

CABINET

Agenda Item: 10

Ward: District wide

Portfolio: Cross cutting

FROM: Cllr Harvey Siggs,
Leader of the Council
Cllr Damon Hooton,
Chairman of Scrutiny

Date: 10th July 2017

SUBJECT: Proposals to alter the scrutiny process within the Council

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	Seen by:	Name	Date
Report Sign off	Deputy Chief Executive	Tracy Aarons	11/6/17
	Legal	Lesley Dolan	14/6/17
	Finance	Paul Deal	14/6/17
	Portfolio Holder	Leader of the Council	27/06/17
	Ward Member	n/a	
Summary:	<p>Following concerns from across all parts of the Council regarding the effectiveness of the council's scrutiny process work has been carried out to identify ways in which the council can make scrutiny an integral part of the actions and business of the council.</p> <p>A member workshop enabled councillors to identify what was currently working well, what was not working as we has hoped and what a 'good' scrutiny process might look like. This information has been collated and used to develop the proposals with this report. The proposals look to increase the size of the scrutiny board and make better use of the wider skills of elected members. The main board will meet quarterly but in between meetings four working groups will be tasked to take forward actions around the areas of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Policy and strategy• Working with town councils• Performance management• Project working <p>The leads of these working groups will report back to the main Scrutiny Board meeting. By enabling scrutiny actions via the working groups, using the main board meetings to hear feedback on this work and then spend extended time focusing in depth on a specific service or function councillors will be able to better understand the activities and performance of the council and offer their views and opinions. It is also hoped that with this wider working more councillors will become actively involved in working of the council.</p>		
Recommendation:	Members are asked to:		

	<p>Approve the proposals within this report and recommend to full Council that these proposals and the necessary constitutional changes are implemented.</p>
<p>Direct and/or indirect impact on service delivery to our customers and communities:</p>	<p>The change in Scrutiny process itself will not have a direct impact but a more effective Scrutiny process should enable the Council to identify ways to improve its service delivery to customers and communities.</p>
<p>Impact on Service Plans:</p>	<p>The proposed changes will have some impact on democratic services as there will be a different approach to Scrutiny.</p>
<p>Financial Implications:</p>	<p>It is anticipated that there will be a small financial pressure from the creation of a Scrutiny Assistant post to help support the lead officer. This will be a part time position of 0.2FTE and will therefore be a relatively small sum.</p>
<p>Legal Implications:</p>	<p>The proposals will require amendments to the constitution which, if the proposals are approved by Cabinet, will be taken to Council for approval.</p>
<p>Crime and Disorder Implications:</p>	<p>None</p>
<p>Equalities Implications:</p>	<p>There are no identified equality implications as regards those with protected characteristics.</p>
<p>Risk Assessment and Adverse Impact on Corporate Actions:</p>	<p>A better scrutiny process will help identify areas within the council that would benefit from attention or changes in ways of working. This will consequently help contribute to the corporate approach to understanding and reducing risks.</p>
<p>Scrutiny Recommendation</p>	<p>Members of Scrutiny have had an active role in reshaping the way the scrutiny process could work across the organisation. At its meeting of 26th June Scrutiny Board agreed to recommend to Cabinet that the proposals discussed be adopted.</p>

INTRODUCTION

For scrutiny to be effective across the Council it needs to be an integral part of how we do business. Members, at the recent workshop to look at Scrutiny, expressed the view that the current process for scrutiny at Mendip has become stale and is not contributing effectively to the business of the council.

Members also expressed a desire to keep Scrutiny non-political, identifying the benefits that could be gained by the council from widening the opportunities for councillors to be involved in a scrutineering role and making clear a view that members would be keen to learn more about the working of the council to be able to help it to develop and move forward. Central to these conversations was a sense that members wanted more opportunity to take an active role in helping the council improve the lives of the residents of the District.

At the recent Peer Review the LGA Team identified the Scrutiny process as needing attention and noted the positive steps the Council was already taking to, having already identified the problem itself, to deal with the perceived weakness.

CHANGING THE APPROACH

From the feedback at the workshop and the input provided via other consultation members have expressed a view that Scrutiny should ensure it does the following as part of its role:

Review corporate performance in greater depth.

Act as positive challenge during the development of policies and strategies.

Provide impartial inquiry, as a representative of Scrutiny, on those project teams agreed by the Chairman of Scrutiny and Chairman of Cabinet as of corporate significance.

Explore the effectiveness of service delivery through 'Spotlight on' sessions aimed at enabling members to gain a greater depth of understanding of specific services.

