

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
9 JUNE 2006

Scrutiny and the Local Strategic Partnership (including Streetscene)

Purpose

1. To report on an academic piece of work partly commissioned by the Management Committee and in particular the proposal to establish a task group to gain awareness, review progress to date and support the future development of one of the projects being championed by the Wiltshire Strategic Board (WiSB).

Background

2. Following the County Council elections last May a number of members made preliminary approaches to Overview and Scrutiny about weeds in kerbs and other street management matters. A survey of members at the time indicated that from "doorstep" discussions with the electorate some concern was expressed about the physical appearance of the local environment, particularly in the larger towns. The results of community planning activities also confirmed that this was a priority issue for Wiltshire residents.
3. WiSB was formed as the County's Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and published a community strategy entitled "Creating a County Fit for our Children 2004-2014". All members were sent a copy of the Strategy on election. As well as setting out broad policy themes it identified four issues to be championed by the Board, one of which was improving the street scene – the quality of our streets and street life. The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee decided to consider the local instances of concern being raised by members under a review of the implementation of aspects of the strategic Streetscene project (designed to respond to many of the those issues). The timing of such a review was dependent on progress by the Board and on scrutiny officer and member capacity bearing in mind other priorities within the Management Committee's work programme.
4. Democratic Services had made a bid for one of the management graduate trainees last year and, although not successful, an opportunity arose for Ed Stevens during the latter stages of his placement with the Council to do a dissertation on a scrutiny theme. In discussions with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman it was considered some useful work could be done around the possible role and relationship between the Overview and Scrutiny function and the LSP, including how the Management Committee might usefully engage with the Streetscene Project.

Outcome

5. Ed has now completed his dissertation for submission to Warwick University which can be viewed in full on the Council's website under the papers for this meeting. His work has given rise to the proposals in this paper and furthers the initial intentions of the Management Committee. The background research and evidence gathered, including a survey of all non-executive members, concluded that:

- (1) One of the Government's core objectives for the future development of LSPs centre upon effective, transparent and accountable governance and scrutiny arrangements for LSPs that enable partners to hold each other to account and local people to hold the partnership to account. Vital if the Wiltshire LSP is to move in the direction of a commissioning (rather than advisory) role as envisaged by Government.
 - (2) By utilising scrutiny's role of engaging, consulting and feeding back to non-executive councillors and the public, not only could the perceived democratic deficit within the LSP as highlighted in the survey be reduced but impetus added to drive forward policy initiatives and deliver objectives.
 - (3) An acceptance and understanding between WiSB and the Management Committee would help extend external scrutiny (an area not fully developed yet), enhance the governance arrangements of the LSP and support the effective delivery of the community strategy at a local level.
6. Some of the recommendations in the report are far-reaching and would require discussions at the Board level and within partner organisations, including both executive and non-executive arms of the participating local authorities. Discussion would need to include structure, process and timing – the dissertation covers this in much more detail. However some good early work could be done in respect of scrutinising aspects of the Streetscene project – an issue previously identified by the Management Committee. (The Project's original aims, targets and progress are attached as an appendix). This would allow "the water to be tested" and develop relationships and understanding before possibly broadening out in to other areas.
 7. The Performance Scrutiny Task Group is already monitoring performance against LPSA2 targets and has asked for information about how the Local Area Agreement (LAA) will be performance managed.

Resource Implications

8. If the existing Performance Task Group is utilised and ad hoc task groups established for one-off activities when capacity allows, then the additional work should be able to be contained within existing resources. Opportunities for joint scrutiny may mean that capacity can be increased and costs shared.

Proposals

9. I have spoken to the Chairman and Vice- Chairman of the Management Committee and taken their lead in making the following recommendations:
 - (1) To recognise the potential role for overview and scrutiny in supporting the delivery of the community strategic by WiSB.
 - (2) To thank Ed Stevens, Management Graduate Trainee, for the work he has done as part of his dissertation for Warwick University.
 - (3) To forward his work and this report to the WiSB for comment on the conclusions and recommendations as part of its broader debate on future governance arrangements (it may also wish to invite comment from individual partner organisations).

- (4) In the first instance, to:
- (i) be aware that the Performance Scrutiny Task Group has already begun to consider how it might extend its current work in respect of monitoring performance against LPSA2 targets to include the LAA blocks particularly at the point when a performance management framework is developed; and
 - (ii) establish a scrutiny task group (its membership to be appointed at the meeting) to review the street management element of the Streetscene Project – its aims, progress and effectiveness, and to support future delivery as appropriate. To consult the existing project board in scoping the review including opportunities for joint scrutiny with relevant partners and to receive feedback in 3 months of its first meeting.
- (5) To endorse that the Chairman, Vice Chairman and Scrutiny Manager (or their nominees) hold discussions with WiSB representatives and other interested parties at the appropriate time in order to explore the potential benefits and practicalities of closer association including joint scrutiny, subject to periodic update.

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The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this report:
None