

Report of the AD Governance & ICT

Scrutiny Topics for Review in 2014-15

Summary

1. This report provides introductory information on the possible topics for scrutiny review in this municipal year, for Members consideration.

Background

2. At a meeting in late April 2014, the Committee agreed to submit the following possible topics to the annual Scrutiny Work Planning Event held on 14 May 2014:
 - i. High Value Jobs - To identify cost effective ways to attract graduates and young entrepreneurs to start up or relocate to York thus enabling the employment of local people at higher than average wages and to promote York as a place to grow Gross Added Value jobs in tech sector businesses.
 - ii. Bulk Buying of Energy – To investigate ways of tackling fuel poverty and rising fuel bills by exploring bulk energy buying scheme alongside other councils or large partner organisations, and to look at localised sustainable energy generation, maximising receipts from carbon credits by using council land for planting trees and /or solar or wind farming.
3. In addition three potential topics relevant to the work of ECDOSC were submitted by Members:
 - iii. Public transport provision in the city - in the light of the shift of economic activity towards the North of the city around Monks Cross and new park and ride provision changing travel patterns.

- iv. The implementation of the Low Emission Strategy – it has now had time to be implemented, but as yet there has been no evidence of how effective or otherwise it has been in reducing air pollution below the World Health Organisation and European Union health limits.
 - v. To investigate the trial closure of Lendal Bridge in light of the Government's Traffic Adjudicator ruling of Tuesday 1st April. Specifically, how and why City of York Council enforced a closure of Lendal Bridge and Coppergate which was essentially unlawful, and to address the other concerns (including poor signage) included in the ruling – in order to understand how the Council got itself into a position where it was enforcing closures it had 'no power' to enforce and to ensure that lessons are learnt and mistakes are not repeated.
4. At the work planning event it was suggested that the views of Cabinet Members be sought on the proposed topics relevant to their individual portfolios. Their views on the topics listed above are included below.
 5. In addition, at the work planning event there was widespread support to undertake another corporate review during this municipal year. A number of possible scrutiny topics were discussed and the consensus was a corporate review around supporting elderly people. The Corporate & Scrutiny Management Committee will formally agree the topic for corporate review at its next meeting on 23 June 2014.

Information Gathered

6. i. High Value Jobs
The Council Leader feels that this would be extremely helpful in sorting out the supply chain so that CYC could free up less skilled jobs for those who are unemployed whilst still increasing individual spending in the authority area. The topic had already been scoped by an ECDOSC working party and the Committee agreed it was worthy of review. A Task Group meeting is to be held on 2 July 2014.
7. ii. Bulk Buying of Energy
The Council Leader confirmed this was something he had been looking at for some time and some help from Scrutiny would be welcome. The Cabinet Member for Environmental Services, Planning & Sustainability noted that work was already being done in this area. His concern was that already overloaded staff could be diverted from actually moving the agenda along. The Committee received a comprehensive scoping report

on this topic in March 2014 and the item was adjourned until the meeting in July 2014 for an update report.

8. iii. Public Transport Provision

The Council Leader was not clear what this would achieve apart from saying there was not enough good quality, low cost bus provision. He commented that the council had a market forces transport system. He suggested that looking at the short-fall in transport funding received from Government towards transport schemes might be more fruitful.

9. iv. Low Emissions Strategy.

The Council Leader felt this was an interesting topic with some merit. The Cabinet Member for Environmental Services, Planning & Sustainability confirmed that more detailed implementation of the Low Emissions Strategy will be dealt with by the forthcoming updated Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP), although CYC had been progressing some aspects such as getting cleaner electric buses, promoting hybrid taxis, and electric vehicle charging infrastructure. He felt that a scrutiny might be premature or should wait for the AQAP - possibly a simple update to the appropriate scrutiny committee in the first instance and then make a decision as to whether to proceed further at that time.

10. CYC's Environmental Protection Manager confirmed the Low Emission Strategy contained many ideas to be delivered via the 3rd Air Quality Action Plan and various carbon reduction programmes over a period of many years. It was not something that was simply "implemented". The aim is to reduce emissions to meet the EU's air quality objectives as enacted in UK legislation, whilst at the same time reducing carbon emissions. He felt it was too soon to be deciding whether it had been effective as it was currently in the process of being delivered and that, due to a restructure, was likely to lead to less capacity for low emission and air quality work. CYC did not have the current capacity to deal with an increased workload.

11. v. Lendal Bridge.

The Council Leader commented that in his opinion "this is politics not scrutiny". He considered it was ultimately up to scrutiny whether this topic proceeded but he felt it might be premature in light of the independently chaired congestion commission.

12. The Cabinet Member for Environmental Services, Planning & Sustainability said that while this was no longer in his portfolio area, this specific topic prejudged whether Counsel's advice to the Council on the

legal position was wrong, which would only be clear once the Council's approach to the adjudicator and any possible subsequent court action confirmed whether that was the case or not. He took the view that it ought not to proceed in the interim in terms of possibly legally prejudicing the Council's case.

13. The outgoing Director of City and Environmental Services thought this was premature as CYC had yet to receive the view of the chief adjudicator and thus there may be no case to answer. Equally the Council and its "counsel" believed that there was no case to answer and as a result no need to answer allegations it was unlawful. He suggested that if this topic needed to be reviewed then it needed to be done at a more appropriate time.
14. 'Supporting Elderly People' Corporate Review
As this is likely to be the topic agreed by Corporate & Scrutiny Management Committee later this month, this Committee may wish to discuss some ideas for their contribution to this corporate review. This will enable the scrutiny officer to carry out some initial research and produce a scoping report for when this Committee meets again in July 2014.

Council Plan

15. The High Value Jobs topic would support the Council's corporate priority to create jobs and grow the economy, as set out in the Council's Plan 2011-15. The Bulk Buying of Energy topic would support the priorities to protect vulnerable people and protect the environment; Public Transport Provision would support Get York Moving, Low Emissions Strategy would support protecting the environment.

Risk Management & Implications

14. There are no known risks, and there are no known Financial, HR, Equalities, Legal, Crime & Disorder, IT, or Property implications associated with the recommendation in this report. Implications associated with the topics would be addressed as part of any scrutiny should a decision be taken to proceed to review.

Recommendation

Members are asked to consider the information within this report and with the support of the officers, agree:

- Which of the proposed topics should proceed to review
- A suitable review remit for each agreed review and the timeframe for their completion (bearing in mind the limited time available for carrying out review work during this municipal year due to the forthcoming elections)
- Whether the agreed reviews are to be carried out by a Task Group or the full Committee
- Ideas around a topic in support of the proposed corporate scrutiny review for 2014-15

Reason: To keep Members informed of suggested topics for review in the new Municipal year.

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**Report
 Approved**



Date

3 June 2014

Wards Affected:

All



Background Papers: None

Annexes: None