

DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL

Presentation of findings

20th February 2003

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Why review democratic renewal arrangements?

- To ascertain progress achieved to date
- To ensure that current arrangements are operating properly
- To highlight any areas that require further attention
- To reassure the public that decision making structures are facilitating a high standard of decision making

Our objectives

Our objectives were to:

- Assess progress achieved since formally adopting the new political management arrangements
- Assess partnership working arrangements
- Highlight any areas to be strengthened

What we did

- Interviewed key officers and the Leader
- Observed three meetings
- Reviewed key documents including Constitution
- Interviewed two partners selected at random

*NB. Although we have carried out this initial assessment, responsibility lies with the Council to ensure that current arrangements meet legislation and ODPM guidance requirements.

Headline messages

- New political management arrangements working well but some areas require strengthening
- Partnership working is operating well but communication with the public and partners could improve
- Progress has been achieved against last year's findings such as:
 - Standards committee established with an independent chair and code of conduct implemented
 - Training has been provided for both Members and officers
 - The Constitution has been made more specific

Detailed findings (1)

GENERAL

- Some Members feel marginalised by the new political management arrangements therefore potential has not been realised
- Communication and access to information could be improved on two levels – between elected Members and officers and between elected Members
- There is heavy reliance placed on a section of Members in terms of workload and decision making which should be addressed
- There is an opportunity to review current political management arrangements before the election, tapping into the experience of current elected Members

Detailed findings (2)

DECISION MAKING AND EXECUTIVE

- Success story – revised structure for decision making in planning
- Full council meetings need to be made more effective – more constructive debate required and better use of public question time

Detailed findings (3)

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY (1)

- The overview and scrutiny role is still evolving but needs to be more challenging and to make more of an impact
- Need to foster better understanding of the role, in particular:
 - Better definition of the overview and scrutiny role required
 - Challenge needs to be stronger
 - Call ins should be better understood
 - Improved approach to policy development is required
 - Scope to be more proactive and adopt a critical friend role

Detailed findings (4)

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY (2)

- Scope exists to work with existing Members involved in overview and scrutiny to review progress and identify areas that have gone well and those that haven't
- Training focusing on overview and scrutiny for Members and officers will lead to better understanding and better performance
- External scrutiny could be stronger in two ways:
 - Overview and scrutiny can involve external participation from public/partners to assist in scrutiny of council
 - Overview and scrutiny have scope to carry out scrutiny of external organisations' performance eg LSP, Police, Fire, Health etc..

Detailed findings (5)

PARTNERSHIPS

- What we focused on?
 - LSP and community planning arrangements
 - Progress achieved to date

- What we did?
 - Interviewed two partners selected at random
 - Interviewed officer responsible for LSP and community planning
 - Looked at work in progress and plans for the LSP and community planning
- What we found?
 - Innovative approach to mapping out community planning but needs to be communicated to both public and staff
 - Need to ensure that the Council is outward focused and maintains good links with partner organisations

Recommendations (1)

- Review current political management arrangements to identify areas that need strengthening. Particular attention should be given to:
 - Delegations to officers
 - Single officer decision making
- Ascertain views and concerns of existing elected Members, prior to May 2003 elections, in any review of current political management arrangements via debate or survey
- Improve communication and information sharing between officers and Members and between Members by exploring use of streamlined electronic bulletin board and/or development of regular staff and Member newsletter

Recommendations (2)

- Review performance of council meetings and amend rules and format accordingly to encourage more constructive debate and to ensure that best use is made of question time for the public
- Adopt a proactive approach in holding a Member/officer workshop to agree solutions to improve the overview and scrutiny role. Particular attention should be paid to the policy development role
- Develop a programme of training for Members and officers to foster better understanding of the role and expectations of overview and scrutiny
- Clearly communicate progress achieved in community planning and partnerships to staff, public, partners and other stakeholders

Way forward

- Agree a response to action plan
- Work with officers to prioritise areas for improvement
- Monitor implementation