

BARNSELY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

30TH JULY 2013

1. **Present:** Councillors Margaret Sheard (Chair), Doug Birkinshaw, Phillip Birkinshaw, Sharron Brook, Gill Carr, Lesley Duerden, Robin Franklin, Paul Hand-Davis, Joe Hayward, Graham Kyte, Margaret Morgan, Harry Spence, Peter Starling, Sarah-Jane Tattersall and John Wilson) together with co-opted members Tony Haigh and John Winter

2. **Declarations of pecuniary and non-pecuniary interest**

There were no declarations of pecuniary and non-pecuniary interest.

3. **The role of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

Councillor Alan Gardiner, Cabinet Spokesperson for Corporate Services and Shaun Jones, Head of Performance and Partnerships were welcomed to the meeting.

The Chair began by reminding members that this was the first meeting of the new Overview & Scrutiny Committee. She explained that the first part of the meeting would focus on the committee itself - what its role would be and how it would be expected to work. The second part of the meeting would focus on the Corporate Performance Plan and its associated performance framework, so that members could identify what performance issues and specific performance indicators they would like the Committee to potentially scrutinise.

The Committee considered a report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Legal and Governance) explaining the Council's revised Overview & Scrutiny arrangements. In particular, it set out the remit for the new Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the ways in which it would carry out its work during the year.

Members were reminded that from the start of the current municipal year, the former Scrutiny Commissions had been replaced by an Overview & Scrutiny Committee (OSC). This change was intended to help Overview & Scrutiny become more effective and especially to give it a more important role in monitoring and reviewing the strategic performance of the Council and other agencies.

The report went on to explain that the Committee would be expected to carry out this role in conjunction with the Area Councils, who would, it was stated, have responsibility for monitoring the local performance of services. A number of ways were suggested for how the Area Councils and the Overview & Scrutiny Committee could work together, although it was accepted that further discussions would be required in order to determine how this relationship might best operate.

Members were informed that the OSC would also have an important role to play in:

- Scrutinising / calling-in cabinet decisions;

- Scrutinising important decisions taken by other organisations;
- Considering relevant councillor calls for action.

Finally, the report explained that much of the work of the committee would actually be carried out on its behalf by the 'Task & Finish Groups'. These groups, it stated, would be asked to carry out two investigations each during the year and to report back their findings to the Committee as a whole.

IT WAS AGREED

That the proposed remit for the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the suggested way of working for the year be endorsed.

4. Membership of the Overview & Scrutiny Task & Finish Groups

The Committee then received a report which set out the proposed membership of the three Overview & Scrutiny Committee Task & Finish Groups (Growing the Economy, Reducing Health Inequalities and Keeping our communities Safe.)

IT WAS AGREED

That the proposed membership of the Task & Finish Groups be endorsed.

5. The work programme of the Task & Finish Groups

At this point the committee discussed the proposed work programme of the Task & Finish Groups. This programme had been produced following the Committee's development session in June. Members were informed that it focused on the performance issues around growing the economy, reducing health inequalities and keeping our communities safe. There was a discussion about the reasons why certain topics had been included in the programme, such as the levels of tobacco smoking in the borough. Members were informed that this investigation would be helpful in terms of the Council's new responsibility for public health and to ensure that resources are used in the most effective way.

The report explained that each of the three Task & Finish Groups would be asked to carry out a programme of two investigations.

The first Task & Finish Group would focus on issues around '**Growing the Economy**' and would carry out investigations on the following topics:

Topic One: Is our approach to regenerating the town centre working? What lessons have we learned from other areas about how to do this?

Topic Two: Are we successfully creating the conditions for economic growth and greater prosperity?

The second Task & Finish Group would focus on issues around '**Reducing Health Inequalities**' and would carry out investigations on the following topics:

Topic One: Why have we not had more success in persuading people not to smoke?

Topic Two: What new approaches do we need to take if we are to reduce obesity in the borough?

The third Task & Finish Group would focus on '**Keeping our communities safe**' and would carry out investigations on the following topics:

Topic One: Have we succeeded in getting local people more involved in caring for vulnerable people in our communities?

Topic Two: Adult safeguarding performance evaluation - is it achieving its targets?

