

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee – 13th June, 2013

Report of the Lead Officer and the Director of Corporate Resources

Terms of Reference and Annual Scrutiny Programme 2013/14

Purpose of Report

1. To note the terms of reference of the Committee and the items included in the Annual Scrutiny Programme for detailed consideration by this Scrutiny Committee during 2013/14.

Background

2. On 25th April, 2013, the Cabinet considered a report on a review of the Council's overview and scrutiny arrangements. The recommendations from Scrutiny Chairs were endorsed by the Cabinet and formally approved at the annual meeting of the Council on 16th May, 2013.
3. The principles of the new structure are to strengthen the Council's overview and scrutiny arrangements; to ensure proper democratic accountability and to promote confidence in the conduct of the Council's business. The new scrutiny arrangements are also set in the context of significant financial pressures faced by the Council and the need to focus limited resources in the most effective way.
4. The review was also based on the following principles, as agreed by Scrutiny Chairs:-
 - That the former informal "Chairs of Scrutiny Committees" meeting be formalised into an "Overview and Scrutiny Management Board".
 - That a revised structure of Overview and Scrutiny Committees be adopted, including Scrutiny Committees to carry out detailed scrutiny reviews and a separate Scrutiny Committee with a remit for Corporate Performance Management, Efficiency and Effectiveness.
 - That the role of Scrutiny Committees be developed further to comprise:-
 - The adoption of the "Parliamentary Select Committee" model by undertaking single item in-depth scrutiny investigations/inquiries with reports from the Scrutiny Chair being presented to the Cabinet/Council.

- Being more strategic and selective in selecting topics for scrutiny with Scrutiny Committees focussing on in-depth investigations. The Overview and Scrutiny Management Board will have a role in overseeing and co-ordinating the annual scrutiny programme.

- Enhancement of the role of Scrutiny Committees in policy development by carrying out the in-depth scrutiny reviews as referred to above.

- All scrutiny "Call-ins" to be determined by the Management Board (with provision for inviting statutory co-opted members in the case of Education matters).

- Cabinet Members/Chief Officers and others to attend scrutiny meetings to give evidence/reports if required by the Scrutiny Committee (given advance notice).

- The retention of statutory co-opted members on the Scrutiny Committee that considers "Education" matters (ie: Children's Services).

- The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board to submit an annual report to the Council on corporate scrutiny activity.

- The Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board and individual Scrutiny Committees to be submitted to Council.

5. The approved terms of reference of the Scrutiny Committee are set out in Appendix 1. The terms of reference of the Committee also gives a clear indication of the Cabinet portfolios and Directorate functions within the remit of the Scrutiny Committee.

6. Scrutiny Committees have discretion to set their own programme of meetings to carry out the reviews that are allocated to them. Meetings of the five Scrutiny Committees have also been scheduled in November, 2013 to undertake detailed scrutiny of the Council's revenue budget proposals.

7. In April, 2013, Scrutiny Chairs considered the development of a draft Annual Scrutiny Programme for the 2013/14 municipal year taking account of the views of Cabinet Members and Directors as part of their business planning cycle. The Overview and Scrutiny Management Board formally endorsed the Annual Scrutiny Plan at its meeting on 29th May, 2013. The items for detailed consideration by the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee during 2013/14 are:

- Safeguarding Standards within the Borough and Children's Services Contribution
- Looked After Children – Provision and Outcomes
- Early Intervention Strategy for the Borough

8. Appendix 2 gives more detailed information on the topics set out in the Annual Scrutiny Programme for 2013/14 as referred to in paragraph 7 above.
9. Immediately following this first formal meeting of the Scrutiny Committee, an informal development session will be held for members and officers to discuss the scope of the topics to be scrutinised; the process of gathering information (including the 'witnesses' to be invited to attend) and the timescales for carrying out the reviews (with timescales for both informal and formal meetings).
10. Under the Scrutiny Committee Procedure Rules, as contained in the Constitution, all Scrutiny Committees previously had the discretion to include a standard item entitled 'Public Forum' on the agenda to facilitate members of the public asking questions on any matter falling within the terms of reference of the Committee. This discretion remains under the revised Scrutiny arrangements and the Committee is invited to express views on whether such an item should be included on future agendas.
11. The revised scrutiny arrangements will be subject to ongoing review and further consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board during the municipal year.

Finance

12. The costs of operating the revised scrutiny arrangements will be contained within existing budgetary allocations.

Law

13. Scrutiny Committees are established in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Act 1972 and the requirements of the Council's Constitution, which was adopted under the Local Government Act 2000, subsequent legislation and associated Regulations and Guidance.