It is therefore proposed that the following way of working is implemented as a way of meeting these intentions and building a more effective approach:

Scrutiny Board to in future meet quarterly.

During these meetings the following will take place:

- Quarterly performance reporting will be considered and discussed.
- Each meeting will have a 'Spotlight on' session. This will enable board members to look in depth at a particular subject. These subjects will have been developed by the chairman of Cabinet and Scrutiny as part of the Forward Plan and may include a review of a particular service, a partner's activity, a contract or a particular project.
- The lead convenor member for working groups will update the board on activities and progress.

- Nominees of Scrutiny who have been sitting on a particular project team on behalf of Scrutiny will be asked by the Chairman to give an update of progress.

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None of this removes the right of Scrutiny Board to call in any decisions of the council where appropriate.

Four working groups will be formed, reporting to the new Board, that will focus on specific areas to provide wider inquiry and scrutiny of council working and help develop proposals for consideration by Cabinet to improve the working of the council.

Scrutiny Board will increase its numbers to allow this to take place to thirteen members. Other members may also be co-opted where appropriate.

WORKING GROUPS

Scrutiny Board will be supported by a series of working groups as follows:

Policies and strategies group – responsible for reviewing strategies and policies and giving feedback to the relevant officers. This group will be consulted by officers as policies and strategies are formed and will be expected to review documents and give feedback to officers.

Performance group – responsible for reviewing performance targets identified in the corporate plan, challenging where they considered targets to be ineffective or unrealistic and recommending new targets based on their investigations.

Partnership group – responsible for building relationships between the District Council and the towns and parishes in out area. Members will initially visit, and observe, town/parish meetings bringing their experiences back to jointly consider commonalities and how we might work more effectively with them, forming recommendations on how Mendip might work better with the councils and progress monitored. They will also look at how to develop the role of district councillors who either sit on, or attend, town/parish councils to provide a more effective liaison role between the two tiers.

Projects group – responsible for co-ordinating the scrutiny representation on key projects agreed between the chairmen of Scrutiny and Cabinet. Members of this group may be nominated to sit on projects teams alongside members of Cabinet and provide the scrutiny role as the project develops, reporting back on progress to the Projects group. This group will also be responsible for taking part in joint scrutiny actions where the council works in partnership with others, including the Somerset Rivers Authority, the 5 Councils and Somerset Health and Wellbeing.

Each working group will be chaired by a nominated Cabinet Assistant and this person will be the lead convenor for the group. It will be the role of the lead convenor of each working group to co-ordinate the activities of their group.

CHAIRMAN AND VICE CHAIRMAN

The role of the Chairman under this new approach will expand with the expectation that the post holder will keep an overview of all activities being carried out, co-ordinating

activities in the various working groups and ensuring that the work of Scrutiny is contributing to the direction of travel the Council is taking.

The Chairman will meet with the lead convener of each working group regularly to discuss the progress of their working group. The chairman will also meet regularly with Portfolio holders to discuss the progress of activities. The Chairman will also have regular meetings with the Chairman of Cabinet to discuss activities of the board, its working groups, project group representation and agree future focus.

The Vice Chairman will be responsible for supporting the chairman in these activities, attending meetings on behalf of the Chairman and leading on pieces of work at the Chairman's request.

The Chairman may draw on additional members to join Scrutiny, or act on its behalf, where they have particular skills or experiences considered to be appropriate for an area of work being carried out. In this way it is intended that the council makes the best use of its elected members and they are given an opportunity to take an active part in council progress.

TRAINING AND SUPPORT

It is recognised that the new way of working will require more input from Members than previously and that they may wish to have specific training on subjects to develop their skills to meet this demand. As a consequence a small budget, from within the existing member training budget, will be allocated to support specific training for Scrutiny members.

Where topics identified on the Forward Plan for a 'Spotlight on' session are such that board members believe that they need a greater understanding of the subject prior to the Scrutiny meeting, officers will arrange for a training/briefing session to be run to allow members to build their understanding and be more effective during the main meeting.

Where it is agreed that a corporate project should be supported by a Scrutiny representative the Chairman of Scrutiny can agree to co-opt an elected member to the board to take this role on their behalf if that person is considered best placed to carry out the role.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are asked to:

Approve the proposals within this report and recommend to full Council that these proposals and the necessary constitutional changes are implemented.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

Members across the Council consider that the current Scrutiny process is failing to deliver an effective inquiry and challenge. To enable the council to move forward

effectively and to deliver better outcomes for the Mendip area there is a need to alter the way the Council scrutinises itself.

The proposals have been developed by members to help address current limitations and to help the Council deliver on its aspirations.

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