

## **Finance & Procedures Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 17 November 2005**

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Minutes of the meeting of the **Finance & Procedures Overview & Scrutiny Committee** held on **17 November 2005** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr K H Hudson  
Vice-Chairman: Cllr P K Savill

Cllr K J Gordon  
Cllr Mrs S A Harper

Cllr T Livings  
Cllr P F A Webster

### **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Mrs J R Lumley

### **OFFICERS PRESENT**

P Warren	- Chief Executive
R J Honey	- Corporate Director (Law, Planning & Administration)
M Martin	- Committee Administrator

### **464 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 25 October 2005 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### **465 REVIEW OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY IN ROCHFORD**

The Committee considered a report on benchmarking for Overview and Scrutiny, compiled by Andrea Staltmeier Consulting.

The Corporate Director advised Members of a communication which had been received from Selby District Council regarding a proposal to co-ordinate and run a fourth-option scrutiny conference in the New Year. Selby had been a lead fourth option authority in setting up a Fourth Option Group. The proposal indicated that the conference would provide plenty of opportunity for practical scrutiny exercises and there would be no limit on the number of Members who could attend from individual authorities.

The Chief Executive confirmed that the Capacity Bid Fund existed for this type of training and the Committee agreed that it would provide a very good opportunity for Members.

In considering the benchmarking report, the following key points were noted:-

- Very little work had been undertaken across the country on benchmarking overview and scrutiny between authorities.

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- This was despite the fact that the new Council structures had now been in place for over 3 years and that benchmarking had been a key feature of best value reviews.
- It was therefore difficult to draw any conclusions in terms of outputs and outcomes from comparison with other authorities.
- There was, however, more scope for benchmarking of organisation and processes and a list of 48 good practice elements in overview and scrutiny had been appended to the report as Appendix 1.
- Rochford could already demonstrate that 15 of these were in place and a further 11 partly in place.
- Many authorities that had been graded with an 'Excellent' or 'Good' score from the Comprehensive Performance Assessment process did not benchmark their overview and scrutiny process.
- However, some authorities had developed performance indicators for reviewing their own performance rather than making comparisons.
- Some initial suggestions for indicators had been appended to the report as Appendix 2. These could be used by Rochford as a starting point.
- Questions contained within the Self Evaluation Framework, which had been developed by the Centre for Public Scrutiny, were not geared towards fourth option authorities.
- Whilst the Council could readily provide information such as the percentage of recommendations made by overview and scrutiny committee that had been accepted by policy committees, this type of information could not be easily used in comparison with other authorities and did not provide indications in respect of monitoring efficiency or effectiveness.
- The CPA process had not provided guidance on how a Council could improve its scoring for its overview and scrutiny process.
- The Council had the potential to move quite rapidly from weak to strong against the factors identified by the Evaluating Local Government project.
- A dedicated overview and scrutiny officer would not require specialist expertise in subject areas, as this would be provided by other officers.
- Rochford could take the lead in developing benchmarking for outputs and outcomes and providing innovative forms of overview and scrutiny.

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- A final decision on the Council's proposed new committee structure would be taken by Council in December and initial dialogue with other local authorities around benchmarking could be undertaken to ensure that any benchmarking system was in place at the outset of the new municipal year.
- It would be difficult to quantify the amount of added value which the overview and scrutiny process provided in terms of, for example, saving money on processes or providing greater partner satisfaction.
- Members agreed that it was not appropriate at this stage to consider appendix 1 in any more detail than that provided.

In considering the possible performance indicators outlined in appendix 2, the following views were expressed:-

1.2 – replacing the word 'corporate' with the word 'organisational' provided a broader indicator.

2.2 – this was dependent on the willingness of a newspaper editor to publish an article and as such was not an accurate indicator.

3.1 – the term 'greater accountability' was more relevant to a cabinet system of local government.

4.1 – the specific reference to policy committee chairmen should be withdrawn.

5.1 – this item could be introduced at a later stage, once the new process was well underway.

5.2 – the wording 'sufficient opportunity for public to take part' should be removed at this stage and be re-considered at a later date.

5.3 – this did not add any extra value.

7.1 – 7.5 – these indicators did not provide real value; in particular 7.3 could be addressed within 5.2 and 7.5 was already covered by the Council's Member training programme.

**Recommended** to the Policy & Finance Committee

That the following performance indicators be used to evaluate the Council's Overview and Scrutiny process for the 2006/2007 municipal year.

- Completion of Overview and Scrutiny work programme on time.

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- Number of occasions when Overview and Scrutiny comments/ recommendations on organisational performance are acted upon.
- Whether sufficient information is provided to witnesses about the Overview and Scrutiny process.
- Views of policy committee members as to whether Overview and Scrutiny adds value; and what improvements could be made to the relationship.
- Views of public on aspects of meetings: accessibility of venue; ability to see, hear and follow the proceedings; interest and relevance of topics; clarity of reports.
- Witnesses' views of value added by Overview and Scrutiny meetings.
- Percentage of Overview and Scrutiny recommendations accepted.
- Percentage of Overview and Scrutiny recommendations implemented.

The meeting closed at 9.15 pm.

Chairman .....

Date .....