Equality Impact

14. Provision exists within the recommended scrutiny arrangements for overview and scrutiny to be undertaken of the Council's policies on equality and diversity.

Recommendations

15. That the terms of reference of the Committee, as set out in Appendix 1, be noted.
16. That the issues contained in the Annual Scrutiny Programme for 2013/14, as referred to in paragraph 7 and Appendix 2, be noted.

17. That an informal development session be held for members and officers, at the conclusion of the formal business of this meeting, to discuss how they wish to progress the items for detailed consideration by the Committee during 2013/14.
18. That the Committee consider the possible inclusion of a "Public Forum" session as a standing item of business on the agenda for future meetings.



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List of Background Papers

Reports and minutes of the Cabinet dated 25th April, 2013
Reports and minutes of the Council dated 16th May, 2013
Reports and minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board dated 29th May, 2013

Terms of Reference

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee

In accordance with any relevant statutory requirements and the Annual Scrutiny Programme approved by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board:-

- (a) To undertake in-depth scrutiny investigations, inquiries and reviews in accordance with the Annual Scrutiny Programme;
- (b) To contribute to policy development by carrying out the scrutiny of matters falling within the functions of the Directorate of Children's Services and the portfolio of the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Lifelong Learning.

To submit reports and recommendations to the Cabinet and/or the Council on the outcomes of scrutiny investigations, inquiries and reviews.

To make recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board on any proposed amendments to the Annual Scrutiny Programme.

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee		
Portfolio		Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Lifelong Learning
Area for Scrutiny		Safeguarding Standards within the Borough and Children's Services Contribution
Council Priorities		
	Council Plan:	Keeping children and young people safe
Context		Child protection and safeguarding are national and local priorities. Over the last fifty years society has become increasingly aware of the high numbers of children that are at risk of harm and neglect. It has also become more intolerant of those public services which fail to keep young people safe. Consequently all local authorities have seen an increase in the number of children being taken into care.
Rationale		The Council must work with its partners to keep children and young people safe from harm and neglect. This is one of its highest priorities. The complexity and challenging nature of work in this area must be understood by all those who are connected with the Council and everyone needs to appreciate what is needed to improve services.
What are we asking from the Scrutiny Committee?		To understand and support our activities to promote safeguarding.
		To engage in the dialogue about other measures which may make our safeguarding work even more effective.

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee		
Portfolio		Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Lifelong Learning
Area for Scrutiny		Looked after Children Provision and Outcomes
Council Priorities		
	Council Plan:	Improves services to, and outcomes of, looked after children
Context		All local authorities have experienced a rise in the number of children and young people who have been taken into care. Society has become much more intolerant of agencies and families that fail to keep young people safe. There is growing evidence about the level of poor parenting which exists in the community and which puts children at risk. There is also growing concern about the relatively poor outcomes achieved by many care leavers e.g. in terms of educational qualifications, poverty and offending.
Rationale		Many factors have a bearing on this phenomenon. It is essential that the Council keeps young people safe from harm and neglect, but at the same time we need to manage the costs of doing so. These two drivers create a dilemma for the organisation and it is important that elected members understand what we are doing and how they can help.
What are we asking from the Scrutiny Committee?		<p>To understand and support our activities to improve outcomes for looked after children.</p> <p>To engage in the dialogue about other measures which may help to improve outcomes for looked after children.</p>

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee		
Portfolio		Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Lifelong Learning
Area for Scrutiny		Early Intervention Strategy for the Borough
Council Priorities		
	Council Plan:	Keeping children and young people safe. Improving outcomes of all children and young people.
Context		Children and young people in Dudley receive good services from the Council and its partners. Educational outcomes are generally in line with national averages. The proportion of children in the care of the Council is above the national average.
Rationale		<p>If we can provide effective services earlier in the lives of children and young people and their families there may be numerous advantages; e.g. our education and care provision to children in their early years is already highly regarded. If it can be improved still further it will give more children a better start in life and improve their educational achievement throughout their school careers.</p> <p>Earlier identification of children in need, and effective action to support them and their families will enable us to promote their welfare more effectively.</p> <p>This latter point in particular may help to reduce the expenditure of the Council and keep more young people safe without the need to intervene in their upbringing.</p>
What are we asking from the Scrutiny Committee?		<p>To understand and support our activities to promote early intervention.</p> <p>To engage in the dialogue about other measures which may make our early intervention work even more effective.</p>