
REPORT OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD ON 10 JULY 2007

Chairman: * Councillor Stanley Sheinwald

Councillors * B E Gate * Anthony Seymour
: * Mitzi Green * Mrs Rekha Shah
* Barry Macleod-Cullinane * Dinesh Solanki
* Jerry Miles * Yogesh Teli (3)
* Paul Scott (1) * Mark Versallion

* Denotes Member present
(1) and (3) Denote category of Reserve Members

[Note: Councillor Jeremy Zeid also attended this meeting to speak on Recommendations I and II and the items indicated at Minutes 157 - 160 below].

PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION I - Reconfiguring Scrutiny

The Committee considered the report of the Director of People, Performance and Policy, which set out proposals for the reconfiguration of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny function whilst maintaining the existing principles of Scrutiny as an independent Councillor-led function working with local people to improve services.

Members commented on various aspects of the report, including the special responsibility allowance (SRAs), for scrutiny Members with additional responsibilities. The Committee was of the view that the Scrutiny Policy Leads and the Scrutiny Performance Leads for Children and Young People, Sustainable Development and Enterprise, Safer and Stronger Communities ought to receive the same SRA. However, the Leads for Adult Health and Social Care should receive a higher SRA to reflect and recognise the demands arising from that area of work.

Some Members gave a guarded welcome to the reconfiguration in the knowledge that there would be an opportunity to carry out a review after 6 and 12 months to identify changes. The following issues were raised:

- the existing advisers, whose specialist advice had been valuable to the work of scrutiny, ought to be retained;
- a non-partisan approach was essential to ensure effective working of scrutiny;
- it was essential that the Scrutiny Review Group on NHS finances continued to meet;
- the proposed Committees might not have adequate capacity to scrutinise the health service and the police effectively;
- the increased size of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee might be unwieldy;

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- scrutiny was moving towards informal structures with some meetings being held in private, thereby reducing transparency;
 - the reconfiguration and the support received by Members were driven by the budget, which might compromise the effectiveness of scrutiny;

Other Members were of the view that a focus on outputs and key issues would ensure effective scrutiny. The reconfiguration would provide Members with flexibility and an opportunity to work differently rather than through Committees.

Members were assured that the scrutiny officer support would remain the same. Other Directorates and Partners would also provide support. Officers would ensure that issues that required scrutinising were not overlooked, and that the Scrutiny Leads were fully supported. Given the changed nature of Councillors' responsibilities and the absence of a service-specific committee structure, there will be mandatory training for all scrutiny Councillors on health, children's issues and community safety. In addition, there will be a compulsory session on scrutiny in general for all Councillors. Some of the existing ways of working would continue, and a review on the reconfiguration would be conducted in six months' time.

Having agreed the reconfiguration, the terms of reference of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Performance and Finance Sub-Committee, including the establishment of Scrutiny Policy Leads and Scrutiny Performance Leads to consider the policy and performance issues in relation to Adult Health and Social Care, Children and Young People, Sustainable Development and Enterprise and Safer and Stronger Communities, it was

Resolved to RECOMMEND: (to Council)

That (1) the Overview and Scrutiny function of the Council be reconfigured as set out in the report of the Director of People, Performance and Policy circulated to all Members of the Council;

(2) the reconfigured Overview and Scrutiny Committee be established;

(3) the membership of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be appointed, including its Chairman;

(4) the terms of reference of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be agreed;

(5) the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the SRAs be noted and agreed.

(See also Minute 157).