
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WITHIN ROCHFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report outlines work done in preparation for this review and seeks agreement to a programme of work for the Committee within the terms of reference agreed.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 As part of its Improvement Plan, the Council has undertaken to review the operation of overview and scrutiny within the authority. This Committee is tasked to carry out the review by April 2006. The Committee has already approved a Scoping Form but, given the size of the task, it is now appropriate to agree a programme for the work to be undertaken.

3 PREPARATORY WORK

- 3.1 The Scoping Form identified information that could prove useful to the committee for research purposes and as a background to the subject. This documentation has been brought together as a reference pack to be sent to each member of the Committee under separate cover. A copy will also be placed in the Members' library.
- 3.2 In the meantime, officers have sought to identify examples of best practice in other authorities, particularly those operating under the "fourth option". Information gathered to date is included in the pack.
- 3.3 Coincidentally, the Council were invited to send two Members and two officers to a "Fourth Option Scrutiny Conference" organised by the Fourth Option Special Interest Group of the Local Government Association on 3 March 2005. Arrangements were made at short notice for Councillors Capon and Mrs Starke to attend on behalf of the Leader and Chairman of this Committee accompanied by the Corporate Director (Law, Planning & Administration) and the Head of Administrative and Member Services. Although useful in discussing shared issues with other fourth option authorities, no particular solution arose out of the conference. Corby Borough Council, who sponsored the event, have offered a copy of their Overview & Scrutiny Toolkit and it is hoped to have this by the date of this meeting.

4 ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED IN THE PROGRAMME OF WORK

- 4.1 It is unlikely that this review will progress satisfactorily through the medium of reports and recommendations in a traditional committee format. Members are asked to consider a less formal approach with both evenings and days or half days set aside for the work depending on the agenda.
- 4.2 Since membership of the Committee may change following Annual Council, an indicative programme is proposed. This programme will need to be flexible since it depends on such matters as the availability of witnesses, consultants and dates for visits to best practice authorities, etc. It is unlikely that all Members will be available on all occasions and consideration might be given to some level of delegation to smaller groups of members for some aspects of the work. For example, best practice authorities could be investigated by a working party reporting back to the main Committee. Consultants might undertake other work, such as the benchmarking of current performance against best practice, externally.
- 4.3 With several elements proposed within the programme, Members may choose to give more priority, and therefore time, to one area than another. These priorities may change as the review develops. There are also a number of options with regard to matters such as expert advice and opinion and, depending on cost, Members may wish to invite speakers from a number of organisations to address them.
- 4.4 Subject to all of the above, a draft programme is annexed at Appendix 1 to this report and Members' views are sought.

5 RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Failure to complete this review will jeopardise the Improvement Plan and delay implementation of improvements in the Overview and Scrutiny process.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 A bid has been made for capacity building funding to assist in this work. The outcome of the bid is still awaited although the Council has agreed provision of over £25,000 towards a number of capacity building initiatives in 2005/06. Allocation of resources among competing aspects of the Improvement Plan will follow a decision on the bid. At this stage the estimated cost of this review, excluding officer time but including some consultancy fees, is £20,000.
- 6.2 A sum of £5,000 has been carried forward from the Overview & Scrutiny budget for 2004/05 towards the cost of this review.

7 RECOMMENDATION

7.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**

to agree the approach suggested in the attached programme of work subject to consideration of matters of detail by Members in the new municipal year.

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APPENDIX 1

**REVIEW OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WITHIN ROCHFORD DISTRICT
COUNCIL**

**Draft Programme
23 May 2005 – 27 April 2006**

Part 1. Setting the scene for the review.

Purpose: To consider the purpose and direction of the review in detail.
Format: Presentation by officers followed by general discussion.
Theme: Current operation of Overview & Scrutiny within the Council.
What do we understand by Overview & Scrutiny?
What resources are available to undertake the role?
What are the criticisms of our current system?
What are we looking to get out of this review?
Length of session – half day
Venue - Committee Room 4
Date: w/c 23 May 2005

Part 2. Information gathering

Purpose: To consider published research and guidance.
Format: Presentation/discussion lead by external facilitator.
Theme: How is Overview & Scrutiny developing across local government?
What lessons have arisen out of 4th Option authorities?
What examples of best practice might suit Rochford?
How can we benchmark current performance?
Length of session – half day
Venue: Committee Room 4
Date: w/c 13 June 2005

Part 3 Overview & Scrutiny - an external perspective

Purpose: To obtain a view from the Audit Commission of role and outcomes expected from overview and scrutiny in a District Council.
Format: Presentation by Ian Davidson, Relationship Manager & Area Performance Lead, Audit Commission followed by discussion.
Theme: Either a specific presentation focusing on this review and/or a training session available to all Members
Length of session – Half day
Venue: TBA
Date: w/c 20 June 2005

Part 4 Visit to Best Practice site (1)

Purpose: To view the operation of Overview & Scrutiny in a recognised best practice authority.

