

Assessment of Economy & Place Scrutiny Committee's Trial Period

I was appointed chair of this scrutiny committee in May 2018, at the same time as it was set up under the trial way of working. What follows is a brief personal observation of the trial.

The first meeting of the committee served as a very useful introduction to the new way of working, and it was resolved that a task group should explore themes and topics that the committee might include in its work plan.

With the initial enthusiasm of the relevant directorate's officers, the task group were able to help inform an outline work plan of planned reports to the committee – alongside the committee's standing reports. This worked well as a starting point to the municipal year.

The challenge arose in trying to draw a dotted line between what the committee should then have reviewed as part of those reports, and what would be covered by the 'sister' committee as policy development. Councillors are, rightly, naturally enthusiastic to work out how they can scrutinise and develop subsequent policy to improve future council working.

This dotted line between the two committees meant that it was a challenge to do much more than review and oversee existing work, due to the dangers of duplication or crossing over into policy development. The result being that many reports from the initial task group's recommendations were scrutinised and noted, without much further action or work undertaken.

The committee also suffered from a drought of relevant Economy and Place scrutiny topics being submitted by members of the council, topics which could well have helped inform the work plan and resulted in task groups. This wasn't necessarily a result of the new way of working, but does highlight that scrutiny also relies on members' willingness to use the process.

In my opinion, to improve scrutiny of the Economy and Place function, there should be a single committee. We should not be afraid of the size of the directorate and a single committee would offer better synergy. Alternatively, should the council be minded to maintain two committees, the chairs and vice-chairs of the committee should be encouraged to undertake regular joint briefings to better map work plans. But my preference would be towards the former option.

In conclusion to this brief report, the 12 month trial resulted in standard scrutiny work being undertaken, primarily in overview of different topics. But

nothing that fundamentally impacted on the council's work, which would suggest the way of working needs more work or a change.

Councillor Neil Barnes

Chair, Economy and Place Scrutiny Committee

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