

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

Present:

Members of the Group:

Councillors: David Booth
Ken Browne
Richard Chattaway
Richard Grant (Chair)
Bob Stevens

Officers: David Carter, Strategic Director Performance and Development
Jim Graham, Chief Executive
Jane Pollard, Overview and Scrutiny Manager
John Wright, Committee Manager

1. General

(1) Apologies

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Alan Cockburn, Mick Jones, Frank McCarney and Jerry Roodhouse.

(2) Members' Disclosures of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

None.

(3) Minutes of the meeting held on 30 January 2008

The minutes of the 30 January 2008 meeting were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

(4) Matters Arising

None.

2. Developing the 2008/09 Overview and Scrutiny Core Work Programme

The Group considered the core work programme for 2008/08. Particular consideration was given to whether or not items from the work programmes of individual Overview and Scrutiny committees should be included in the core work programme.

Consideration was also given to how LAAs could be scrutinised. It was felt that there was a need to examine whether they were effective and providing value for money.

Resolved:

- (1) The Group approved the following Core Work Programme for 2008/09 for submission to Council:

Issue	Lead Overview and scrutiny Committee
PriceWaterhouseCoopers Benchmarking reports	ALL
Directorate Performance Report Cards	ALL
Corporate Business Plan – Priorities and Targets	ALL
Local Area Agreement – Effectiveness, Value for Money and Priorities (Including quarterly performance reports)	ALL
Action Plans arising from external inspections/reports	As Appropriate
Medium Term Financial plan/Financial reports	Resources Performance and Development
Any requirements in response to CPA	ALL
Commissioning strategies	As appropriate
Narrowing the gap	ALL
Customer focus	Resources Performance and Development
Educational Attainment	Children, Young People and Families
Personalisation Agenda for Adult Social Care	Adult and Community
Extra Care with Housing	Adult and Community

3. Overview and Scrutiny Performance Round Up 2007- 08

The Group considered the performance of the overview and scrutiny function during 2007-08. The group had agreed an action plan to implement the outcomes of the scrutiny review in January 2007 and the work set out in the plan had been completed.

The Group had agreed a performance management framework in April 2007 and the report detailed progress against the agreed indicators. It was noted that the percentage of recommendations accepted and implemented during the year was affected by issues such as available budgetary provision and the timescales for service reconfiguration. It would be important for the Group to monitor levels of acceptance and implementation and where levels were low to examine the reasons for this.

Overall the report was positive and the challenge was to maintain the momentum. Areas for improvement such as developing the skills of members and promoting awareness were picked up as part of the draft Action Plan to take forward the Strategy.

During the course of the debate it was suggested that the Group might wish to scrutinise the performance of the decision making processes of the council. However the Group considered that because of the potential political implications this was a matter for the Leaders Liaison Group.

Resolved:

(1) The report be noted.

4. Draft O and S Action Plan 2008- 09

The Group had previously agreed the Overview and Scrutiny Strategy 2008-13. The Group considered the draft overview and scrutiny action plan which would take the Strategy forward.

The Group identified the need for training to

- Enable members to ask informed questions and improve questioning skills generally
- Improve chairing skills
- Enable scrutiny to be carried out as a non political team exercise
- Provide a comprehensive induction process for newly elected councillors
- Provide training for prospective candidates to enable them to have a fuller understanding of the roles and functions of councillors and of the Council as an organisation.

The Group also considered that more should be done to encourage small groups of councillors to carry out scrutiny work which could then be reported back to the relevant committees.

Resolved

The draft overview and scrutiny action plan be approved.

5. Representing The Future: The report of the Councillors Commission

Resolved

That consideration of the report be deferred until the next meeting of the Committee.

6. Regional Scrutiny Arrangements

The Group considered the consultation from the West Midlands Overview and Scrutiny Network on possible arrangements for the provision of regional scrutiny as consequence of the changes that will be introduced by the Sub National Review.

During the consideration of the item the following points were made

- It is important for scrutiny to have a voice at the regional and sub-regional level.
- The Forum for Leaders was not an appropriate body to carry out regional scrutiny there was value in establishing a separate body to do so
- There needs to be a debate regarding whether or not it is appropriate for Cabinet members, who are not used to being involved in scrutiny and may not have undergone specialist scrutiny training, to be involved in scrutiny at a regional level
- There was concern that if a regional body was too large it may inhibit the prospects for achieving a consensus and actually being able to pursue a work programme.
- Sub regional scrutiny was likely to play an increasingly important role in the future and this view had been recently supported by Liam Byrne MP, Minister for the West Midlands. Any new regional scrutiny arrangements should take this in to account.
- It would be important to establish the views of the other County Councils in the region on the consultation and if appropriate a joint response to the consultation should be submitted.

The Group was concerned that the consultation document was rather imprecise about a number of key aspects of the operation of any new arrangements and in particular does not

- Explain how authorities would nominate members to serve on the regional scrutiny body
- Explain the political composition of any new regional scrutiny body
- Give an indication of the proportion of co-opted members that may be involved in scrutiny reviews
- Provide any proposals for consideration on the size of the body that would be created
- Give an indication of the proposed amount of officer support that would be required nor the likely costs of doing so
- Suggest the range of subjects which could be the subject of regional scrutiny in addition to scrutiny of Advantage West Midlands

Resolved:

- (1) The contents of the consultation be noted
- (2) The Overview and Scrutiny Manager be authorised to respond to the consultation on behalf of the Council
- (3) The Overview and Scrutiny Manager, in consultation with the Chairman, be requested to establish the views of the other County Councils in the region on the consultation and if appropriate co-ordinate a joint response to the consultation on behalf of all relevant County Councils.

7. West Midlands Overview and Scrutiny Network Steering Group

The Group considered the notes of the meeting of the West Midlands Overview and Scrutiny Network Steering Group held on 17 March 2008.

Resolved

The report be noted

8. Date of Next Meeting

The Group noted that their next meeting would be held on Monday 7 July 2008 at 2.00 p.m.

9. Any Other Business

- (1) A number of issues had been raised with the Chair in relation to possible reporting arrangements to the committees
 - (a) The Group decided that the Overview and Scrutiny Committees did not wish to receive a report on the ECO –Town consultation proposals in advance of the 19 June meeting of the Cabinet
 - (b) The Group decided that Chairs did not wish to see the draft report to Cabinet (22 May meeting) on the new LAA priorities and targets as there was little that could be altered at that stage and in any event there would be a report to full council on 24 June 2008. The committees could look at the new arrangements when it received its quarterly performance reports in the next cycle of committees.
- (2) It was noted that there was a workshop on the future of regional scrutiny at Warwick Racecourse on 14 May 2008 and Wolverhampton on 22nd May 2008. Any member interested in attending should let Jane Pollard know asap.
- (3) It was agreed that the Group receive a report at its next meeting on how best to coordinate scrutiny of the LAA with the Districts and the arrangements for holding the Public Service Board to account.

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Chair

The Group rose at 3.05 p.m.