Format: Coach from Civic Suite. Meeting with officers/Members of best practice authority. View operation of Overview & Scrutiny meeting from public gallery. Return to Civic Suite.

Length of session – afternoon/evening

Venue: TBA

Date: June 2005

Part 5 Interviews with Chairmen of Policy Committees

Purpose: To receive the views of Chairmen of Policy Committees on the function of Overview & Scrutiny within Rochford.

Format: Informal question and answer session with individual Chairmen (and Vice-chairmen?)

Length of session: Prior to commencement of agenda proper for Finance & Procedure O&S Committee (early start?)

Venue: Committee Room 4

Date: 23 June 2005

Part 6 Interviews with Chief Officers

Purpose: To receive the views of Chief Officers on function of Overview and Scrutiny within Rochford.

Format: Informal question and answer session with individual Chief Officers

Length of session: Prior to commencement of Policy & Finance Committee (early start?) and running in tandem with that meeting.

Venue: Committee Room 4

Date: 12 July 2005

Part 7 Consultation with Stakeholders

Purpose: To receive the views of Stakeholders on function of Overview and Scrutiny within Rochford.

Format: (a) Informal question and answer session with individual and group stakeholders e.g. representatives of Partner Organisations, Chambers of Trade, Parish Councils, etc.

(b) survey of residents (through Rochford District Matters?)

(c) focus group feedback

Length of session:

(a) Prior to commencement of agenda proper for Finance & Procedure O&S Committee (early start?)

(b) administrative process

(c) dependent on focus group

Venue: Committee Room 4 and TBA

Date: 21 July to 22 September 2005

Part 8 Benchmarking

Purpose: To agree process for benchmarking against best practice authorities.
Format: Officer report to Committee
Length of session: Finance & Procedures Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Venue: Committee Room 4
Date: 21 July 2005

Part 9 Expert opinion

Purpose: To obtain a wider perspective of the role of the Councillor and outcomes expected from the modernising agenda
Format: Presentation/discussion by external provider(s) selected from among expert sources identified in scoping form and depending on cost and availability.
Length of session – Half day
Venue: Committee Room 4
Date: w/c 13 September 2005

Part 10 Visit to Best Practice site (2)

Purpose: To view the operation of Overview & Scrutiny in a recognised best practice authority.
Format: Coach from Civic Suite. Meeting with officers/Members of best practice authority. View operation of Overview & Scrutiny meeting from public gallery. Return to Civic Suite.
Length of session – afternoon/evening
Venue: TBA
Date: September 2005

Part 11 Review of progress

Purpose: To consider progress to date and agree direction for remainder of review and interim recommendations to Council, if any.
Format: Presentation by officers followed by general discussion.
Length of session: Finance & Procedures Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Venue: Committee Room 4
Date: 25 October 2005

Part 12 Benchmarking

Purpose: To consider outcomes of benchmarking exercise
Format: Officer report to Committee.
Length of session: Finance & Procedures Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Venue: Committee Room 4
Date: 17 November 2005

Part 13 Option Appraisal

Purpose: To decide on format of Overview and Scrutiny within Rochford.
Format: Report and presentation by officers followed by general discussion and debate
Length of session: Finance & Procedures Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Venue: Committee Room 4
Date: 19 January 2006

Part 14 Challenge

Purpose: To invite external challenge of preferred option.
Format: Presentation of preferred options to external challenge from experts.
Length of session: Half day
Venue:
Date: w/c 30 January 2006

Part 15 Conclusion of review

Purpose: To conclude review and agree final recommendations to Council
Format: Officer report to Committee
Length of session: Finance & Procedures Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Venue: Committee Room 4
Date: 23 March 2006

Part 16 Report to Policy & Finance Committee

Purpose: To consider recommendations for adoption in the new municipal year
Format: Presentation of review findings by Chairman of Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Length of session – Policy & Finance Committee
Venue: Council Chamber
Date: 6 April 2006

Part 17 Recommendations to Full Council

Purpose: To consider outcome of the review and agree any necessary amendments to the Constitution for adoption prior to Annual Council in May 2006
Format: Report from Policy & Finance Committee
Length of session – Full Council
Venue: Council Chamber
Date: 27 April 2006