

CHAIR OF THE SCRUTINY LEADERSHIP BOARD'S REPORT TO COUNCIL - COUNCILLOR MRS MAXINE CALLOW

Culture

In July 2019, I highlighted to you that the culture of our organisation was key in making improvements in the way we carry out scrutiny at the authority. Since that time the scrutiny function has gone from strength to strength thanks to the continued efforts of scrutiny members, Executive Members and council officers. Officers are seeking earlier involvement in policy development and are actively engaging with scrutiny members as appropriate; and in return scrutiny members are proactively identifying relevant topics and strategies for review. All this combined has led to improved working relationships and a more valuable contribution made by those involved.

Workplanning

It is my view that workplanning is a key determinant in carrying out effective scrutiny and that the right topics being identified for consideration at the right time will allow for the greatest opportunity for worthwhile scrutiny. To ensure our workplans are robust we review them regularly and engage with the Executive, Senior Officers and partners to allow them to feed in suggestions and involve scrutiny at the right time in the development and review of policy. Unfortunately the pandemic has, understandably, had a significant impact on some of the work of scrutiny in 2020 and as a result workplans have had to be reactive and flexible to balance the new demands placed on officers with the need to continue effective scrutiny.

From March 2020, the meetings of the three Scrutiny Committees were cancelled in response to the pandemic and two special meetings of the Scrutiny Leadership Board were held in July 2020 to consolidate the work of scrutiny. The two meetings considered the key topics identified by Members such as homelessness, the response to the pandemic by Children's Social Care and Adults Social Care, tourism recovery and the health system's response to the pandemic. Scrutiny review work was also put on hold. The Scrutiny Committees therefore revised their workplans in July 2020 with a view to recommencing work in September 2020 when the normal meeting timetable was resumed. The pandemic is still however having an impact and it has not yet been possible to resume the work of the Channel Shift Scrutiny Review or fully undertake the Supported Housing Scrutiny Review as planned. These pieces of work will recommence in the New Year. There also remains an impact on the work of the Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Committee in particular, with the workplan being revised in order to minimise impact on key services.

I am pleased to say that despite the pandemic some excellent scrutiny work has still been able to be carried out and concluded including the Inclusion in Education Scrutiny Review, which was

recently approved by the Executive subject to the Cabinet Member comments. The review of the school's response to the pandemic has been recently concluded and will report to the Executive shortly and the Housing and Homelessness Scrutiny Review is considering the recommendations it wishes to include in its final report before its planned submission to the Tourism, Economy and Communities Scrutiny Committee in February 2021.

The Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Committee has held the postponed special meeting on mental health services provision and received the results of a brief analysis carried out on the impact of the Whole System Transfers of Care Scrutiny Review.

There has also been scrutiny involvement in the development of a number of new strategies and plans including the Ten-Year Education Strategy, Tree Strategy and the Active Lives Strategy and the Scrutiny Leadership Board has also fed into the development of the Council's new key performance indicators.

Looking forward, further policy development and strategy input has been identified to be carried out on the Drug Strategy, Lancashire Waste Strategy, the Air Quality Strategy, the Sponsorship Strategy and the Sustainability Strategy. Review work will also be carried out on the Community Safety Partnership. The work of the three committees continues to be regularly reviewed with topics for review identified to ensure a balance during these continued difficult times.

Relationship between Scrutiny and the Executive

The new Executive/Scrutiny Protocol was approved by Council earlier this year and can be used as a tool to continue to build upon the relationship between scrutiny and the Executive. I, as Chair of the Scrutiny Leadership Board, regularly speak to the Leader of the Council and the Chairs and Vice Chairs of our scrutiny committees continue to have a regular and ongoing dialogue with the relevant Cabinet Members to their Committee. This relationship is proving even more important during the pandemic, with more work being carried out outside of Committee meetings and the sharing of information more important than ever.

Budget Scrutiny

A pleasing result of the pandemic has been the improved attendance of members at training. A fantastic number of members attended the financial scrutiny training provided by Steve Thompson and Phil Redmond which resulted in the revision of the way in which budget and financial scrutiny will be carried out. At its meeting on 15 October 2020, the Scrutiny Leadership Board following consultation with the Director of Resources approved the following proposals:

- Scrutiny of the Council's budget and financial performance should be an ongoing consideration. It was considered that in order to effectively review the Council's budget and provide a valuable contribution in terms of new ideas, that additional input should take place earlier in the process and on a regular basis.

- The Scrutiny Leadership Board should take an active role in scrutiny of the Council’s overall financial performance and budget whilst the three Committees should be asked to focus more on the financial performance and medium term financial plans (for Children’s and Adults Services)/financial planning of individual services within their remit.

Due to the fact that the budget process for 2020/2021 was already ongoing the following schedule of meetings was agreed:

10 December 2020 (informal meeting)	Informal scrutiny review of 2021/2022 capital and revenue budgets. Input into the new Medium Term Financial Plan.
11 March 2021 (formal committee)	Council Financial Performance Monitoring Overview
20 May 2021 (informal meeting)	Finance/Budget 2022/2023 development scrutiny review, identification of priorities
Tbc October 2021 (formal committee)	Council Financial Performance Monitoring Overview

The three Committees will be working to establish appropriate timescales for their specific service budget reviews in due course.

Conclusion

I have been very pleased with the development of scrutiny since I submitted my first report to Council 18 months ago. The feeling around scrutiny is now one of positivity and appreciation of the value that can be added by effective and enthusiastic scrutiny members. Our focus is on ensuring appropriate and early input into new policy and strategy, supporting the Council in its ongoing response to the pandemic and demonstrating the impact and value added by scrutiny.

I look forward to presenting the Scrutiny Annual Report to you in June 2021.