

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COORDINATING GROUP HELD ON 7 MARCH 2006

Present:

Members of the Group:

Councillors: David Booth
Ken Browne (Chair)
Alan Cockburn
Richard Grant
John Haynes
Mick Jones
Sid Tooth
Bob Stevens

Officers: Jim Graham, Chief Executive
David Carter, Strategic Director of Performance and
Development
William Brown, Strategic Director of Community Safety
Jane Pollard, Assistant County Solicitor
Janet Purcell, Member Services Manager

1. General

(1) Apologies for absence

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor Jerry Roodhouse.

(2) Members' Disclosures of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

None

(3) Minutes of the meeting held on 22 September 2005

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 September 2005 were agreed as a correct record.

Minute 5 – Development of an electronic library

It was noted that the development of an electronic library would follow the current review and improvements to the IT systems and databases (including the development of the intranet) to ensure it is properly integrated. Members commented that the new Inform was working well.

Minute 3 – Developments in Scrutiny – consultation documents
The Member Services Manager undertook to ensure that consultation documents were being brought to the attention of spokespersons.

2. Proposed Review- Drugs, Substance and Alcohol Misuse

A report of the Strategic Director of Performance and Development set out a proposed review of drugs, substance and alcohol misuse. This followed a review by the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee of this issue in Rugby. The view of that Committee was that it should be looked at across the County and could be subject to a cross-cutting approach. The Community Safety Overview and Scrutiny Committee has also looked at this issue and it was suggested that a group be established to take forward a review (possibly with members drawn from both committees).

William Brown advised the group that most of the work referred to had been undertaken by officers, with input from Peter Boileau and taking account of the information coming out from a national review of services by the Healthcare Commission and National Treatment Agency. The next stage was to look at work planning and governance issues.

Jim Graham added that the current structure of the bodies managing the services was not efficient with a number of overlapping groups within which there was not clear understanding of roles or accountability. There was now an opportunity to look at the governance arrangements to strengthen efficiency and accountability and also to focus on the outcomes of treatment (rather than just measuring inputs which has been the approach for national indicators). He added that there was a need to ensure proper representation of the Council on the governing board.

It was agreed that officers take forward these issues and also develop some objectives for a stage 2 review. These would be agreed with the Chairs of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Community Safety Committee following which a panel would be established to take forward to review.

3. Alternative Models of Scrutiny

The group considered a report from the Strategic Director of Performance and Development that set out alternative models for overview and scrutiny.

The group discussed various approaches (including aligning the committees to directorates and/or to Cabinet portfolio holders).

The group was advised that there was no intention at present to reduce the number of Cabinet portfolio holders, but there may be changes to the areas they cover. The group concluded that they did not wish to propose changes to the current structure at present and that, given the current structure, an overarching overview and scrutiny group/committee would be an unnecessarily layer.

The following points about approaches to scrutiny were raised:

- there was need for support for members (separate from departments and to avoid debates being between departments and members) (see minute 5 below)
- there were some good examples of scrutiny that was involving the public and/or undertaking probing questioning
- each Chair finds their own 'style'
- there were different ways of approaching scrutiny, taking account of the topic under scrutiny, and committees can chose how they want to approach topics (and this does not have to be in meeting-mode).
- scrutiny can be resource-intensive (for officers and members) so there is a benefit in focusing on areas where the outcomes are likely to make a difference to policy development/service delivery.
- committees should drive own agendas and not feel they have to accept all items suggested to them.
- Officers need to be open about problem areas they have, and recognise scrutiny can be a positive critical friend that will help find solutions rather than a threat.

Members were reminded that there were proposals to extend the role of local authority scrutiny to police and crime and disorder partnerships. Neighbourhood governance and the effective scrutiny of arrangements at a local level were also being debated. There would be a need to balance scrutiny of internal services with scrutiny of activities outside the authority. This would include partnerships.

Jim Graham added that the focus was now on community governance and scrutiny provided a vehicle for members to use their role as civic leaders in determining how well we are ensuring that services are fit for purpose.

The group concluded that they would welcome a seminar for the group to discuss the approach to overview and scrutiny. This would be followed up by a seminar for all members.

4. Reporting on Customer Service

David Carter reported that, following departmental changes, issues concerning customer service would now be within the remit of the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

5. Arrangements for Scrutiny

David Carter reported that Jane Pollard had been appointed as Scrutiny Manager and would head a team of three officers (currently in the corporate review team) who would provide dedicated support to overview and scrutiny. The new arrangements would also mean that solicitors would no longer be attending meetings on a routine basis.

6 Date of Next Meeting

The Group noted that the next meeting was scheduled 3 May 2006 and agreed that the meeting begin at **1.30 p.m.**

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Chair