

## **Request for Change of Scrutiny Committee Terms of Reference**

### **Purpose of Report**

1. This report advises Members of a suggestion and request from the Chairs of two Scrutiny Committees to amend their terms of reference slightly to redress the balance of work between these Committees. The report also seeks comments on a proposal for an inherent way of working which is outcome based, to enable scrutiny to measure its success in terms of review recommendations.

### **Background**

2. In 2009, the Council undertook a full scale review of the scrutiny function, including the way it operated and the Committees and their remit areas. The current operational remits for Committees were set and agreed by Council at that time. Those remits were originally set to reflect the 'cross-directorate' structure in place at that time and to provide maximum flexibility for working, at that time, with the Local Strategic Partnership and other partners. Since then the Council has restructured several times and indeed moved into new premises at West Offices.
3. The Council is currently undertaking a review of its scrutiny and Council procedures, upon which all Groups have been consulted. Without prejudicing the findings of that review, nor undertaking a fuller review than is perhaps required ahead of the 2015 local elections, it is suggested that some 'tinkering' with the remits of both Economic & City Development and Community Safety Scrutiny Committees is required.
4. In addition, at the recent Scrutiny Annual Work Planning, Councillor Semlyen raised the issue of adopting a 'success matrix' approach to scrutiny reviews, suggesting it could be addressed as a scrutiny topic this year. Since then, Scrutiny Officers have discussed this in more detail with Councillor Semlyen and the intention behind the proposal has become clearer. Councillor Semlyen is suggesting that in order to demonstrate the positive impact of scrutiny, scrutiny committees adopt a

way of working that ensures each scrutiny review leads to measurable outcomes through the recommendations it makes. In the light of that clarification, it is suggested that, rather than a matter for review, this might be a conceptual approach to the scrutiny process worthy of consideration by Corporate & Scrutiny Management Committee as the Committee responsible for the scrutiny function.

## Analysis

### 5. Proposed Change in Remits

In addition to this Corporate & Scrutiny Management Committee (CSMC), there are currently 4 standing Overview & Scrutiny Committees on the Council's Structure:

- Community Safety
- Economic & City Development (ECDOSC)
- Health
- Learning & Culture

In comparison to the volume of scrutiny review and overview work undertaken and completed by the other Scrutiny Committees since the last local elections in 2011, Community Safety Scrutiny Committee has struggled:

Committee	Reviews Completed	Overview Work Done
Economic & City Development	6	36
Health	4	100
Learning & Culture	6	48
Community Safety	1	58

6. Whilst there are various reasons for this lower average, it is suggested that a slight shift in focus between the remits ECDOSC and Community Safety might help to give a wider area to Community Safety to focus upon and would help make the remit of ECDOSC more manageable.
7. This Committee is therefore asked to consider moving the housing landlord and stock portfolio from ECDOSC to Community Safety, whilst leaving ECDOSC with the housing strategy elements under the Local Plan. In effect this means that the 'Housing Landlord & Housing General' service areas would be specifically added to Community Safety's area of work.

8. 'Success Matrix' (or evidence and outcome based) Approach to Scrutiny  
Councillor Semlyen is requesting this Committee consider supporting this approach to the way the Council undertakes scrutiny reviews, so that scrutiny ensures its recommendations are evidence and outcome based, as well as measurable. Through this approach, strengthen its ability to challenge the Council and its partners to be better or to be the best they can be.
9. The Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS)<sup>1</sup> promotes the development of and improvements to the practice of public scrutiny and accountability within government and public services, including standards of professional practice. CfPS good practice guides recommend the following as basic principles of delivering effective scrutiny recommendations:
  - they should be **evidence based**, specific and realistic;
  - they should have a clear focus on **outcomes 'on the ground'**;
  - they should focus on delivering a **measurable** change in service, e.g. a reduction in instances of anti-social behaviour or rent arrears;
  - they should be used to establish a **value in 'return'** on scrutiny effort;
  - they should recognise cost implications;
  - they should, wherever possible, be developed in partnership to ensure that what is proposed is **robust and realistic**
10. Scrutiny Officers endeavour to adopt these principles when supporting topics selected for review and scrutiny reviews but this practice has not been formally endorsed by this Committee or across the Council in the past. CSMC is asked to consider whether formally acknowledging and adopting this approach, as raised by Councillor Semlyen, would help achieve a wider adherence and commitment to these principles across the Council and the partners we work with.
11. Councillor Semlyen is seeking this Committee's endorsement of her proposed approach (as outlined in paragraph 4 above), which is fairly consistent with CfPS's recommended good practice in the conduct of scrutiny reviews, as demonstrated in paragraph 9 above.
12. In the process of researching these fundamental principles, other newer ways of working have also been identified, such as a new CfPS tool for measuring the impact of overview and scrutiny and the recommendations it makes. In analysing this, the CfPS recognised that

