

CARLISLE CITY COUNCIL

Report to:- **Carlisle City Council**

Date of Meeting:- **4th May 2010**

Agenda Item No:-

Public

Title:- **SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT**

Report of:- **Scrutiny Manager**

Report reference:- **OS12/10**

Summary:-

The Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2009/10 is attached. It summarises the work of the scrutiny committees over the last year. The report also looks forward to the next year and makes a number of recommendations to continue the development of independent Member led scrutiny.

In accordance with agreed procedure the report was considered by the Community O&S on 23rd March 2010, Resources O&S on 1st April 2010 and Environment & Economy on 8th April 2010. The Scrutiny Chairs Group formally endorsed the final version of the report at their meeting on 13th April 2010.

Recommendation:-

That Council formally accept the report and its recommendations.

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Scrutiny Team

15 April 2010

Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers: None

Overview and Scrutiny

ANNUAL REPORT 2009/10



CARLISLE
CITY COUNCIL



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Introduction

This annual report provides an overview of the work of the scrutiny function during the 2009/10 civic year.

The first part of the report provides brief details of the work of the individual panels. In addition, there is some scrutiny work which is being carried out jointly in Cumbria and this too is detailed.

The second part of the report considers the implementation of changes to scrutiny practices this year and looks to the future, considering areas where further development could be considered.

Part 1: Work of the Individual Panels

The sections below give brief details of the main elements of work carried out by the panels along with a personal commentary from the Chairs of the Panels.

Community Panel

The Community O&S Panel enjoyed a lively, active and interesting year. At the Development Session (used to help Members set their own work programme and agendas for the year), the Panel decided on some key areas to focus on – housing, equalities and health. These priorities have, wherever possible, been reflected in the panel’s approach to its work. For example, the Panel has helped to reinvigorate the equalities discussion within the authority – not least by some Members attending the Corporate Equalities Group on a regular basis.

There have been many housing issues discussed by the panel – including the regular updates on the Housing Strategy Action Plan and some dialogue with Riverside Carlisle about various matters. The Panel have also been closely involved in considering plans for new facilities for people with housing difficulties. This included an informal workshop that enabled Panel Members to meet the staff involved with providing the hostels service and, most importantly, seeing at first hand the difference that these facilities can make to people’s lives.

Another key strand of work during the year was scrutiny of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP). The panel considered the strategic assessment and the partnership plan. Recent legislation and guidance has encouraged joint scrutiny of CDRPs where they cross local authority boundaries. With this in mind, workshops have been held to consider the best way forward. The workshops have brought together for the first time officers and Members from the CDRP, the Police Authority and scrutiny bodies from Eden and Carlisle District Councils and Cumbria County Councils. The final outputs from this process are still being determined but it seems likely that from the 2010/11 civic year, scrutiny of the Carlisle and Eden CDRP will be carried out by a Joint Scrutiny Panel with representatives from the two district councils and the police authority.

The Community Panel held the only two Call-in meetings of the year – both to consider decisions of the Executive to make specific cuts to the funding for Community Centres. The Panel were disappointed with the process that had been followed in reaching the decisions and did not consider there to be a clear rationale for the specific reductions in funding being proposed. One issue to arise from the first Call-In was that of scrutiny Members being brought into Working Groups – critically, these are not like Task and Finish groups that are

owned and directed by scrutiny Members. As such, new guidance is being produced for scrutiny Members that end up on one of the authority's working groups. This should help them contribute to these groups but also identify and respond at an early stage if they are unhappy with the work they are being asked to do.

The Panel has expressed an interest in scrutinising the possible development of the Tullie House Trust and is looking forward to meeting the Chair of the Shadow Board early in the new Civic Year. Similarly, scrutiny of progress with the Sands Centre development is eagerly anticipated for 2010/11.



Personal View from Cllr Nicola Clarke, Chair of Community O&S Panel

It has been an amazing year and one I shall remember in many ways and for many reasons. I was delighted to have been given the opportunity to chair one of the scrutiny panels for the District Council - I love this type of detailed work and the challenges it presents, plus it was an opportunity for me to develop additional skills, and work with some remarkable officers and members alike.

