

BUSINESS SUPPORT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

3 FEBRUARY 2009

WORK PROGRAMME

Report from: Neil Davies, Chief Executive

Author: Peter Holland, Committee Co-ordinator

Summary

This item advises Members of the current work programme and allows them to adjust it in the light of latest priorities, issues and circumstances. It gives Members the opportunity to shape and direct the Committee's activities over the year.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

- 1.1 Under Chapter 4 – Rules, paragraph 22.1 (v) General terms of reference, each overview and scrutiny committee has the responsibility for setting its own work programme.

2. Background

- 2.1 Appendix 1 to this report sets out the existing work programme for the committee.

3. Agenda planning meeting

- 3.1 Members will be aware that Overview and Scrutiny Committees hold agenda planning meetings on a regular basis. These give officers greater guidance on information Members wish them to provide when scrutinising an issue. An agenda planning meeting was held on 15 January 2009.
- 3.2 It was agreed that Members of the Committee receive a briefing note relating to the Six-Monthly Review of Complaints and that Capital Budget Monitoring and Revenue Budget Monitoring would appear as a single agenda item and that Members would be invited to ask the Chief Finance Officer any questions relating to the contents of the reports relating to Capital and Revenue Budget Monitoring that went to Cabinet on 27 January 2009.

4. Homeless Strategy Task Group

- 4.1 A "one-off" task group consisting of 5 members of the committee met on 14 January 2009 to consider the Homeless Strategy prior to it going to Cabinet on 27 January 2009.
- 4.2 The task group agreed the strategies vision and 5 aims and asked that a report reviewing the Homeless Strategy be brought to the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee in six months time.

5. The co-ordinating role of the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- 5.1 Under Medway's constitution, Chapter 4 – Rules – paragraph 22.2 (xxiii) this Committee has the overall responsibility 'to provide guidance and leadership on the development and co-ordination of the scrutiny function for all Overview and Scrutiny Committees, including guidance on priorities for scrutiny activities'.
- 5.2 To assist the Committee in fulfilling this role the Chairman has agreed that a regular overview of business discussed by the other O and S Committees should be presented at these meetings. Whilst each O and S Committee is able to determine its own work programme this Committee may wish to comment on common themes and the balance of business being covered by each Committee. The work of Overview and Scrutiny Committees can include:
- items raised by individual members of the Committee or any six members of the Council who are not members of the Committee
 - work on matters referred for review by the Council.
 - Pre-decision scrutiny of items on the Cabinet's Forward Plan selected by the Committee for discussion
 - policy review and development often undertaken in small cross party task groups. Each Committee usually undertakes one or two reviews of this type each year.
 - pre-budget scrutiny
 - consideration of petitions presented at Full Council
 - consideration of called-in Cabinet decisions
- 5.3 Appendix 2 to this report sets out an overview of the work undertaken by each Overview and Scrutiny Committee during the last cycle of meetings and for the next cycle. In addition Appendix 3 sets out the items in the Cabinet's Forward Plan indicating by asterisk items identified by the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee for pre-decision scrutiny.
- 5.4 **Task Group Activity**

It has been suggested that there be a final meeting of the Civic HQ Task Group after the first meeting of Council at the St Georges Centre. Members have previously requested that this Committee set up a Task Group on a housing related topic and the following issues were identified as potential topics:

- Temporary Accommodation
- Empty Property
- Value for Money

5.5 If members select one of the above topics for a Task Group the proposed Energy Conservation Task Group would have to be delayed.

6. Scrutiny of the Local Area Agreement (LAA)

6.1 A write-up of outcomes from the joint LSP/Overview and Scrutiny development sessions held on 28 October and 1 December 2008 was circulated before Christmas to all Councillors and participating partner organisations. The sessions were commissioned by this Committee and the LSP to discuss the accountability framework for the LAA and how Overview and Scrutiny Committees (OSCs) can exercise their new powers to effectively and constructively scrutinise and challenge the LAA lead partners.

6.2 The top five actions identified as a priority for overview and scrutiny at the 1 December session are summarised below and the Committee is invited to approve the proposed next steps suggested under each action:

Action 1:

The purpose of OSCs and their work programmes should be reviewed and the focus sharpened to create capacity for scrutiny of the LAA

Proposed next steps:

- **That all reports to OSCs should clearly identify and explain any implications for delivery of relevant LAA targets.**
- **That OSCs should be encouraged to take into account the extent to which Task Group work might contribute to delivery of LAA targets in terms of Task Groups currently underway and when new topics for indepth reviews are selected.**
- **That each OSC should be encouraged to minimise the time spent on receiving and noting information reports and that maximum use should be made of briefing notes as an alternative.**

Action 2:

There must be early and timely engagement by the LSP and partners with OSCs

Proposed next steps:

- That the LSP should be asked to consider inviting input from OSCs at an early stage when LAA targets are changed or re-negotiated
- That the LSP should be encouraged to be proactive in inviting input from OSCs in relation to targets where delivery is not on track or

where scrutiny could undertake in-depth research and gather evidence to support action planning in challenging areas such as the target for reducing teenage conception

- That the suggestion made at the 1 December development session of asking each thematic partnership to nominate an OSC link person should be explored further.

Action 3:

Performance Monitoring information must be accurate and early for meaningful OSC involvement

Proposed next steps:

- That the delivery plans for each target should be made accessible to all Overview and Scrutiny Committee members, preferably electronically (the feasibility of this is currently being explored by officers)
- That the end of year performance information (as submitted to the Government) for each LAA target should be reported to each OSC and that an update on performance should then be reported to each Committee in the July/August cycle of meetings

Action 4:

For meaningful engagement OSCs should scope and prepare questions ahead of inviting partners to meetings and where possible give advance notice of questions

Proposed next steps:

- That each Overview and Scrutiny Committee should be encouraged to ensure that partners are notified of questions in advance when invited to attend OSC meetings and that this should be built into the protocol mentioned under Action 5 below.

Action 5:

Protocols should be developed to ensure there are clear ground rules for OSC engagement with partner organisations

Proposed next steps:

- That training on scrutiny of partnerships should be built into the Member Development programme from 2009/10
- That a draft protocol to establish best practice for engagement by OSCs with partners should be developed and reported to this Committee

- 6.3 Finally, a refresh of the LAA is required to be submitted to the Government by 26 March. In order to meet this timescale and in view of the fact this is a technical exercise and will not involve any

significant changes to Medway's LAA it is proposed to submit a report to Cabinet on 10 March, the LSP Board on 24 March and then, subject to consultation with the Mayor, Group Leaders and the Whips to, a special quorate meeting of the Council. This will avoid the need for a special meeting of this Committee.

7. Cabinet Forward Plan

7.1 Appendix 3 sets out the current forward plan.

8. Financial and legal implications

8.1 There are no financial or legal implications arising from this report.

9. Recommendations

9.1 That Members consider whether any changes need to be made to the work programme, including whether to add any items from the forward plan.

9.2 Members are asked to note the work undertaken by all overview and scrutiny committees in the last cycle and to be considered at the next cycle of meetings (set out in appendix 2 to this report).

9.3 That the Committee agree to the proposed next steps on the scrutiny of the LAA.

9.4 To agree the topic for the next Business Support Task Group.

Lead officer contact

Peter Holland, Committee Co-ordinator

Telephone: 01634 332011 Email: peter.holland@medway.gov.uk