

AGENDA MANAGEMENT SHEET

Name of Committee Overview And Scrutiny Coordinating Group

Date of Committee 30 January 2008

Report Title Overview and Scrutiny Strategy

Summary This reports puts forward a draft Overview and Scrutiny Strategy for approval.

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Would the recommended decision be contrary to the Budget and Policy Framework? No.

Background papers None

CONSULTATION ALREADY UNDERTAKEN:-

Details to be specified

- Other Committees
- Local Member(s) N/A
- Other Elected Members Cllr Richard Grant
- Cabinet Member
- Chief Executive
- Legal Sarah Duxbury
- Finance
- Other Chief Officers
- District Councils
- Health Authority
- Police
- Other Bodies/Individuals

FINAL DECISION YES

SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS:

Details to be specified

Further consideration by
this Committee

To Council

.....

To Cabinet

.....

To an O & S Committee

.....

To an Area Committee

.....

Further Consultation

.....

Agenda No

Overview And Scrutiny Coordinating Group - 30 January 2008.

Overview and Scrutiny Strategy

Report of the Strategic Director of Performance and Development

Recommendation

That the Group approves the revised strategy with/without amendment.

The Group is asked to consider how it would wish to publicise the Strategy

The Group initially considered the proposed strategy at its meeting on 28 November 2007. Following the comments of the Group a revised strategy is attached for approval and the Group is also asked for its views on how it would wish to promote/publicise the new strategy.

The purpose of any strategy is to provide a focus and direction for securing improvement. The next stage is to develop an action plan to support the strategy.

DAVID CARTER
Strategic Director of Performance
and Development

Shire Hall
Warwick

06 December 2007



Overview and Scrutiny Strategy

Introduction

Overview and scrutiny is part of the process of checks and balances that seeks to ensure that the Council and public services in Warwickshire are delivering on its promises. Key roles for overview and scrutiny committees are

- holding the Cabinet and other decision-makers to account
- using the call-in process to challenge executive decisions before they are implemented
- policy review and development
- engaging with the community
- ensuring that public services are effective, efficient and responsive to the needs of the community

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 sets an ambitious agenda to empower individual councillors and overview and scrutiny committees to hold public service providers in their area to account and to ensure the concerns of communities are considered in local decision-making. Enhanced powers are given to individual councillors through the 'Councillor Call for Action' to refer matters of public concern to overview and scrutiny committees for consideration. Overview and Scrutiny Committees are given new powers to require information and have their reports and recommendations taken into account by public service partners in relation to matters falling within the scope of the Local Area Agreement.

The development of the new Local Involvement Networks (LINKs) provides another avenue for the public to express their views and concerns about health and social care services in their area and provides an opportunity to further strengthen the ability of overview and scrutiny committees to reflect public opinion.

Whilst it is hoped that by demonstrating the value of its work overview and scrutiny can gain the co-operation of partners voluntarily these new powers do provide a framework for enhancing both the democratic accountability of public services at a local level and the crucial leadership role for councillors as champions of their communities.

Good Overview & Scrutiny

- Provides 'critical friend' challenge to policy makers and decision-makers
- Provides an opportunity to debate the principles and values which lie at the heart of policy development
- Enables the voice and concerns of the public to be heard
- Is carried out by 'independent' minded people who lead and own the scrutiny role
- Drives improvement in public services
- Adds value and is able to demonstrate its effectiveness

Overview and Scrutiny is about increasing accountability, improving performance and engaging local people

Our Vision For The Future

How would we like to see the overview and scrutiny function in Warwickshire develop over the next five(?) years? Our aspirations are for an overview and scrutiny function that

- is a key driver of the local public service improvement agenda
- is viewed as an essential part of the decision-making process on important public service issues
- makes a positive difference to the lives of people living and working in Warwickshire
- encourages proactive engagement by the public, partners and communities
- enhances the community leadership role of councillors
- is valued by the council, public and partners
- is relevant to local people
- is recognised locally and nationally for the work it carries out

Our Strategy

Engaging Members

- Providing all members with the requisite skills to be effective participants through the member development programme.
- Implementing effective arrangements for dealing with any councillor call for action under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007
- Ensuring all members are aware of how the procedures for call-in of executive decisions operate
- Demonstrating the benefits of what good overview and scrutiny can achieve
- Providing members with the opportunities to go on best practice visits
- Providing members with the opportunity to engage directly with service providers and service users
- Chairs and spokespersons of Overview and Scrutiny Committees acting as scrutiny champions within and outside the Council
- Publication of annual reports to Council and the outcomes of reviews in relevant council publications.