The priorities for the work and the areas of focus seemed to be apparent in four strong themes, CDRP, Equality, Health and Housing; it would have been so easy to pick a few more but these were a good baseline to begin with and as the year progressed the panel and myself found other areas of work beneath this original structure, that became worthy of further investigation. We began as well, to link the pieces of work in a way that made the scrutiny much more meaningful and gave the work programme a better 'shape', as well as recognising scrutiny's outward community-facing role and its deeper inward-looking function.

As a consequence of this, the more 'weighty' subjects of Housing and Health were divided and looked at more closely and 'chunked' together. These two subjects are very closely linked and were also pointing us to the following year's work around the new themes of 'Economy' and 'Environment'. As a consequence we began to follow policy development for an age strategy, levels of deprivation linked to fuel poverty, homelessness and how this affects our housing teams, service users, residents and other organisations. We looked into community cohesion, including the use and provision surrounding community centres, and the various projects of the Community Team, with whom the panel hope to establish closer links in 2011. It was recognised from the outset that the Equality Scheme and CDRP needed to be driven forward, to establish better ways of working and to encourage changes in culture within the District Council. Although it has taken a whole year and some intricate partnership working between various organisations, these two projects will come to fruition in the next financial year and hopefully, will continue to thrive and grow. Of course, the panel has looked at other emotive subjects, but its success has developed from remaining focused in areas around its four chosen core themes.

Cont...

This year, like many other authorities, the District Council has been experiencing a Transformation Programme, some of which has been scrutinised by the Community Panel. The panel members have been acutely aware of the levels of moral amongst employees within the authority and this has made some of our work *intensely painful* as many of us have come to know and share work with officers, teams and staff. Members realised with unnerving clarity, the exact importance of scrutiny and its precise meaning and purpose of place within the Civic walls. This did not hinder the quality of the work produced, or the professional relationships that had been forged or stop any of us from looking to the future, regardless of the anxious times we were, and still are, travelling through. The panel and I have benefitted from meeting such dedicated officers throughout, totally committed to their work, many of whom have not had the opportunity to discuss their projects with a scrutiny panel previously.

While it was important to focus on the work streams, the other priority for me was to continue to build strong working relationships with officers and the senior management team built on trust, honesty and reliability, and to gain a better understanding of the political landscape from members. It was also most important to practice and achieve independent thinking within the scrutiny function. This year I was lucky enough to have been invited by South Lakeland District Council to accompany them, with other colleagues from Carlisle District and County Council and our scrutiny officers, to witness a Select Committee at work in the House of Lords. It was a fascinating insight into the different styles and questioning tactics, of how to obtain specific information on a particular subject from a person/s, carried out in a most calculated but elegant manner. The recipient was always a little uncomfortable, but the atmosphere was neither hostile nor infused with political intent, it was just perfect scrutiny.

Personal View of Cllr Olwyn Luckley, Portfolio Holder

The Housing, Health and Community Development responsibilities of the Council have been subject to the increasing effects of the recession on the community and of assistance to the Executive, has been the Community O & S Panel's challenge and scrutiny of the decisions and policies involved. The Panel's insistence of seeking after clarity has emphasized the recognition that transparency for both Members and the public has to be a principle part of the work carried out. This is a principle that must be upper most as the recession and the drying up of external support continues to bite and thanks are due to the Panel for making this clear.

The decision for individual members of the panel to study particular areas of the panel's scrutiny should produce in depth examination of those subjects that can only be of benefit to the work of the Council.

The Community O & Panel's working group upon the Community Services Review was hampered by the lack of terms of reference at the outset and for this, those responsible must apologise. However, the evidence that the group provided was an important contribution for the Executive decision making, in their examination of the activities and capabilities of the Centres and the likely effects of savings in the Council's grants.

Some of the projects and policies presented in reports to the Panel have a lengthy history of progression with several reports coming at various times to the Panel. In listening to the scrutiny, I have felt sometimes that a summary of what has been previously presented would help in assisting Members with a reminder of that information which would enable them to dwell only on the current stage of project or policy development.

I'm grateful for the strong support of the Panel of the Council's projects within the Housing Strategy, also their critical examination of development of the Equality and Diversity policy of the Council and the outcomes of the work of the Carlisle and Eden CDRP both of which must contribute positively to the well being of our community.

