



- 1.2 To make recommendations to Cabinet and Council to help ensure continuous evaluation and improvement of the delivery of the Council's overview and scrutiny function.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 That the current overview and scrutiny committees and arrangements be retained and their operation and effectiveness be further evaluated in 12 months.
- 2.2 That the following working arrangements be confirmed:-
- 2.2.1 That the scrutiny link officer role be further developed and promoted.
  - 2.2.2 That the scrutiny committee pre-agenda meetings be further developed and promoted.
  - 2.2.3 That the Scrutiny Project Group initiation and scoping process be further developed and supported with appropriate guidance and procedures.
  - 2.2.4 That the current constitutional Scrutiny Procedure Rules and informal protocols be further developed as necessary.
  - 2.2.5 That informal meetings between the scrutiny chairs, vice-chairs and cabinet portfolio holders be retained.
  - 2.2.6 That ongoing learning and development opportunities continue, and development and improvement of the overview and scrutiny arrangements over the next 12 months take into consideration the findings of the evaluation survey.
  - 2.2.7 That promotion of overview and scrutiny continues to take place through the Borough Bulletin and Service Team Meetings to further raise the profile, awareness and understanding of the function.
  - 2.2.8 That the Policy and Scrutiny Officer provide a report following evaluation after a further 12 months of operation.

## **3.0 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 In July 2010 Cabinet agreed that an external review of the overview and scrutiny function be undertaken and an independent review was then commissioned. The findings and recommendations of the independent review were considered by Cabinet on 29 November

and Council on 14 December 2011 where new arrangements for scrutiny were agreed and put in place subject to a review after 12 months.

- 3.2 Following operation of the new arrangements in 2012/13 an evaluation was subsequently undertaken and a report and action plan considered and adopted by Cabinet on 9 July 2013 and Council on 24 July 2013. A further annual review was also agreed. The completed action plan for 2013/14 is attached as Appendix 3.

#### **4.0 SCRUTINY SUCCESS AND ACHIEVEMENTS**

- 4.1 The current scrutiny arrangements have now been in operation for more than 2 years and during that time there have not been any fundamental problems with their implementation. Feedback and engagement in the delivery of the new arrangements has on the whole been encouraging and the general trend, as again evidenced by the survey results, is positive. Scrutiny committees, with all scrutiny stakeholders, continue to work pro-actively to undertake and support scrutiny work. Scrutiny's achievements for the year are detailed fully within the Scrutiny Annual Report 2013/14 to be received by Council along with this report on 30 July 2014. Annual reviews are recommended to ensure ongoing evaluation and improvement of the scrutiny function and its delivery.

#### **5.0 OVERVIEW AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY FORUM**

- 5.1 This report will be submitted for scrutiny to the Overview and Performance Scrutiny Forum on 19 June 2014. Comments and recommendations of the Scrutiny Forum will then be included within this report.

#### **6.0 REVIEW TIMETABLE AND METHODOLOGY**

- 6.1 The review timetable is below :

- (1) April / May 2014 – Corporate survey undertaken.
- (2) May / June – analysis work and report production.
- (3) 19 June 2014 - Initial report and findings to Overview and Performance Scrutiny Forum for comment.
- (4) 7 July 2014 - Final report and findings, with any Scrutiny Committee recommendations to Cabinet.
- (5) 30 July 2014 - Final report to Council.

- 6.2 The method of research and evaluation comprised a survey. The survey questions were the same as used for last year's survey to enable a benchmark for comparison purposes going forwards. This

will help facilitate a measure of progress and improvement or otherwise. The questions were designed around each of the key findings of the independent review as detailed in the report of the Head of Governance to Cabinet on 29 November 2011. The questions are therefore intended to cover the following key issues raised in that independent report:

- (1) Overview and Scrutiny Structure
- (2) Scrutiny link officers
- (3) Scrutiny pre-agenda meetings
- (4) Scoping of reviews
- (5) Resources
- (6) Scrutiny protocols / procedure notes
- (7) Induction/follow-up sessions for Members and Officers
- (8) Executive inviting Scrutiny to look at certain issues
- (9) Some Scrutiny reviews to full Council
- (10) Importance of Forward Plan
- (11) Possible bi-monthly informal meetings between Chair, Vice-Chair and Portfolio Cabinet Member(s).

