

SCRUTINY COMMISSION – 16th February 2010

Report of the Acting Director of Programmes and Resources

ITEM 6 SCRUTINY REVIEW

Purpose of the report

To consider initial arrangements for a Scrutiny Review.

Recommendation

That members of the Scrutiny Commission discuss and agree what key issues they would like to see in the Review of Scrutiny.

Background

Charnwood's scrutiny arrangements have been in place since 2000 and, with the exception of minor changes in 2004, the structure has largely remained the same. For the last 2 years, it has been anticipated that there would need to be a review of the Council's scrutiny arrangements once advice and regulations were received in relation to the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. The Leader of the Council has requested that the review should now be undertaken.

Along with the need to modernise because of the new Act, a number of external drivers are now encouraging the Council to review its scrutiny structure and arrangements:-

Charnwood's IDeA Peer Review 2008

"The scrutiny function needs development and support.....the committees are calling officers to account rather than Lead Members. The accountability of Lead Members is diminishing and there is an over-reliance on officers. We would recommend that this is addressed. The scrutiny function could be developed to include policy development, but this will require officer support which, from our observations and discussions is very limited at the present time".

Audit Commission – Charnwood's Use of Resources Assessment 2009

"Scrutiny is getting better, but there is little evidence of where it has made a difference. There are effective risk management processes in place, although scrutiny arrangements have so far had limited impact on services".

Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) – 2010

"Public scrutiny is now moving into another era with community-led scrutiny of local decisions. This is where the public's involvement in challenging local authorities and public service providers on public service improvement and delivery is actively sought by elected representatives (such as MPs or councillors) or appointed non-

executives on governing bodies (such as school governors or non-executive directors of hospital trusts). Constructive and ongoing engagement with stakeholders, from experts to the general public, helps to achieve genuine accountability for the use of public resources”.

Councillors are therefore asked to support the proposed arrangements to progress the Review.

An initial step

At its meeting on 15th December 2009, the Scrutiny Commission asked for early involvement in the Review process.

It is crucial that members of the Scrutiny Commission are able to influence the future of scrutiny at Charnwood and to develop, and own, new structures and ways of working. **To assist in this and to launch the Council’s Scrutiny Review, it is suggested that the Commission discuss and agree the key issues that it thinks should form the framework for scrutiny in the future.** These would then be taken to the next stage in the development of new structures and procedures.

The next stage would take the form of an Away Day to discuss the Commission’s key issues in the wider context of scrutiny. Before eventual decisions are made it is important that all members are fully informed of good practice and what different options exist.

Outcomes sought from the Review of Scrutiny

The positive outcomes sought from the review of scrutiny would be to ensure:-

- that the scrutiny function is fit for purpose to undertake the roles and functions expected of a modern council, drawing on practice from other places
- that the scrutiny function effectively informs and shapes key decisions and policy, enabling better outcomes for local people
- that members are confident and empowered to undertake their responsibilities and can take the council’s agenda forwards and have the ability to make a more positive contribution

Timetable

The timetable is for councillors to determine, but the following might be possible:-

February 2010	Initial discussion and identification of key issues by Scrutiny Commission
March 2010	Cabinet consideration of key issues identified by Scrutiny Commission
April 2010	Away Day and/or facilitated discussion
May/June 2010	Reports to Scrutiny Commission and Cabinet
September 2010	New Constitutional arrangements considered by Council
September 2010	Implementation

Financial and Legal Implications

Until the new scrutiny structures and processes are determined, it is not possible to predict what financial implications there might be.

There are no legal implications.

Risk Management

There are no risks associated with this report.

Background Papers: The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007

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