Environment and Economy Panel

Once again this Panel has covered a wide range of issues, from Waste, Parking and Tourism to Budgets and Performance and Panel Members should be commended in their understanding and effective scrutiny of such diverse topics.

Much of the Panel's work this year has been within the formal panel arena - workshop sessions and Task and Finish Group work has not been at the forefront of Members activity. In line with the overall direction of scrutiny work, Members may look to address this in the next civic year. Members of the Panel expressed some frustration during the Transformation of the Senior Management structure and look forward to more settled arrangements next year.

The Panel welcomed the opportunity to scrutinise the options for the Development of the Town Hall and Tourist Information Centre in January 2010 and be involved in the process before major decisions had been made. A subsequent workshop was arranged and Members were shown details of the option selected and information on how the work would be taken forward.

Members requested a workshop to be held on Performance Indicators (PIs) and as the Panel had some concerns about the indicators relating to fly-tipping the workshop was designed around both understanding and using PI's and how fly-tipping information was recorded and acted upon. Members' improved knowledge should widen their scrutiny skills when Performance is under scrutiny in the future.

Towards the end of the Civic Year a Task and Finish Group was commissioned to undertake a scrutiny review of Parking. It is envisaged that this review will take around 8 months to complete due to the complexity and scope of the subject and therefore the work will continue into the next Civic Year.

A small group of Members from the Panel are to shortly undertake a piece of work on the fairly recent development of the Carlisle Tourism Partnership and their first Action Plan. The work of this group will inform the whole Panel and in turn should produce more effective scrutiny.



Personal View from Cllr Carole Rutherford, Chair of Environment & Economy O&S Panel

The development session at the beginning of the year was a very useful innovation and is one that should be continued. It enabled the Panel to identify well in advance items that were likely to appear on the forward plan and that they would like to see on their agenda or areas of work that required more in depth scrutiny. It also gave the opportunity to arrange a sensible timetabling of work over the year. Having the confidence to reject agenda items that it was felt were an inappropriate use of the panel's time also meant that we had more control of what we saw and how it would be dealt with.

Unfortunately after such a good development session things went rather downhill. Some of the senior officers who would have been leading on items of work identified by the Panel left or were assigned other roles under the Transformation process. There was confusion as to who would pick up that work and when, resulting in last minute changes to the agenda and work being cancelled.

Things that did make it onto the work programme and went well were the sessions on the plans to refurbish the Old Town Hall. Members felt they had made a valuable contribution to the development of those plans and were able to influence the outcome. After a delayed start the task and finish group on a parking strategy for Carlisle has commenced its work. Though members are aware of the complexities of the subject and that there is no quick and easy fix it should prove to be a rewarding piece of work.

There are some areas such as the questioning and holding to account of Portfolio Holders and the Executive rather than officers that still needs improvement. We also still need to find ways of encouraging and supporting members in the role of a lead member on a given subject.

Resources Panel

It has been a busy year again for this Panel with a total of 11 meetings throughout the Civic Year including 3 special meetings to consider the Transformation of the Authority and to undertake biannual scrutiny of the Carlisle Renaissance Action Plan.

The civic year began with a Development Session for Members of the Panel following the recommendation from the Review of Scrutiny 2009. This gave Members an opportunity to spend some time considering their work programme and prioritising the topics which they would like to consider in the Civic Year. The Panel's agendas can still be fairly long and some items are considered and then "noted", but there has been some improvement this year and hopefully this will continue to develop.

The biannual scrutiny of Carlisle Renaissance (CR) continued with meetings in August 2009 and January 2010. The meeting in January was particularly productive and it was decided that these meetings should be held on a quarterly basis with the Chair of the CR Board present at all meetings.

The Panel completed their scrutiny review on the Lease Car Scheme which commenced towards the end of the 2008/09 Civic Year and a report was presented to the Executive in September 2009. Following a difficult review the Task Group made several recommendations on the scheme and also requested a number of reviews in respect of essential car allowances and hire/pool cars. Work is currently ongoing to look at the changes to the scheme and the Panel Members are extremely pleased that their work in this area has proved fruitful.

The Panel continue to be involved in the development of Shared Services with continued monitoring of the shared ICT service with Allerdale and scrutiny of the Revenue & Benefits business plan in preparation of a shared service with Allerdale and Copeland and will continue scrutiny in these areas in the next Civic Year.



