

REPORT OF THE POLICY AND REVIEW COMMITTEE

First round of meetings

All overview and scrutiny committees have held their first round of meetings. Executive Members took the opportunity to present their top three priorities and risks. Using this as a guide, along with their own priorities, members of the Committee agreed outline work programmes for 2010 – 11 which will be presented to Policy and Review Committee for approval on the 30th June. It is especially important this year, as the council, its partners and other public sector bodies look set to tighten their belts, that in agreeing the work programme, where similarities or duplication in suggested topics and methodologies, that Policy and Review asks Committees to work together to minimise expenditure and use of resources. More so than ever scrutiny needs to demonstrate its own contribution to added value and improved outcomes for the work that *it* does and the differences *it* makes.

Scrutiny – Performance improvement V service reduction

You don't have to look far to see the raft of conferences offering their own suggestions as to how scrutiny can prepare for the future and prepare itself for new legislation post general election. There is a growing debate about the future for scrutiny in identifying challenges and potential solutions and the challenges of delivering efficient and effective evidence based scrutiny and successful partnership working with ever diminishing resources. Of this we have no doubt: There will need to be improved collaboration between inspectorates and Overview and Scrutiny Committees to ensure performance improvement. Not that scrutiny is unique; with most areas of public sector delivery anticipating sharp budget cuts, there will be a definite case to clarify the need for financial scrutiny post general election. Where service areas suggest and implement cuts, scrutiny will need to ensure the reduced deliverables actually happen and that the outcomes promised emerge.

Health scrutiny

We suspect that our Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee will have a challenging agenda when reviewing the changes to the NHS – specifically for us the PCT, and what this will mean for health and social care scrutiny: i.e. The role and structure of commissioning organisations in a changing NHS, like the rest of us; doing more with less - the financial pressures on the system and new government policy. We will need to ensure scrutiny makes conclusions and recommendations to the PCT which maintain the principle of improving health services specifically as a result of the scrutiny process.

Local Strategic Partnership

We are somewhat fortunate to already have established over the last 18 months a scrutiny relationship with our Local Strategic Partnership and our involvement in scrutinising the Local Area Agreement, so to some extent are ahead of the game when it comes to understanding and improving scrutiny and accountability of Local Strategic Partnerships. We already have a formalised, mutual and respected

dialogue with our LSP. A challenge some authorities are yet to address through their scrutiny process.

Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnership

In December 2009 we successfully introduced local authority Scrutiny as a dimension to our local Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnership, and would seek to build on that positive relationship throughout the next 12 months, culminating in what will become an annual meeting. We valued their contributions which explained how they overcome challenges to working in a successful CDRP and consult effectively with the local community to identify and prioritise crime and disorder issues. Our next joint challenge will be how to directly involve the use of scrutiny to improve community safety. A challenge we are no stranger to, having adopted this approach four years ago with the year-long cross-cutting review of "From anti- social behaviour to positive contributions and engagement." However, like all challenges scrutiny sets for itself, the test will be somewhat harder this time, and the need to engage and empower our community into our public scrutiny processes will be high on our priorities.

Member engagement

This year will be a year where all Members engaged in overview and scrutiny will need to pitch in. Not least to address the issue that arose again at this years annual Review of Scrutiny – the effective engagement by ALL of the Committee in their respective work programmes.

Joint Scrutiny, Pennine Lancashire, Lancashire, and the North West.

With challenge comes opportunity. It is inevitable that further opportunities for an increased role for joint working between local authorities and between different types of public authorities across local areas will be proposed both locally and from the centre. Again we stand well-equipped to meet this challenge, having had several years experience delivering joint scrutiny with Blackpool and Lancashire County Council on a variety of (especially health) topics, and engagement with our AGMA colleagues on specific reviews. With a continued commitment to promote and support the Pennine Lancashire agenda, scrutiny across this footprint could be a direction of opportunity for all of us within its boundaries. On a regional basis we remain committed to the North West Strategic Scrutiny Network with both senior officer and Member representation on its steering group, driving a joined up and collaborative agenda for the North West.

Scrutiny fit for purpose fit for future 2010+

It would be remiss of us not to highlight our own review of current scrutiny arrangements at Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council. As the last substantive review we undertook was in 2005 it was felt that the timing was appropriate to undertake a further review. It is coincidental that it falls in line with events at a

national level. Although each year there is an Annual Review of Scrutiny by the current Committee Chairs, Vice Chairs and Link Chief Officers; which considers what has worked, what needs improvement and how next years Committees will be fit for purpose, it was felt that a more wholesale review of the call on Members time, the number of committees and the way in which we hold the Executive to account should be reconsidered.

An options paper was originally sent out to Group leaders with a series of suggestions to canvas Members opinion and consensus on the future direction of a fit for purpose scrutiny function for Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council. This was raised at the Annual review, where a commitment to take this forward as part of the work programme for Policy and Review Committee between now and September was made. Equally, and importantly another commitment to canvas as much input from all 64 elected Members as possible was part of that decision, and remains ongoing, as the initial questionnaire is currently out to all Members for response. It is envisaged that a series of meetings (with Members) will follow, as some of the options raise both questions and answers, with initial responses to some issues being mixed. Therefore it is important that the outcomes of this review reflect the views and engagement of Members throughout the process, bringing back to council any constitutional changes necessary to reflect Members feelings on how best scrutiny can serve the council, its partners and the public in the future.

Derek Hardman
Chair

Jim Shorrocks
Vice Chair