at their last informal meeting held on 19 April 2010.

#### **4. Recommendations**

4.1 Members are requested to receive the report and provide comments on the content of the follow up report and the proposed Improvement Plan, to address the recommendations for further development of the City Council's Scrutiny Function.

#### **5. Background Papers**

There were no background papers used in the preparation of this report.

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