A Personal View from Cllr Trevor Allison, Chair of Resources O&S

I would like to thank the Panel Members for their support, encouragement and commitment that they have shown during a year when we have been involved in both the Transformation and the Renaissance Initiatives, as well as the formal Budget process. The Panel also commissioned two particularly interesting Task and Finish exercises which serve to demonstrate how Scrutiny can make an effective contribution to the operation of the Council.

This year was set against a background of severe budgetary pressures which are likely to persist for years to come. We considered whether under these circumstances the present format and scrutiny process is as effective as it could be. Through the Scrutiny Chairs Group my suggestion that we could perhaps consider setting up a separate Budget Scrutiny Panel, was not accepted when it was put to the three Panels. Nevertheless, I am keen that we raise our profile in this important area, and hopefully this can be addressed in time for the next round.

The initial workshop on the Transformation was encouraging in that it influenced the designation and structure of the emerging Management Team. But members were disappointed at the decision to reduce the Scrutiny Support team, particularly given the technical support and competence that they have demonstrated in two important Task and Finish initiatives that the Panel have undertaken. The Lease Car exercise was particularly rewarding and the indications are that it will have a positive outcome of significant benefit to the Council. This is due largely to the contribution of my two colleagues on this small team and the support of the officers. Hopefully the current Task and Finish exercise on “Use of Consultants” will be equally productive and give us the confidence to develop other initiatives in the coming year.

Scrutiny of Renaissance comes within our remit. Given the events of recent weeks, there is some sensitivity here. However, I was pleased that the Chairman of the Renaissance Board agreed to present the biannual report to our Panel in person, and give us the opportunity of questioning him directly. He is prepared to come to future meetings.

As we approach the end of the municipal year, it has been a privilege and a satisfying experience for me to have been able to serve as your Chairman.

Chairs Group

As Members will recall, the formal Management Committee was replaced by a more informal arrangement two years ago. The Chairs Group comprises the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the three panels and is intended to provide strategic oversight for scrutiny issues, as required. As the Chairs and Vice-Chairs are now evenly distributed across the three main political groups, the Chairs Group can now reflect a broader range of views from Scrutiny Members.

The Chairs Group has had an active and effective year – it has held 5 meetings and has provided guidance and leadership to the scrutiny function. It has also been a useful forum for other officers to attend and seek advice on how best to bring an issue to scrutiny Members.

Amongst other issues, the Chairs Group made proposals on future chairing – which were discussed at each of the three panels. The Group were also very concerned about the changes to the support arrangements for the scrutiny function and, more broadly, the limited scrutiny of the Transformation programme. The latter has now been addressed through reports and discussion at each of the Panels.

Councillor Call for Action

Members will be aware of the provision to make a Councillor Call for Action (CCfA) – this provides elected members with a mechanism to formally request a relevant scrutiny committee to consider an issue in their ward for further investigation, if all other actions fail. Although the Scrutiny Team has dealt with a number of enquiries about possible CCfAs, there has not been a formal CCfA this year.

Joint Cumbria Scrutiny



The newly established body met for its first meeting in July 2009. Comprised of elected members from all 7 local authorities, along with Cumbria Association of Local Councils (representing towns and parishes) the Committee's remit is to monitor the progress of the Cumbria Community Strategy and the performance of national and local indicators in the Local Area Agreement. More recently, the Committee invited the Lake District National Park Authority to join them as a non-voting member.



At the first meeting, a report on the Cumbria Place Survey captured members' attention and they decided to undertake a review to examine why public opinion on some public services in the county were different to the performance data shown in the LAA report.



A group of members was drawn from CALC, Copeland, Eden and South Lakeland with their final report and recommendations to all authorities in February 2010. The headline from this review was public involvement in service change and planning is a useful, largely untapped resource for local authorities. Input on service design from service users brings both service knowledge and innovative ideas; authorities tend to engage the public when options for service change have been drawn up by officers, rather than an earlier stage of the process.



The Committee continues to receive up to date information on how well county partners are delivering against set targets but have taken on two referrals with a crime and disorder theme - Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership Funding and CCTV in Cumbria.