6.3 Questions were also designed to ensure a balance of quantitative and qualitative data providing both statistical measures of improvement together with contextual data to provide suggestions and ideas for further improvement actions.

## **7.0 EVALUATION AND ANALYSIS**

7.1 The survey sample included Council Members (48) Chief / Senior Officers, and Service Managers/Scrutiny Link Officers (79) a total of 127 persons surveyed. Of the 127, a total of 44 responses were received (34.6 %) an improvement of 15.8% on last year's return.

7.2 The percentage figures provided in this report are based on the percentage of respondees. Of those 44 respondees, 7 (15.9%) were Scrutiny Members, 10 (22.7%) were other Members, 24 (54.5%) were Officers and 3 (6.9%) not indicated. Appendix 3 also provides a breakdown of responses into the three respondent groups of (i) Scrutiny Member (ii) Other Member and (iii) Officer.

7.3 Appendices 1 and 2 attached provide all the survey response data received. It should be recognised that not all the questions in the survey would have been equally relevant to all respondees / respondee groups. This may account for the number of 'don't know' responses and other variations in responses to some of the questions.

Some key headline results are outlined below.

#### **7.4 Overview and Scrutiny Committee Structure :**

Compared with last year's 69.6%, a small increase to 71.4% now feel the scrutiny structure is effective or very effective. 21.4% indicated they 'didn't know' compared to none last year.

#### **7.5 Scrutiny Link Officers :**

Compared with last year's 52.1%, an increase to 59.1% of respondees agreed the introduction of link officers was useful or very useful. The 'don't know' responses are also fewer than last year by 11.8%.

#### **7.6 Scrutiny Committee Pre-Agenda Meetings:**

Compared with last year's 45.4%, a decrease to 39.5% means fewer respondees this year felt scrutiny pre-agenda meetings were effective / very effective. The 'don't know' responses has also increased from 36.4% to 44.2%.

#### **7.7 Scoping of Scrutiny Reviews :**

Compared with last year's 34.7%, an increase to 40.9% now feel that the scoping of scrutiny reviews has improved / improved a lot. The 'don't know' responses have also increased however from 34.8% to 40.9%.

#### **7.8 Resource Support for Scrutiny:**

Compared with last year's 17.4%, an increase of respondees to 28% now feel resource support for scrutiny has improved/improved a lot. Those indicating no improvement were also down from 47.8% to 23%. 'Don't know' responses have however increased to 50%.

#### **7.9 Constitutional Scrutiny Procedure Rules and Informal Protocols:**

Compared with last year's 39.1%, an increase of respondees to 50% now feel that procedure rules and informal protocols have improved / improved a lot.

#### **7.10 Learning Sessions for Members and Officers:**

Compared with last year's 54.5%, a decrease to 40.5% of respondees now feel learning sessions for members and officers have been useful / very useful. 'Don't know' responses are also up by 13.6%.

### 7.11 **Forward Plan of Key Decisions:**

Compared to 86.3% last year, 62.8% of respondents indicated that their awareness of the forward plan and key decisions has improved a great deal / to some extent during the year.

### 7.12 **Scrutiny and Executive Working Relationship:**

Compared with 66.7% last year, 60.5% of respondents strongly or tend to agree that the scrutiny and executive working relationship involving members and officers throughout the organisation, has improved. 'Don't know' responses are up from 14.3% to 23.3%.

### 7.13 **Informal Meetings between Scrutiny Chairs, Vice Chairs and Cabinet Portfolio Members :**

Compared with 59.1% last year, a slightly less 54.2% of respondents this year supported the continuation of ongoing informal meetings between scrutiny chairs / vice chairs and executive members. 'Don't know' responses are up from 31.8% to 43.2%.

### 7.14 **Barriers and Difficulties Under New Scrutiny Arrangements:**

Of the respondents 62.8% indicated that they had not experienced any barriers or difficulties under the current scrutiny arrangements. There is no benchmark measure available from last year's survey.

### 7.15 **Overall Experience of Scrutiny under New Arrangements:**

Compared with last year's result of 47.8%, an increase to 58.2% of respondents feel that their overall experience of scrutiny has improved / improved a lot.

