

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

Culture

At Annual Council in May 2019, a new structure for scrutiny was approved creating a Scrutiny Leadership Board to co-ordinate the scrutiny function at the council, raise the profile of scrutiny and undertake a series of specific scrutiny activities. This is the first report back to council, following the changes, on the progress and work of the new scrutiny function.

Many of the changes being implemented were identified through North West Employer's (NWE) review of scrutiny and a number relate to the importance of the culture of the authority in promoting effective scrutiny, something which has been strongly supported by the new Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities issued by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government in May 2019. The guidance highlights that:

- The prevailing organisational culture, behaviours and attitudes of an authority will largely determine whether its scrutiny function succeeds or fails.
- Creating a strong organisational culture supports scrutiny work that can add real value by, for example, improving policy making and the efficient delivery of public services. In contrast, low levels of support for and engagement with the scrutiny function often lead to poor quality and ill-focused work that serves to reinforce the perception that it is of little worth or relevance.

I am pleased to say that the new scrutiny guidance strongly supports what we are aiming to achieve with our scrutiny function at Blackpool and gives further weight to the recommendations of the review carried out by NWE. The culture of the organisation is key in making improvements to the way we carry out scrutiny.

Workplanning

A key function of the Scrutiny Leadership Board is to have an overview of the workplans of each scrutiny committee ensuring that they are widely consulted upon and that there is co-ordination across the committees. The workplanning process at Blackpool put in place for 2019/ 2020 is more robust than ever, with each committee holding a workshop to ensure all committee members have an opportunity to contribute and feed in the views of residents. Contribution has also been sought from Executive Members, Senior Officers and external partners into, not only the agenda item to be received, but also the timescale for consideration and the type of review to be carried out. The Leadership Board has also engaged with the Leader and Deputy Leaders in order to ascertain their vision and key priorities for the upcoming

twelve months and has provided feedback to each committee on its workplan through the Chairs and Vice Chairs of each committee, all of whom sit on the Leadership Board.

The results are focused and highly prioritised workplans which reflect the key priorities of the council, the concerns of residents and the important policies being reviewed or developed over the next year. It has been acknowledged that scrutiny functions cannot consider everything and the new statutory guidance highlights this further, stating that 'prioritisation is necessary, which means there might be things that, despite being important, scrutiny will not be able to look at.' It is furthermore an intention of the scrutiny function to move away from overview reports that cover a wide range of issues to key single topic items that allow for value to be added by the scrutiny function.

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 will be reviewing them regularly and it is imperative that the Executive, Senior Officers and partners have an ongoing opportunity to feed in suggestions and involve scrutiny at the right time in the development and review of policy.

Relationship between Scrutiny and the Executive

The first informal meeting of the Scrutiny Leadership Board was held on 11 July 2019, during which we made the first steps in developing the relationship between the Executive. We invited the Leader and Deputy Leaders to the meeting in order to discuss their vision and priorities for the next twelve months. The need to ensure early and regular engagement between the executive and scrutiny is also highlighted in the new scrutiny guidance. I have therefore had an initial discussion with the Leader and am encouraging the Chairs and Vice Chairs of Scrutiny to set up regular one to ones with relevant Executive Members in order to promote engagement and improved relationships. It is imperative that the Executive values the input that scrutiny can have and plays its part in developing the relationship and involving scrutiny at the right stage of the decision making process. The Scrutiny Leadership Board will also engage directly with the Executive as appropriate through its informal meeting.

To this end, we are in the process of revising the Protocol on Overview and Scrutiny Committee/Cabinet Member Relations and will be forwarding a new and improved version of the protocol to Council for consideration in due course. This is the first of many scrutiny policies procedures that the Leadership Board will be reviewing over the next year.

Training and Development

Another key role of the Leadership Board is to lead on the training and development needs for scrutiny members. I am pleased to say that the introduction sessions carried out for new and existing members on scrutiny have been very well attended. Unfortunately the specialised training for scrutiny chairs, vice chairs and the Executive provided by the Centre for Public Scrutiny was very poorly attended and I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the

importance of attending scrutiny training for both the scrutiny members and Executive. A key recommendation in the NWE review highlighted the importance of cabinet member attendance at scrutiny training to ensure that their knowledge of scrutiny and the Executive's role in scrutiny continues to be established and improved.

Scrutiny Review Work

It has been long recognised that scrutiny can often add the most value from a 'deep dive' review into a specific topic area rather than a report on a committee agenda. It is a key priority this year to correctly identify topics for scrutiny outside of committee meetings, whilst also ensuring that the democratic accountability of the scrutiny process is upheld. In order to ensure effective scrutiny of the Community Safety Partnership the Tourism, Economy and Communities Committee will be holding an in depth review into the performance of the partnership and priorities for the next year. This is a statutory duty for the committee and a full account of the review meeting will be provided to the Committee detailing the considerations and findings. Undertaking work in this way not only allows for more time to be spent analysing information but also ensures that the committee meetings can be focussed and used more effectively for strategic items. Other in depth reviews that have been identified and that will take place over the coming months include Housing Strategy and Homelessness, Healthy Weight and Channel Shift.

Conclusion

We are at the start of a very long process to improve scrutiny at Blackpool. As mentioned, the importance of culture at the authority cannot be underestimated and we need to move away from any fear of scrutiny to one of active engagement whereby the positive contribution that can be made by scrutiny is understood and valued. The review carried out by NWE has stood us in good stead for the publication of the new statutory guidance and there are many key themes that run through both documents that we are ahead of the game in implementing, such as this first report to Council. We have ambitions to improve the profile and understanding of scrutiny both internally and externally and are taking steps to ensure that the value added by scrutiny can be evidenced and demonstrated.

I look forward to presenting the Scrutiny Annual Report to you in June 2020.