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<sup>1</sup> A registered charity set up to promote public scrutiny, accountability, transparency and involvement in scrutiny for the public benefit.

scrutiny activity typically produced recommendations about subjects reviewed, but practitioners had not always focussed on measuring their impact. It was felt that there might be a value in attributing to the world of overview and scrutiny the economic concepts of getting a 'rate of return' on investment. Annex A sets out further details on CfPS tool for applying this approach step by step.

13. Members may wish to consider asking Officers to further investigate this and other potential tools for undertaking effective scrutiny, with a view to piloting any suitable approaches over a fixed period of time.

### **Consultation**

14. The current Chairs of ECDOSC and Community Safety Scrutiny Committees have been consulted on the proposed change of remits for their Committees and are supportive.
15. Councillor Semlyen is aware that this Committee is being asked to consider formally endorsing the approach outlined in paragraphs 8 to 11, in response to her original proposals for a scrutiny on a 'success matrix'. She has been invited to attend the meeting in support of this initiative.
16. To date no consultation has taken place on further, more newly available 'tools' as described in paragraphs 12 and 13 above, and Annex A. This would be undertaken as part of the further investigative work, should Members be minded to agree to explore this further.

### **Council Plan 2011-15**

17. Whilst the recommendations in this report do not specifically impact upon the delivery of the Council Plan, how scrutiny undertakes its reviews and work is fundamental to helping the Council continue to meet its improvement targets and direction statements.

### **Options**

18. Members of this Committee may choose to:
  - Recommend to Council the proposed change to Scrutiny Committee remits or not;
  - Endorse its support for a clear and focussed approach towards evidence and outcome based scrutiny, resulting in striving to achieving aspirational targets where possible;

- Commission further investigations into alternative approaches and tools for getting the most out of scrutiny, together with any appropriate pilots

## **Associated Implications**

19. There are no known implications associated with the recommendations in this report, other than the transfer of part of a remit, which in effect, simply means that the Assistant Director (Housing & Community Safety) will contribute to the work of Community Safety Committee in relation to this element of his portfolio in future and not Economic & City Development Scrutiny Committee.

## **Risk Management**

20. There are no known risks associated with the recommendations in this report by either making a simple adjustment to remits, nor by seeking endorsement to the cultural approach to scrutiny outlined in paragraphs 8 to 13 above.

## **Recommendations**

21. Members are asked to consider:
  - (i) Recommending to Council the slight change in the remits of Economic & City Development and Community Safety Committees to redress the balance of responsibilities between the two; and
  - (ii) Endorsing the cultural approach towards evidence and outcome based scrutiny reviews outlined in paragraphs 8-11 above;
  - (iii) Whether it would be timely to undertake further work to investigate alternative approaches and tools to ensure the Council achieves the best value and potential outcomes through scrutiny

Reason: To enable the work of Scrutiny Committees to progress efficiently and deliver effective outcomes

## **Contact Details**

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**Report Approved**



**Date**

12 June 2014

**Wards Affected:**

**All**



For further information please contact the author of the report

**Background Papers:** N/A

**Annexes:**

**Annex A** – Developing a New Tool for Measuring the impact of Scrutiny