The Committee meets quarterly and two out of its four meetings to date have included workshops on relevant topics: community engagement and performance management.



More recently, the Committee has heard about the results of Cumbria's Comprehensive Area Assessment. This is the Audit Commission's view of how well the county is achieving against the priorities it set out in the Community Strategy. Cumbria received no red flags but only one green flag for good practice (for activities on worklessness in Barrow) but a number of pointers for improvement. Members followed this up with a special meeting on what authorities and partners are doing to address the issues arising and to see where the Joint Scrutiny Committee can contribute to efforts to drive up performance and improve services.



The Committee will provide a forum this year for member involvement in the refreshment process of both the LAA and Community Strategy. This will give elected members from across Cumbria the opportunity to help identify priorities from local communities and suggest changes to existing local performance targets. This will introduce a community based component to these important activities than in previous years.

Part 2: Development of Scrutiny

Progress with Implementing Recommendations from the Review of Scrutiny

After a false start, the 2009/10 Annual Report was agreed by Council in late June 2009. The recommendations made in the report as a result of the Review of Scrutiny were agreed by Council. These are summarised in the table below along with some indication of the progress made.

Change	Description
Forward Plan Changes	Amend the way that items are listed on the Forward Plan and enable the scrutiny committees to choose which items to consider Progress: This has largely been successful in that the Panels (or in cases where time is limited, the Chair) can select items from the Forward Plan to come to future scrutiny meetings.
Selection of Chairs	Ask that Scrutiny Chairs are shared across all political parties by agreement between leaders of political groups Progress: The sharing of the Chairs across the political parties has tended to reinforce the co-operative ways of working in the scrutiny panels.
Rename Scrutiny Committees	Rename the Scrutiny bodies as 'panels' and simplify names Progress: Change made but some Members prefer old names.
Questioning Portfolio Holders	Briefing meetings to start at 9.15 to enable question planning and seating arrangements to be changed to ensure that Portfolio Holders are more prominent Progress: Briefing meetings do now start at 9.15 - however this extra time has not always been used for the purpose that it was introduced. This is an area that could be developed further.
Quality of Resolutions and Responses from the Executive	Scrutiny resolutions to be clearer, better responses from Executive insisted on. Also, improved monitoring of scrutiny outcomes Progress: Overall impression is that the quality of resolutions has improved although this is not always consistent. Some Members have expressed continuing dissatisfaction with the Executive responses.
Informal meetings between Chair and Portfolio Holders	Meetings expanded to include Directors Progress: These informal meetings have not been pursued this year, partly because of the ongoing Transformation process but also because the Development Sessions have, to some extent, substituted for them.

Change	Description
Task and Finish Group Working	Successful way of working – to be expanded Progress: Although there has been the opportunity for more Task and Finish Group work this year, the diminished scrutiny resource available meant it was not possible to expand this type of working.
Improving Budget Scrutiny	Widespread Member dissatisfaction with budget scrutiny – Task and Finish group will consider how to improve Progress: The Task and Finish Group reported, proposing earlier and more extensive involvement of Members in the Budget process along with more clearly written documents. The Executive has responded positively to the report.
More involvement and Co-option of Public and Other Representatives	Explore ways of co-opting Members who are not on scrutiny and also members of the public or representatives of service users onto Task and Finish Groups Progress: No meaningful progress this year – need to refocus on this in the next year.
More working individually or in pairs/Lead Members	Rather than always working as a whole Panel, more work to be done individually by Members or in pairs. Also, a small number of ‘Lead Members’ to be designated to develop knowledge and expertise in particular areas. Progress: Lead Members have been designated on all three panels
Development Sessions	Hold sessions outside of the formal Panel meetings to ensure that all Panel Members have input to the development of the work programme Progress: These were held for all three Panels and were generally considered very successful.
‘Wash Up’ Sessions	Brief informal session to be held at the end of each Panel Meeting to review how it went and make any changes for future meetings Progress: Not always done but, when they have been, seem to have reinforced the cohesion of the Panel.
Member Training	Members generally felt adequately trained to carry out scrutiny but additional needs will be passed on to the Members’ Development Group Progress: A ‘training day’ was held during which separate sessions were held for the scrutiny chairs and all scrutiny Members.