### 7.16 **Further Research:**

Those surveyed were asked whether they wished to be further involved in the evaluation by taking part in a focus group or a telephone survey and 2 respondents out of 44 volunteered.

## **8.0 CONCLUSIONS**

8.1 The results of the survey highlight the following key findings.

8.2 **Improvement:** As for last year the majority of measured responses to questions throughout the survey, i.e. 9 out of the 12 questions measuring improvement, indicate a positive view of the arrangements. Although there are some decreases on last years

responses, favourable responses for 9 out of 12 remain higher than 50%. Also respondees who said their overall experience of scrutiny had either improved a lot or improved, has increased by 10.4% to 58.2%.

- 8.3 **Learning and Development:** Again there were a high level of 'don't know' responses to survey questions, many of the respondees feeling they were not able to answer some of the questions. Apart from the reasons already given in paragraph 7.3, this may indicate a knowledge / experience gap, and a need for more awareness raising, learning and involvement in scrutiny work. The survey comments provided continue to support this view. There is also an indication that the usefulness of learning opportunities for members and officers has decreased by 14%.
- 8.4 **Resourcing:** Compared to last year's result, 10.6% more people now feel that resourcing has improved and indications of no change are down by 25.5%. Though the 'don't knows' are still high at 50%. It should be highlighted however that recent restructure proposals to increase resource support to scrutiny members are still not yet fully in place. The completed Governance Restructure created new posts of Committee and Scrutiny Co-ordinator whose role it will be to provide resource support for scrutiny, and these officers should be in post soon. Operation of the new Governance structure will also be subject to review in 12 months.
- 8.5 **Scoping Reviews:** Though still less than 50% (at 40.9%), indications are that Scrutiny Project Group scoping and agreement of the terms of reference process is improving. Comments provided throughout the survey suggest actions that may help improve both the operation and outcomes of Scrutiny Project Group reviews.
- 8.6 **Pre-Agenda Meetings :** Indications of the effectiveness of pre-agenda meetings has decreased slightly and favourable responses are less than 50% (at 39.5%). Additional survey comments indicate some need for further development and promotion.
- 8.7 An action plan for 2014/15 to deliver the recommendations in this report is attached at Appendix 4. Actions in the plan are much the same as last year's and involve further consultation with the scrutiny stakeholder groups to ascertain more precise needs for further development and improvement.

## 9.0 **RISK CONSIDERATIONS**

- 9.1 There are no risk implications arising from the contents of this report.

## **10.0 FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

- 10.1 There are no financial implications arising from the contents of this report. Implementation of recommendations approved are to be maintained within existing budgets.

## **11.0 LEGAL CONSIDERATION**

- 11.1 There are no legal implications arising from the contents of this report.

## **12.0 EQUALITIES CONSIDERATIONS**

- 12.1 There are no equalities implications arising from the contents of this report.

## **13.1 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 13.2 That the new overview and scrutiny committees and arrangements be retained and their operation and effectiveness be further evaluated in 12 months.
- 13.3 That the following working arrangements be confirmed :
- 13.3.1 That the scrutiny link officer role be further developed and promoted.
  - 13.3.2 That the scrutiny committee pre-agenda meetings be further developed and promoted.
  - 13.3.3 That the Scrutiny Project Group initiation and scoping process be further developed and supported with appropriate guidance and procedures.
  - 13.3.5 That the current constitutional Scrutiny Procedure Rules and informal protocols be further developed as necessary.
  - 13.3.6 That informal meetings between the scrutiny chairs, vice-chairs and cabinet portfolio holders be retained.
  - 13.3.7 That ongoing learning and development opportunities continue and development and improvement of the overview and scrutiny arrangements over the next 12 months take into consideration the findings of the



evaluation survey.

13.3.8 That promotion of overview and scrutiny continues to take place through the Borough Bulletin and Service Team Meetings to further raise the profile, awareness and understanding of the function.

13.3.9 That the Policy and Scrutiny Officer provide a report following evaluation after a further 12 months of operation.

#### **14.0 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

14.1 To ensure continuous improvements to the effective and efficient delivery of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny function.

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You can get more information about this report from  
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Officer recommendation supported/not supported/modified as below or Executive Members' recommendation/comments if no Officer recommendation.

Signed

Executive Member

Date

Consultee Executive Member/Assistant Executive Member comments (if applicable)