

## **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD**

Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> November, 2013 at 6.00 p.m.  
in Committee Room 2, The Council House, Dudley

### **PRESENT:-**

Councillor Ridney (Chair)  
Councillor Tyler (Vice Chair)  
Councillors Blood, Boleyn, Caunt, Islam and James

### **OFFICERS:-**

Assistant Director (Housing Strategy and Private Sector) (Lead Officer to the Board); Director of Corporate Resources, Assistant Director (Law and Governance) and the Democratic Services Manager (Directorate of Corporate Resources)

#### 10. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Hale and Marrey.

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#### 11. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No Member declared an interest in any matter to be considered at this meeting.

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#### 12. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the special meeting of the Board held on 25<sup>th</sup> July, 2013, be approved as a correct record and signed.

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#### 13. **INTERIM POSITION ON THE NEW SCRUTINY ARRANGEMENTS**

A joint report of the Director of Corporate Resources and the Lead Officer was submitted giving an interim position on the Council's revised scrutiny arrangements that had been in operation since June, 2013.

The report indicated a general level of acceptance that the new scrutiny arrangements had built substantially on those previously operated by the Council. The new approach involved focussing on a smaller number of major issues; aligning scrutiny functions with Directorate structures; revised reporting arrangements and a greater freedom for Chairs and Vice-Chairs and Scrutiny Committee Members to adapt their approach to conducting individual scrutiny reviews.

The annual review process aimed to ensure that the scrutiny arrangements continued to be aligned to the needs of the Council whilst remaining adaptable and flexible to changes in circumstances.

The interim review dealt with constitutional and governance arrangements; key scrutiny themes; comments in relation to the work of each individual Scrutiny Committee and issues for further consideration by the Board.

Members discussed the following specific issues:

- Clarification in regard to the scrutiny of budget proposals by individual Scrutiny Committees and in particular, the Corporate Performance Management, Efficiency and Effectiveness Scrutiny Committee. The Director of Corporate Resources acknowledged the need to clarify and refine the budget scrutiny process for the future.

It was suggested that Scrutiny Committees should focus on the detailed scrutiny of individual Directorate budget proposals whilst retaining some flexibility for cross-cutting issues. Following the cycle of Scrutiny Committees in November, the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board could then scrutinise the overall budget proposals on a strategic basis.

Further consideration would be given to this proposal in the annual review taking account of the timings involved with the budget proposals and the need to avoid potential for duplication.

- In connection with the scrutiny of budget proposals and other financial issues, comments were made on the level of skills and knowledge required to undertake in-depth scrutiny. The Board supported further Member development and training in this complex area of work.

It was considered that the involvement of a wider group of Members in scrutinising budget proposals would be a positive development to assist Members in understanding the complexities involved with the Council's budgetary process.

- Issues concerning the ability of Directorate officers to give full and meaningful responses at meetings, particularly arising from questions on the Quarterly Corporate Performance Management report. A view was expressed that a senior officer from each Directorate should attend the Committee meeting. The arrangements for circulating papers made it impractical for Members to submit advance questions in all cases.

The Director of Corporate Resources indicated that the formatting of the quarterly report and the timing of its distribution would be considered further.

- The lack of a facility under the Constitution for reporting back on decisions taken by external bodies on which the Leader represented the Council (eg: West Midlands Joint Committee and the Local Enterprise Partnership).

Members supported the development of a more robust feedback mechanism either through the Cabinet or Scrutiny Committees. This would be considered in the annual review process.

- The need to ensure that Scrutiny Committees had freedom to influence the topics they wished to scrutinise in the Annual Scrutiny Programme and during the municipal year. It was acknowledged that the programme for 2013/14 had been formulated as a starting point and this could be developed in consultation with Members.
- Scrutiny Committees would retain an element of discretion over the number of topics they wished to scrutinise, however, it was important that the workloads of Committees remained manageable.
- The Board supported the view that the content of Scrutiny Committee minutes should be more extensive than certain other meetings and record additional detail. Whilst it was accepted that verbatim minutes were unnecessary and excessive, the view was that Scrutiny Committee minutes should be sufficiently detailed to record the thread of the discussion and capture the essence of the debate. The Democratic Services Team had acknowledged these views.
- The Board was of the view that, for the next municipal year, meetings of Scrutiny Committees should be programmed throughout the whole year in line with the established cycle of Committees. Additional formal and/or informal meetings or working groups could be arranged as and when necessary.
- The Lead Officer identified issues relating to the development of a more robust and consistent mechanism for Lead Officers briefing Chairs and Vice-Chairs on key issues being considered by Scrutiny Committees.

The Director of Corporate Resources acknowledged all the comments made by Members and further work would be undertaken to develop the scrutiny arrangements. The issues identified would be incorporated in the annual report to be presented to the Board in February, 2014. It was suggested that, as part of the annual review, a wider range of comments could be sought, including those of all elected Members.

#### RESOLVED

- (1) That the issues set out in the interim report, together with the additional issues identified above, be included in the annual review of the Council's scrutiny arrangements.
- (2) That the Lead Officer and the Director of Corporate Resources submit a further report to the Board in February, 2014 to enable any recommendations on the future operation of the scrutiny arrangements to be submitted to the Council in advance of the 2014/15 municipal year.

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#### 14. FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS

The Board noted a report of the Director of Corporate Resources on the forward plan of key decisions for the four-month period commencing on 1<sup>st</sup> December, 2013.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the Chair indicated that the Leader of the Council had requested her to make arrangements for the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board to scrutinise the consultation on the future of Sure Start Children's Centres in Dudley (Key Decision Reference 0589). The consultation period was due to close on 3<sup>rd</sup> January, 2014.

#### RESOLVED

That a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board be provisionally arranged on Monday, 20<sup>th</sup> January, 2014 at 6.00pm to consider the scrutiny of the consultation on the future of Sure Start Children's Centres in Dudley

The meeting ended at 7.15 p.m.

CHAIR