

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COORDINATING GROUP HELD ON 30 JANUARY 2008

Present:

Members of the Group:

Councillors: David Booth
Ken Browne
Richard Chattaway
Alan Cockburn
Richard Grant (Chair)
Mick Jones
Frank McCarney
Jerry Roodhouse

Officers: Ann Mawdsley, Principal Committee Administrator
Jane Pollard, Overview and Scrutiny Manager

1. General

(1) Apologies

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Bob Stevens and David Carter.

(2) Members' Disclosures of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

None.

(3) Minutes of the meeting held on 28 November 2007

The minutes of the 28 November 2007 meeting were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

Matters Arising

None.

2. Councillor Call for Action – Consultation Paper

The Group considered the report of the Strategic Director of Performance and Development following the Government consultation paper on Local Petitions and Call for Action and seeking advice of the Group on which issues needed to be excluded from the councillor call for action and the issues which should be included in any guidance. Jane Pollard added that Members needed to be assisted to informally deal with community issues on an individual basis with Overview and Scrutiny Committees dealing with more strategic issues.

During the ensuing discussion the following points were made:

1. Members agreed that there were a number of opportunities available to address issues initially such as in Area Fora and questions in full Council,

and the consideration of issues by Overview and Scrutiny Committees should be seen as a last resort and at a stage when a more robust process was required. Councillors should be under a positive obligation to take steps to resolve the issue before using the councillor call for action process.

2. It should not be used to circumvent other council processes such as complaint procedures, call-in etc. Areas that should be excluded from the Councillor Call for Action were:
 - issues where there were clear appeal processes such as planning etc
 - individual staff matters
 - issues which would be dealt with under the Council's complaints procedures
 - litigation/court processes
 - vexatious/ repetitive complaints.
3. Committees should use the criteria for selecting topics for overview and scrutiny as the basis for considering whether or not the Committee should enquire into an issue.
4. There needed to be a mechanism in place so that local people were able to engage in the process, but strict criteria would be adhered to before an issue was considered by Overview and Scrutiny.
5. The Councillor Call for Action covered County Council as well as other public service functions and there would be decisions that may have to be made by other organisations such as Severn Trent and the Highways Agency. One of the considerations for any Overview and Scrutiny Committee would have to be whether or not there was any realistic prospect of being able to influence the outcome.
6. The Council should develop a clear protocol to ensure the process was not abused. There were processes in place in other local authorities and it was agreed that Warwickshire should learn from good practice already in operation.

Resolved:

The Group endorsed the report and recommended that Cabinet include their comments in the County Council response to the Government consultation paper on Local Petitions and Call for Action.

3. Overview and Scrutiny Strategy

The Group considered the report of the Strategic Director of Performance and Development putting forward a draft Overview and Scrutiny Strategy for members' comments.

During the ensuing discussion the following points were agreed:

1. The Strategy was to assist Members to organise and rationalise their workloads.

2. Scrutiny was not about County Council work only, but about public services generally in Warwickshire, and Overview and Scrutiny Committees were in a position to use their profile to ensure the public voice was heard and that issues of concern to the public were taken up by the relevant bodies.
3. The work programmes of Overview and Scrutiny Committees were Member-led and the choice to address any issue was determined by Members.

Resolved:

That the Group approves the revised Strategy for a period of five years.

The Overview and Scrutiny Strategy should be sent to all Members electronically and be available on the Overview and Scrutiny webpage.

4. Developing the 2008/09 Core Work Programme

The Group considered the report of the Strategic Director of Performance and Development advising members on the progress made in meeting the requirements of the current core work programme and seeking views on the issues for inclusion in the Core Work Programme 2008/09.

During the ensuing discussion it was agreed that the 2008/09 Core Work Programme would include the following generic reports:

- PriceWaterhouseCoopers Benchmarking reports
- Directorate/Performance Reports around corporate plans and priorities (taking into account the three top priorities adopted by the Council for 2007-2010)
- Medium Term Financial Plan/Finance Reports
- Local Area Agreement Reports
- Action Plans arising from external inspections/reports.

Resolved:

1. That the Group notes the progress made in meeting the current work programme.
2. That a one page 2008/09 Core Work Programme be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committees in the March round of meetings for response to the Group in April 2008 with any comments/suggestions and the final 2008/09 Work Programme to be considered by full Council in May.

5. Annual Reports to Council

The Group considered the report of the Strategic Director of Performance and Development following a request from Members for guidance on the appropriate line of questioning for Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Portfolio Holders when presenting their respective annual reports.

Resolved:

- (1) That the Group agrees the proposed approach.
- (2) That the protocols be forwarded to Leaders Liaison Group for consideration.

6. Date of Next Meeting

The Group noted that their next meeting was scheduled for Wednesday 30 April 2008 at 2.00 p.m.

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Chair

The Group rose at 3.05 p.m.