Members discussed the proposed programme. They made it clear that the investigations should concentrate on key performance issues and especially poor performance; and in this context they thought it important that the groups make good use of the information contained in the Council's Corporate Plan Performance Report. However, it was also recognised that the Task & Finish Groups would require additional detailed information in order to carry out these investigations appropriately. The Committee was advised that as a next step we should now determine in consultation with the relevant directorates what information would be of most value and assistance to members so that they can scrutinise fully these issues.

IT WAS AGREED

That the work programme for the Task & Finish Groups be endorsed.

6. Co-opted Members

The Committee then considered a report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Legal and Governance) setting out the proposed arrangements for co-opting members on to the Committee. This suggested that in addition to the statutory co-opted members (representing parent governors and the diocesan education authorities) up to seven co-opted members should serve on the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and that, in addition, others are recruited as 'expert observers' to assist the Task & Finish Groups in carrying out specific investigations.

The report also made it clear that the Council had not previously set a limit on the number of times a person could serve as a co-opted member. This had meant that some co-opted members had served for a long period of time. This ran counter to the principle established by the Nolan Committee that no one nominated to a public body should serve for more than two substantive terms - of, say, four years each. The report recommended, therefore, that this limit of two four year terms be put in place, so that no one who had already served for more than eight years as a co-opted member on the former scrutiny commissions could be appointed to serve on the Overview & Scrutiny Committee during 2013-14.

IT WAS AGREED

That the suggested approach to appointing co-opted members to serve on the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and expert observers to support the Task & Finish Groups be endorsed.

That the Assistant Chief Executive (Legal & Governance) be authorised to agree, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee, a process for obtaining nominations to serve as co-opted members of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and as expert observers on the Task & Finish Groups.

7. Corporate Performance Plan 2012/13

The Committee then turned its attention to the Corporate Plan Performance Report (Cab 1.7.2013.6.1), submitted to the Cabinet on the 1st July 2013, which provides an overview of the Council's corporate performance monitoring, drawing upon information from Quarter 4 of 2012/13. The report was organised around the 3 overall priorities of the Corporate Plan and the 18 outcomes underneath these priorities.

It was explained that the information contained in this report would be of real value to Overview & Scrutiny in helping to monitor the strategic performance of Council and other services and in measuring what progress has been made towards achieving our key goals and strategic objectives.

Members were told that much of the information contained in the report would be of direct use to the Task & Finish Groups in carrying out their investigations, but that it would also be important for the Committee itself to scrutinise this information; and especially those indicators that will not be looked at as part of the Task & Finish Group investigations.

It was suggested that the Committee could look at these indicators 'thematically' - with indicators from a specific theme scrutinised at each of its scheduled meetings during the municipal year.

The Committee welcomed this approach and went through the report to identify possible indicators to scrutinise in greater detail at its future meetings. They agreed to group these indicators around the themes of changing the relationship between the Council and community, growing the economy, the sustainable future council and improving peoples potential and achievement.

The Cabinet Spokesperson for Corporate Services, Councillor Alan Gardiner, reiterated just how valuable the Corporate Plan Performance Report would be to both the Task & Finish Groups and the Overview & Scrutiny Committee as a whole in carrying out its work programme. He and the Head of Performance & Partnerships, then answered questions from members about some of the specific performance outcomes and measures that the Committee might want to look at.

As part of this, members asked for clarification about what some of the indicators meant and the reasons for rating them as 'red' or in other words that not sufficient progress had been made to achieve the target set. Committee members pointed out

examples of indicators in the report where progress had actually been good, such as the speed of processing major planning applications (79% had been completed on time) but had been assessed as 'red' because the ambitious targets had narrowly been missed (in the instance of major planning applications by 1%. Although this was felt to be a harsh outcome, the Committee recognised that it was a necessary consequence of the approach taken, especially given the fact that it was a year end analysis.

The Chair thanked the witnesses for attending what had proved to be a very useful meeting. She made it clear that following on from today's meeting the Task & Finish Groups will now begin their first round of investigations. She also stated that the Committee would be asked to look at the performance data drawn from the Council's subsequent quarterly Corporate Plan Performance Reports at its next meeting on the 1st October.

IT WAS AGREED

That the Committee should monitor the performance information contained in the Council's Corporate Plan Performance Report at its future meetings along the lines suggested.