

REVIEW OF SCRUTINY ARRANGEMENTS IN SUNDERLAND

REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY, MAYORAL AND MEMBER SUPPORT COORDINATOR

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report is to inform the Scrutiny Committee of a proposed review of scrutiny arrangements in Sunderland and to seek the Committee's views.

2. Background

- 2.1 Mindful of the challenges and opportunities currently facing the council, the Chair of Scrutiny has commissioned an independent review of its scrutiny arrangements. The purpose of the review is to develop a clear and shared understanding on the role, purpose and objectives of the council's scrutiny arrangements.
- 2.2 The Independent Review will be conducted by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CFGs). The Review will engage with all political parties and key officers before finalising a report with recommendations which will form the basis for proposals for improvement to the council's scrutiny and overview model. A member led steering group will oversee the process and establish any necessary improvement activity or formal recommendations to strengthen the scrutiny function in Sunderland.

3. Current Position

- 3.1 The current arrangements for the scrutiny function were introduced by Council on 27th January 2016.
- 3.2 The scrutiny function is member led in Sunderland. Current scrutiny arrangements include one formal, overarching Coordinating Scrutiny Committee with a coordinating function in relation to the broad strategic issues which may fall within the remit of more than one service-based Scrutiny Committee.
- 3.3 In addition, three themed, service-based Scrutiny Committees have the role of scrutiny of service improvement in relation to health and wellbeing, economic prosperity and children, education and skills.
- 3.4 There are also a number of regional scrutiny committees including the Joint Health Scrutiny Committee with South Tyneside and Durham which looks at the Path to Excellence programme of change, the Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee for the North East & North Cumbria Integrated Care System & North & Central Integrated Care Partnerships to NHS England and the North East Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Joint Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee which are outside of the scope of this review.

4. Review Framework

4.1 The following elements will be used by the CFSG as a framework for the review. They are not criteria against which the council's approach will be "judged", but a framework for discussion and debate on those issues and areas most important to Sunderland.

- Organisational commitment and clarity of purpose
- Members leading and fostering good relationships
- Prioritising work and using evidence well
- Having an impact

The following provides examples of the kinds of questions that will usually be asked in interviews, and the general topics that will be explored as part of desktop research during the review process in relation to each element.

4.2 Organisational commitment and clarity of purpose

What do people in leadership positions think of scrutiny and its work?
How is scrutiny treated as a "strategic function" of the council, and as a resource for corporate improvement?
How is scrutiny's work integrated with the Council's City Plan?
How is the relationship between scrutiny and the executive fostered and promoted?
How do senior officers engage in a timely and proactive way with scrutiny's expectations on the provision of information?
How is scrutiny's overall role articulated both by scrutiny itself and by the wider council?
How has this role been based on evidence around what might add most value to the lives of local people?
How does scrutiny seek to engage with the public, including the promotion of scrutiny generally?

4.3 Members leading and fostering good relationships

How do members in scrutiny chair positions operate? How are these members selected?
How do those members act to build relationships with those on the executive side, and with other scrutiny members?
How members have the assurance that they have the necessary skills and capabilities to carry out their role? How does the authority have this assurance?
What training and development opportunities are provided?
What further use could be made of co-option to broaden and deepen the expertise to which scrutiny has access?
How do scrutiny members overall work as part of a team with a common purpose?

4.4 Prioritising work and using evidence well

How does scrutiny use its role to prioritise and focus its workload (i.e., through work programming)?
How does scrutiny evaluate the likely impact of forthcoming work when it is considering its forward work programme?

Could more be done in task and finish groups to embed scrutiny in the policy development process?
How does scrutiny gather evidence and information to support work programming (for example, through regular consideration of key data sources)?
How are committee agendas put together, and by whom?
How well do councillors (and the wider council) understand scrutiny members' formal information rights?

4.5 Having an impact

How are recommendations formulated and agreed?
To what extent does the current scrutiny committee structure support scrutiny to engage with the right issues, in the right way and at the right time?
How do scrutiny's relationships with those outside the council influences what and how it recommends?
How scrutiny evidences its tangible impact – on local people, major decisions and policy development?
How is scrutiny's work, and impact, acknowledged by others (including those outside the council)?

5. Evidence gathering

5.1 The CFGS will use a range of mechanisms to gather appropriate evidence to answer the questions outlined in the framework above to undertake the review. Examples will include:

Desktop work:

- The council's Constitution
- Recent scrutiny annual reports
- The work programmes for committees, including reviewing how those work programmes have evolved in recent months
- Recent committee agendas, minutes and reports
- Executive responses to scrutiny reports and scrutiny recommendations, where relevant

Interviews / workshops with:

- The Leader
- The Chief Executive
- The Monitoring Officer and section 151 officer.
- Scrutiny chairs
- Opposition party group leaders (x3)
- Senior officers
- Scrutiny support officers and officers working in democratic services
- Individuals who have given evidence to scrutiny over the past 18 months/two years
- Conversations with a member workshop on their reflections of the scrutiny function and its impact.

Survey

- Carry out a member survey whose questions will reflect our areas of focus

Observation

- Observing selected scrutiny meetings.

6. Timescales

6.1 The review will take approximately 3 to 4 months to complete. Timescales are outlined below and are subject to change depending on the progress of the review and any additional work that may be required.

- Initial evidence gathering - July
- Survey findings, observation and remaining documentary analysis - August
- Summary of key areas of findings including proposed areas for actions - late August / early September
- Action development session with member steering group - mid to late September
- Submission of final report / actions to committee for agreement - October

7. Action planning

7.1 Overall findings and suggested recommendations will be discussed and agreed with the member steering group being established to lead this project to ensure that they are realistic and deliverable as well as having a collective sense of ownership.

8. Recommendations

The Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:

- (a) Comment on the proposed review of scrutiny and agree the composition of a member steering group to oversee the review.
- (b) Agree for the review to commence as per the timescales in the report.