Summary of Progress

Good progress has been made with a number of the changes made – the Panels are setting their own work programmes and agendas and the Development sessions have proved to be an immediate hit with Members. But there remain areas for further work.

From the discussion of this report at the Panels in March/April, Members considered that the relationship between Scrutiny and the Executive was not as good as it could be. In particular, Members suggested that there still seemed to be a reluctance sometimes to bring policy development ideas to scrutiny first, despite this being good practice. Members also expressed some continuing dissatisfaction with the absence of some Portfolio Holders from Overview and Scrutiny Panel meetings. They stressed that it was difficult to hold the Executive to account when they were not at the meetings. It was suggested that it would be helpful to move from a system of inviting Portfolio Holders to individual panel meetings to one where there was a presumption that relevant Portfolio Holders would always attend the relevant Overview and Scrutiny meetings.

There was also some discussion about the effectiveness of the ‘wash up’ sessions and Members suggested that these were not proving useful and that the combined briefing meetings and the formal meetings were long enough. It is therefore suggested that these sessions are not pursued in the 2010/11 Civic Year – although it is, of course, at the discretion of each individual Chair to use this technique.

The use of Lead Members had been partially successful but the role and support arrangements for these Members need to be clearer if they are to fulfil their promise and improve the levels of knowledge in the Panels.

Following discussion at the Panels in March/April, the following recommendations are made:

- (1)** That the Scrutiny Chairs Group, the Executive along with the Chief-Executive and the two Directors meet informally to discuss how to improve the working relationship between the Executive and Scrutiny and develop positive, efficient practices for policy development work and dealing with Forward Plan items[Scrutiny Chairs Group and Executive];
- (2)** That all Portfolio Holders ensure that they attend all the relevant formal Overview and Scrutiny meetings and present major reports. This would replace the current

system of Panels inviting Portfolio Holders to particular meetings for specific items [Executive].

- (3)** The piloting of Lead Members in the Panels should be explored carefully at the Development Session for each Panel. The discussions should make clear the role of the designated Lead Members and how they would be supported [All 3 O&S Panels, monitored by Scrutiny Chairs Group].
- (4)** That the wish of the Panels to expand Task and Finish Group working be fulfilled next year, making use of the new support arrangements [All 3 O&S Panels, monitored by Scrutiny Chairs Group]
- (5)** That the Panels aim to renew the focus on greater involvement of non-scrutiny Members, the public and service users in scrutiny panel meetings and Task and Finish Group work [All 3 O&S Panels, monitored by Scrutiny Chairs Group].

Scrutiny Support

As Members will be aware, for the next Civic Year, there will be a change in the arrangements for supporting Scrutiny Members. The Scrutiny Chairs Group and all three panels expressed concerns about the proposals - in particular, over whether the changes will impact upon the effectiveness and independence of scrutiny.

The halving of the direct scrutiny support will be made up by support from the Assistant Directors. In the language of the Centre for Public Scrutiny, this change takes the authority from the Specialist Model of support to the Integrated Model of support.

As with any model, there are identifiable strengths and weaknesses. Clearly, there is a real opportunity for a much closer relationship between the Scrutiny Panels and senior officers. The main drawback in using this system was identified by Snape and Ashworth¹ as “[l]ying in the clarity of roles and responsibilities – lack of clarity breeds confusion in who is doing what (and when)”. Members expressed concern that it must be clear how the different elements of scrutiny work – task and finish groups, working groups, research and report writing – would be supported in the new arrangements.

It is interesting to note that, where there have been cuts to the independent scrutiny support in other authorities, the number of panels has often been reduced to one or two. This action has often been taken to ensure that scrutiny does not become too ‘broad and shallow’. This approach also reduces the administrative burden and tends to enable a greater focus on Task and Finish Group work – which Members have consistently identified as the most rewarding element of scrutiny work. However, there is a risk that, by reducing the number of panels, fewer Members are involved in the policy processes of the Council. Indeed, at the panel meetings, several Members expressed concerns that any reduction in the number of panels would make scrutiny less effective and less inclusive.

