

**Policy & Resources
Select Committee
25 July 2013**

Role of Scrutiny at the County Council

Background to Scrutiny

- Formal scrutiny introduced as part of the move to Executive Arrangements following the Local Government Act 2000
- Authorities operating Executive Arrangements must have at least one Scrutiny Committee

Role and purpose of Scrutiny

- To assist the Executive and the County Council in the development of the Budget and Policy Framework
- To conduct research and analysis of policy issues and possible options
- To hold the Executive and the Council to account
- To make recommendations to the Executive or to the County Council arising from the scrutiny process

Policy Development

Key work stream is to review and make recommendations either to the Executive or to the Full Council to assist in the development of future policies and strategies

Policy Review/Development

Policy Development

- Contribute to development of new or improved council policies and strategies (possibly using in-depth reviews)
- Proactive where there may be gaps

Policy/Strategy Review

- Reviewing existing policy, to consider:
 - Do we have a clear and up to date approach?
 - Is it the right approach?
 - Are policies coherent and joined up?
 - Are the policies effective when put into action - is it working? Are they delivering what was intended?

Holding the Executive and the Council to Account

- Scrutinising decisions which the Executive is planning to take (Pre-scrutiny)
- Scrutinising Executive decisions that have been taken before they are implemented (Call-in)
- Scrutinising Executive decisions after they have been implemented, whether shortly afterwards or as part of a wider review of policy to measure their effect

Scrutiny of Decisions

- Issues to consider when scrutinising decisions:
 - Are decisions evidence based?
 - Has appropriate consultation been undertaken?
 - Do decisions reflect the County Council's priorities?
 - Have alternative options been considered?

Call-in

- Only applies where a decision has been made but not yet implemented
- Can only be done within 5 working days of the date members have been notified of the decision
- A quorum of members can call a meeting of a select committee to consider an executive decision. The Committee must meet within 14 days of the of meeting being called

Call in options

The Committee must decide whether or not to recommend

- That the decision be reconsidered by the relevant decision maker
- Where the decision is not in line with the Policy or Budget Framework that the County Council should take that decision

Effect of call-in

- Any decision which is not in line with the Policy or Budget Framework cannot be implemented until the call in has been disposed of
- Urgent Key Decisions cannot be called in although they can still be scrutinised by the committee

Items for the Agenda

- Any member of the Committee can put an item on the agenda of the next meeting of the committee
- Any member of the County Council can refer a matter to a committee provided it is relevant to the function of that committee
- The Executive or the County Council may request that a committee considers a matter referred by them

Topic Suggestions

- Suggestions welcome at any time to the Chairman or Scrutiny Officer
- Make clear the reason for the request – is there evidence this is an area of concern? (e.g. performance data, frequently raised by constituents) – is it a County wide rather than local issue? Etc (see 'whether to scrutinise' handout)
- Note: Member Briefing Programme takes place monthly – for information items

In-depth Reviews

- Review group established to investigate an issue outside of the formal committee meetings
- Topic scoped to identify key lines of enquiry, relevant stakeholders, timetable for undertaking etc
- Terms of Reference to Policy & Resources Select Committee for approval
- Review group considers written and oral evidence, analyses, culminates in a written report presenting the evidence and recommendations e.g: Severe Winter Weather Review (2010)

Light Touch Reviews/Working Groups

- Topics that do not require the full 'in-depth' treatment
- Group of Members identified to meet outside of the formal committee meetings
- Aims and timescale scoped, meetings held with relevant officers to discuss, culminates in summary of findings and recommendations where relevant
- E.g: Procurement of Temporary Agency Staff (2011)

Terms of Reference

Policy & Resources Select Committee

- Key Executive Member – Executive Member for Policy & Resources
- Key Department – Corporate Services
- however remit is not limited to these
- Includes: Efficiency, Human Resources, Partnership Working (internal and external) Procurement, Relevant Financial Management (e.g. budget setting and monitoring final accounts, capital programme, capital receipts), asset and estate management, information management (including records management), communications, use of IT, Health and Safety, corporate policy and performance, Business Units

Overseeing the Scrutiny Function

Role of this Committee to Coordinate Scrutiny:

- ensure resources of the scrutiny function effectively targeted
- ensure outputs and outcomes of Scrutiny are having impact and being evaluated
- prioritise topics for scrutiny thematic reviews
- provide an annual report to the County Council outlining the effectiveness, outcomes and learning of the scrutiny function
- To monitor the operation of the provisions relating to call-in and urgency, submitting a report to Cabinet if necessary

What will success look like?

- Scrutiny function is Member led
- Work programme is realistic, flexible and focused
- Topics are prioritised appropriately
- Reviews well scoped and project managed to ensure they are timely and improvement focused
- Time and resources directed where it can add most value
- Constructive and evidence based

Conclusion

- Role of scrutiny is wider than simply holding the Executive to account
- There needs to be an effective dialogue between scrutiny committees and the Executive to ensure that the work of committees has maximum impact on policy

Role of Scrutiny

Any Questions?