Critical friend challenge to policy makers and decision-makers

- Carrying out evidence based reviews
- Ensuring recommendations are achievable and practicable and draw on best practice
- Building relationships of trust with members and officers of the Council and relevant partners
- Engaging policy makers and decision-makers in the work of overview and scrutiny to ensure their issues and concerns are understood
- Ensuring the voice and concerns of the public are heard
- Using the call-in process in appropriate circumstances to challenge executive decisions before they are implemented

Engaging with the Community

- Providing all members with the opportunity to represent the views and concerns of their communities
- Inviting relevant partners and other organisations to participate in reviews and meetings
- Promoting the work of the overview and scrutiny through the press and media
- Promoting the work of the overview and scrutiny through the website and the publication of leaflets
- Proactive publicity and consultation in relation to appropriate reviews
- Publishing the outcomes of reviews to the community and relevant partners
- Using the new locality arrangements and the new Local Involvement Network (LINK) to identify issues of local concern and to feedback the outcomes of reviews
- Responding promptly to issues of concern raised by the LINK

Driving improvement in public services

- Ensuring the work programme is focussed on issues where the overview and scrutiny function can add value/make a difference
- Implementing the agreed criteria for the selection of topics to ensure the work programme remains relevant to local people
- Developing and implementing a core work programme to ensure that priorities are dealt with
- Monitoring the performance of the Council to identify areas for improvement
- Implementing effective arrangements to monitor the performance of the local area agreement
- Through reviews or other activities providing a forum for the exchange of views on particular issues from stakeholders
- Ensuring the voice and concerns of the public on specific issues are heard
- Learning from best practice

Adding Value and demonstrating effectiveness

- Implementing the agreed performance management framework for overview and scrutiny
- Monitoring the response to review recommendations.
- Monitoring the impact of recommendations on the delivery of public services
- Publicising the outcomes and impacts of reviews through appropriate press and media
- Publication of annual reports

Key Skills for Overview and Scrutiny

Scrutiny requires members to assess, probe, analyse and adopt a number of different, often innovative techniques in order to achieve their objectives, requiring the application of a variety of skills.

Chairing Skills

Chairing Skills are key to an effective meeting. An effective chair manages the use of time by:

- ❑ Helping to interpret, clarify and summarise
- ❑ Helping move the discussion on
- ❑ Remains focussed on outcomes
- ❑ Gets a result which is then accepted as the collective will
- ❑ Shows a commitment to achieving objectives
- ❑ Holding respect through impartiality
- ❑ Managing and taking ownership of the work programme
- ❑ Ensuring balance
- ❑ Encouraging appropriate participation
- ❑ Using officers appropriately
- ❑ Communicating effectively, including through the media

Project Planning Skills

The ability to plan events to a conclusion taking into account resources and timescales. This includes planning scrutiny reviews and also planning work programmes for the Committees and identifying desired outcomes.

Team Working

Getting members of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee or panel working effectively together towards a common goal

Questioning Skills

The ability to probe and prod for information, managing to question and challenge officers without interrogating

Listening

Genuinely listening to others whose views and opinions may differ from your own.

Analytical Skills

The ability to review and interpret data and reach well reasoned conclusions and recommendations. Developing SMART recommendations

Report writing

The ability to write clear and concise accounts with recommendations for action

Negotiating

The ability to negotiate to reach a consensus

Developing relationships

Promoting scrutiny by developing relationships with the Cabinet, Officers, Partners, Key Stakeholders, members of the public, other Committees (Other Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Area Committees) and the media.

Selecting Topics for Overview and Scrutiny

1. Whether or not any particular issue will be addressed is determined using the following criteria.
 - Does this issue have a potential impact for significant section(s) of the population?
 - Is it a matter of general public concern?
 - Is the issue to be reviewed a key deliverable of a strategic and/or partnership plan?
 - Is it a key performance area where the Council needs to improve?
 - Is there a legislative requirement to undertake the review?
2. Secondly to ensure that reviews add value/ make a difference consideration will be given to whether it is practicable to undertake the review by asking the following questions-
 - Are there adequate resources available to do the activity well?
 - Is the overview and scrutiny activity timely?
 - Is there a clear objective for scrutinising this topic?
 - Is there evidence to support the need for overview and scrutiny?
 - What are the likely benefits to the council and its customers?
 - Are we likely to achieve a desired outcome?
 - What are the potential risks?

Reasons to Reject Items for Overview and Scrutiny

3. There will sometimes be very compelling reasons why an item should not be subject to overview and scrutiny. Most commonly this arises where
 - An issue is being examined elsewhere - e.g. by the cabinet, working group, officer group, other body
 - An issue was dealt with less than 2 years ago
 - New legislation or guidance is expected within the next year
 - There is no scope for overview and scrutiny to add value/ make a difference