Following discussion at the Panels in March/April, the following recommendations are made:

- (6)** Scrutiny Members remain concerned about the new support arrangements for Scrutiny and ask to be provided with a detailed list of the respective responsibilities of the senior officers and the scrutiny officer as they relate to the various elements of work required to support the panels [Senior Officers]

¹ The Development of Regional Scrutiny: Volume 2: Good Practice Materials, 2003, p8

(7) The Scrutiny Chairs Group are asked to monitor the new arrangements next year, particularly to ensure that the Panels are fully supported and that the respective responsibilities of the scrutiny officer and senior managers are proving to be clear and unambiguous.

To eliminate any early teething troubles, the Scrutiny Chairs Group should carry out an assessment of how the new arrangements are working half-way through the 2010/11 civic year [Scrutiny Chairs Group].

(8) The Scrutiny Chairs Group should commission a piece of Task and Finish Group work (with at least 2 Members from each of the 3 O&S Panels) to examine whether the number of Panels remains appropriate and the pros and cons of changing the number of panels. The review will draw on experiences in other local authorities and will consider the make-up with different numbers of scrutiny panels and different ways of working. In carrying out this work, there should be no presumption that there needs to be a change to the current number of panels [Scrutiny Chairs Group].

Conclusions

Scrutiny has continued to develop this year – the Panels can point to a range of successes – from pressing for greater scrutiny of the Transformation process to the acceptance of the recommendations made in the Lease Cars review report and the more informal involvement of scrutiny Members in homelessness matters.

It is also the case that scrutiny has been more robust this year and has worked hard to provide a fuller ‘critical friend’ challenge to the Executive and senior officers alike. Other roles have not been neglected - but there remain underdeveloped areas – the involvement of service users and the public generally for one. A renewed focus on this area should be a priority for next year.

The next civic year will be a critical one in the progress of scrutiny – the change of support arrangements will provide both opportunities and challenges. But, with hard work and good planning from Members and officers alike, scrutiny should continue to develop as a truly independent, Member-led function.

Summary of Recommendations

The body requested to take action on a given recommendation is listed in the square brackets at the end of the recommendation.

- (1)** That the Scrutiny Chairs Group, the Executive along with the Chief-Executive and the two Directors meet informally to discuss how to improve the working relationship between the Executive and Scrutiny and develop positive, efficient practices for policy development work and dealing with Forward Plan items [Scrutiny Chairs Group and Executive];
- (2)** That all Portfolio Holders ensure that they attend all the relevant formal Overview and Scrutiny meetings and present major reports. This would replace the current system of Panels inviting Portfolio Holders to particular meetings for specific items [Executive].
- (3)** The piloting of Lead Members in the Panels should be explored carefully at the Development Session for each Panel. The discussions should make clear the role of the designated Lead Members and how they would be supported [All 3 O&S Panels, monitored by Scrutiny Chairs Group].
- (4)** That the wish of the Panels to expand Task and Finish Group working be fulfilled next year, making use of the new support arrangements [All 3 O&S Panels, monitored by Scrutiny Chairs Group]
- (5)** That the Panels aim to renew the focus on greater involvement of non-scrutiny Members, the public and service users in scrutiny panel meetings and Task and Finish Group work [All 3 O&S Panels, monitored by Scrutiny Chairs Group].
- (6)** Scrutiny Members remain concerned about the new support arrangements for Scrutiny and ask to be provided with a detailed list of the respective responsibilities of the senior officers and the scrutiny officer as they relate to the various elements of work required to support the panels [Senior Officers]
- (7)** The Scrutiny Chairs Group are asked to monitor the new arrangements next year, particularly to ensure that the Panels are fully supported and that the respective responsibilities of the scrutiny officer and senior managers are proving to be clear and unambiguous. To eliminate any early teething troubles, the Scrutiny Chairs Group should carry out an assessment of how the new arrangements are working half-way through the 2010/11 civic year [Scrutiny Chairs Group].
- (8)** The Scrutiny Chairs Group should commission a piece of Task and Finish Group work (with at least 2 Members from each of the 3 O&S Panels) to examine whether the number of Panels remains appropriate and the pros and cons of changing the number of panels. The review will draw on experiences in other local authorities and will consider the make-up with different numbers of scrutiny panels and different ways of working. In carrying out this work, there should be no presumption that there needs to be a change to the current number of panels [Scrutiny Chairs Group].

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