

Scrutiny Committee

9 March 2016

Scrutiny Priorities Workshop

Summary

1. This report summarises scrutiny development activities which have taken place over the past nine months and sets the background for a workshop session. The workshop will provide the Committee with information on a range of key strategic issues and activities identified as themes during meetings of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Committee with members of the Corporate Management Team in 2015. Presentations from officers will be followed by table discussions to provide the Committee with an opportunity to consider how it wishes to focus its resources to add greatest value to the work of the County Council and its partners through development of its forward work programme.

Objective

2. The objective of the workshop is to provide the Committee with an opportunity to consider the development of its forward work programme for 2016.

Scrutiny Focus

3. The topics which will be covered are set out at paragraph 13 of this report. Officers have been asked to present information at the meeting which will enable the Committee to come to a view on the following key questions:
 - a. What work has taken place to address this issue?
 - b. What further work is planned?
 - c. Who is involved in leading and delivering this work?
 - d. What are the timescales?
 - e. What are the challenges?
 - f. Who are the stakeholders and how are they being involved?
 - g. How might scrutiny add value to this work?

How does this relate to County Council priorities?

4. Our ambition: 'By 2028 we want Suffolk to be recognised for its outstanding environment and quality of life for all; a place where everyone can realise their potential, benefit from and contribute to Suffolk's economic prosperity, and be actively

involved in their community.’ Source: Suffolk’s Community Strategy 2008-2028 ‘Transforming Suffolk’.

Suffolk County Council’s Corporate Priorities	Link to this Scrutiny
Raising educational attainment and skill levels	✓
Supporting the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) to increase economic growth	✓
Maintaining roads and developing Suffolk’s infrastructure	✓
Supporting those most vulnerable in our communities	✓
Empowering local communities	✓

5. All scrutiny items should consider how well they are delivering against the County Council priorities and Suffolk’s Community Strategy.
6. Having considered the information presented, the Committee is asked to consider:
 - a. What, if any, should scrutiny’s role be to add value to this work?
 - b. What is the focused problem/issue scrutiny should seek to address?
 - c. How would scrutiny demonstrate the impact it had made?
 - d. What are the key questions?
 - e. Who should be involved?
 - f. When and how should scrutiny take place?

Contact details

Name: Theresa Harden
Job title: Business Manager (Democratic Services)
Telephone: 01473 260855
Email: Theresa.harden@suffolk.gov.uk
Local Councillor(s): All Councillors

Background

7. Scrutiny development activity took place throughout 2015. In July 2015, scrutiny councillors, co-optees and representatives from District and Borough councils attended a workshop to discuss approaches to budget scrutiny, implications of devolution and public service integration, health and care integration and economic growth. From these discussions a number of themes were identified where county and district/borough scrutiny committees each have a scrutiny role.
8. Participants discussed opportunities for widening the approach to budget scrutiny to give a more holistic picture of public sector spend; developing a more flexible approach to involvement in scrutiny to reflect changing governance arrangements and opportunities for joint scrutiny. Discussion about devolution and public service integration raised a number questions in terms of how scrutiny should engage in this process, not only to ensure that deliberation goes into the design of any emerging governance arrangements, but asking whether proposals for change offer a better deal for Suffolk residents, without adding to the bureaucratic burden.

9. The outcomes from this session were explored further at a countywide scrutiny workshop on 9 February 2016, attended by 29 scrutiny chairmen, vice-chairmen and officers from across county and district and borough councils in Suffolk. Ed Hammond, Director (Local Accountability) from the Centre for Public Scrutiny facilitated the event, which focused on the practical issues and pitfalls of undertaking joint scrutiny, improving collaboration, identifying priorities for joint scrutiny and the role of scrutiny in the devolution process.
10. The workshop identified a number of principles which participants considered to be important in planning joint scrutiny activity:-
- Local residents experience of services does not stop at the boundary and local issues cut across accountabilities;
 - Joint scrutiny comes in addition to the scrutiny of individual council activity - scrutiny resources are limited and additional “joint” scrutiny needs to be short-term, issue driven and targeted with specific outcomes in mind;
 - Joint scrutiny should focus on topics where the value of scrutiny coming together makes logical sense, on issues of high profile and where the solution involves a range of partners;
 - A need to develop light touch mechanisms for sharing scrutiny information and intelligence, to avoid losing opportunities to do things in partnership; not necessarily more meetings;
 - Recognise and value our differences - issues and challenges may be different eg rural/urban areas;
 - Practical and logistical issues – differences in how we conduct scrutiny, who provides support, proportionality, where and when to meet; scrutiny needs to find realistic ways of coming together, which avoids unnecessary bureaucracy/complexity or which is resource intensive – joint scrutiny should be flexible, light touch and with a clear focus.
11. In September 2015, a workshop took place for County Council scrutiny councillors and co-opted members to identify how scrutiny resources should be focused to add maximum value in an environment where organisational capacity to support the scale of transformation required is reducing. A number of opportunities were identified, including:
- improved clarity and understanding of the role of scrutiny;
 - closer working relationship with Cabinet and Corporate Management Team;
 - being clear about the “business case” for scrutiny, focusing resources where scrutiny can make the greatest impact;
 - narrowing the focus of reviews to focus on specific problems/issues;
 - widening public and stakeholder engagement;
 - being more forward looking;
 - improving clarity of recommendations and mechanisms for follow up;
 - greater use of Task and Finish group work where this is likely to lead to effective outcomes.

12. As a first step towards taking this forward, the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of Scrutiny Committee met with individual members of the Corporate Management Team throughout October and November 2015 to discuss their views of scrutiny and to seek views on how scrutiny resources could usefully be focused in 2016.
13. From these discussions, a number of themes emerged as key strategic issues for the Council where scrutiny could potentially add value :
 - Consultation – are we doing it well and how representative/valuable is it? What do we know about what local people value in terms of local services?
 - Digitalisation of services and website improvements – what do people want and how will the plans ensure that people are able to access what they need in terms of services?
 - Is the organisation making the best use of improvements in information technology – what is the plan and what is it intended to deliver?
 - Progress with Adult and Community Services “Supporting Lives Connecting Communities transformation – what difference is it making on the ground?
 - What is the potential for developing the use of assistive technology in Adult Social Care?
 - What are the plans for closer collaboration in the Fire Service?

Main body of evidence

In order to explore these issues in more detail, the Committee will receive presentations from officers involved in this work at the meeting. A timetable is attached as Appendix 1.

Following each presentation, participants will be invited to ask any questions for clarification, followed by an opportunity to discuss the questions set out in paragraph 6 a) to f) above.

The information gathered from the table discussions will be used by the Committee to inform its forward work programme for 2016.