

Chairman's report to Scrutiny Committee - 26 Jan 2017

My 3 main objectives for Overview & Scrutiny function:

1. **Increase engagement with committee members, council members, officers, Cabinet and the public.** I'm doing this by:
 - a. Implementing more inclusive practices of query within the committee, such as circulating Cabinet decisions for opinions as to whether they should be called in
 - b. Offering available training to committee members so they feel more competent and confident
 - c. Considering and responding to public requests to look more closely at some policies or processes
 - d. Polling council members for their suggestions
 - e. Learning what other authorities do to increase engagement

2. **Improve the reputation of Scrutiny for adding value to our policies and strategies.** I'm doing this by:
 - a. Resuming the production of the Annual Scrutiny Report, where we will report to council what we've contributed in the year
 - b. Encouraging committee to resist the temptation to correct grammar, typos and spelling, and to encourage policy writers to use the Communications team to create better documents. We need Scrutiny to contribute substantive recommendations, not to be the punctuation police.
 - c. Discussing with heads of services and Cabinet members their concerns about Scrutiny and ways they see for Scrutiny to add value to their work.
 - d. Learning what other authorities' scrutiny committees do to add value

3. **Improve the working relationship with Cabinet, to bring draft policy and strategy docs to Scrutiny earlier in the process.** I'm doing this by:
 - a. Encouraging open discussions of how we can improve the process for each service area. The desires and fears of each Head of Service and Cabinet member differ.
 - b. Offering to be available for Cabinet members if they'd like to meet up to discuss.
 - c. Discussing with Leader of Council how we can improve our working relationship, then following through.
 - d. Learning how scrutiny chairmen in other authorities relate with Cabinet

To help understand options and opportunities to improve on these three things, I've been working with a scrutiny mentor and consultant since October 2016. We've explored our current Scrutiny practises and considered what we could do. Today's report presents to you the things I think we should try to implement. This report is to inspire discussion, ideas, and commitment.

Proposal for our way forward in 2017.

1. Resume production of Annual Scrutiny Report to council beginning July 2017.

- a. Foreword by Chairman
- b. Summary of work and successes for the year. We'll ask for contributions from committee members.
- c. What is Scrutiny?
- d. Committee members and blurbs from each about how they view scrutiny's contribution to council's work.
- e. How we are organised (district, joint, five councils partnership)
 - i. Vale Overview & Scrutiny, for policy, strategy and performance to do solely with Vale.
 1. Whole committee
 2. Task/working groups
 - ii. Joint Overview & Scrutiny, for policy, strategy and performance having to do jointly with both SODC and Vale.
 1. District chair is co-chair of Joint committee
 2. Whole committee
 - iii. Five Councils Partnership contract Overview & Scrutiny, having to do with governance and performance under the shared outsourcing contracts.
 1. Two members from the Vale Overview & Scrutiny are members of this committee
 2. SODC is the first chair of this partnership committee, which has rotating chairmanship. Details of how this will work are forthcoming.
- f. Planned work for the next year: major items from our work programme and some information about them.
- g. Scrutiny development for the future. For this year, this will be a main focus of the report. In future years, I'd expect this to take a back seat to our work programme and results.
 - i. Put in place our annual work plan (like the Cabinet work programme; public, more information about each item)
 - ii. Role definitions: to lay out expectations of committee members and roles with special responsibility allowance

- iii. Handbook: to describe to new members and other interested people how we work, responsibilities etc.

2. Proactively manage our work programme.

- a. **Long List:** The first step in amassing a meaningful work programme is for Committee to brainstorm to create a long list of possible issues to scrutinise. See the timeline below for where this fits in.
 - i. Members of committee, please consider issues you've seen, also whether casework points to a policy or strategy need, or recurring performance issue. Please start a list!
 - ii. Ask your colleagues who aren't on Scrutiny to identify issues.
 - iii. Officers can help with their experience and professional association with previous work.

- b. **Short List:** From long list, a working group of volunteers will select the issues committee will to work on. Scrutiny Committee to consider and adopt short list recommendations. See timeline below.
 - i. I've requested funding for a Short List Workshop, facilitated by an external consultant, one evening from 5-9pm or so, to allow members who work during daytime hours to participate.
 - ii. Committee members and consultant would derive the short list from long list using criteria in decision tree (attached at Appendix 1) and other tools (to be introduced by consultant.)
 - iii. For each item directed to the short list, working group to recommend whether it's work for the whole committee or a task group. If a task group seems the best solution, working group to recommend a champion / leader. Working group to recommend who to invite to report to Scrutiny or be a witness.
 - iv. We need to attach members to any working groups. If this is done by the working group, committee will need to approve. Or we can do this at the Scrutiny committee meeting just after the short list workshop.
 - v. During this Short list Workshop, we'll document the process in order to have a process to follow in future years. Scrutiny Committee to review and adopt the process.

- 3. **Scrutiny Best Practices Workshop.** One of my objectives is to increase engagement of committee members and another is to increase our value to council. One way to contribute to both of these things is to provide training in new techniques and best practices. In addition to offering remote courses, such as those offered by the centre for Public Scrutiny, we can bring experts in to us.

I've requested funding for consultant to facilitate a Scrutiny Best Practices Workshop for all committee members (including South members). We can learn about how to form and manage task (or working) groups, and general better practices for scrutinising. To be held evening hours for the length of a usual meeting, for example, 7-9:30pm.

4. Timeline for next 6 months

- a. **January 2017:** Today I'm presenting my ideas for improvement for committee discussion, refinement and adoption.
- b. **February 2017: Long List brainstorm.** Committee members brainstorm long-list of issues for consideration for our work programme.
- c. **March 2017: Short list workshop.** Consultant facilitated workshop, as described in item 2b above.
- d. **April 2017:** Publish the process we used to create the short list; Scrutiny Committee to adopt. Publish work programme for 2017/18 in a format more like the Cabinet work programme.
- e. **May or June 2017: Scrutiny Best Practices Workshop.** As described in item 3 above.
- f. **April 2017 - March 2018:** Do our planned work. Modify work programme as needed to accommodate ad hoc needs.
- g. **July 2017** – first annual report to council.

I hope you're with me on all this. Any suggestions for improvement of the plan?

Appendix 1

Work Programme Development- Overview & Scrutiny Topic Selection Flowchart

