



MEMBER DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION:

Report of: Corporate Director of Transformation & Resources

Relevant Portfolio Holder: Councillor I Moran

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SUBJECT: SCRUTINY REVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE - FEEDBACK FROM LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Wards affected: Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To consider responses from Local Authorities in relation the Scrutiny Review Questionnaire, to Member Development Commission, as approved at the previous meeting 6 July 2021 and consider any proposed changes to the Scrutiny structures at West Lancs.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That the responses from Local Authorities to the Scrutiny Review Questionnaire be noted.

2.2 That it be noted of the twenty-eight Authorities contacted, sixteen Authorities responded with completed questionnaires.

2.3 That following consideration of responses to the Scrutiny Review Questionnaire, Member Development Commission determine and agree the next steps to be taken, in relation to West Lancashire Borough Councils Scrutiny Review and consider any additional staff resource required.

2.4 That if appropriate, recommendations be considered by Executive Overview & Scrutiny Committee, Corporate & Environmental Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Council, as appropriate, with a proposed implementation date of May 2022.

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Following consideration by Council at the meeting held on 14 April 2020, it was resolved that the terms of reference of the Member Development Commission be extended to review the number and remit of Overview & Scrutiny Committees at West Lancashire, including the Members Update procedure rules, by comparing Overview & Scrutiny structures of other similar Local Authorities, and submit recommendations to Executive Overview & Scrutiny Committee, Corporate & Environmental Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Council, if appropriate, which should include any additional staff resource required, with an implementation date of May 2022.
- 3.2 In relation to this, a draft questionnaire was considered at Member Development Commission (MDC) on 6 July 2021. MDC approved the questionnaire to be sent to other Local Authorities, to seek information regarding their Scrutiny arrangements. Following feedback from MDC Members, it was agreed that the questionnaire be sent to Local Authorities, as listed as 'similar' Authorities by CIPFA, as well as other Lancashire and Cumbria Authorities.
- 3.3 Twenty-eight Councils were contacted to seek the appropriate email addresses, for requests to be sent to, and the questionnaire was sent to each, allowing several weeks for completion and return of forms.

4.0 FEEDBACK FROM RESPONSES

- 4.1 Out of the twenty-eight Authorities contacted, sixteen responded with completed forms.
- Nine Authorities work to an Executive/Cabinet Model
 - Seven Authorities work to a Committee Model
- 4.2 Of the Nine Councils working to the Executive/Cabinet Model (see table below):
- eight have one Scrutiny Committee, one Council has two Scrutiny Committees.
 - Of the eight Councils with one Scrutiny Committee, three also have one or two sub committees, and six have task and finish groups.
 - The Council with two Scrutiny Committees does not have any sub committees but does have Task and Finish Groups, to conduct reviews.
- 4.3 Details of the current arrangement for West Lancs are included at the bottom of the table for comparison.

Executive/Cabinet Model						
Council	Scrutiny Committee	Meetings	Sub Cttee / Work Group	Meeting	Task & Finish Group	Meet
Amber Valley	1	6 per year	No	-	No	-
Bassetlaw	(2) 1 1	Monthly 6 wkly	No	-	Yes	Every 3 wks in 3-6mth

						period
Burnley	1	12 wk cycle	2	Ad hoc	Yes	Ad Hoc
Chorley	1	4 per year	1	5 per year	Yes	3wkly
Dover	1	11 per year	No	-	No	-
Lichfield	1	Bi Monthly	No	-	Yes	Adhoc monthly or wkly
Preston	1	8 per year	No	-	Yes	Ad Hoc
South Ribble	1	7 per year	1	4 per year	Yes	
Wyre	1	8 per year	No	-	Yes	Ad Hoc
West Lancs	(2) 1 1	5 per year 4 per year	1	2	No	-

4.3 Of the seven Authorities working to a Committee Model (see table below):

- Three Councils have one Scrutiny Committee, one having two working groups, and one having one.
- Once council has three Scrutiny Committees, with no other sub committees, working groups or task & Finish Groups.
- One Council has two Scrutiny Committee's with working groups a required.
- Two Council work without Scrutiny specific Committees, relying on the Committee system to provide scrutiny within its committee format.
- Four of the seven Authorities have Task and Finish Groups.

Committee System						
Council	Scrutiny Committee	Meetings	Sub Cttee / Work Group	Meeting	Task & Finish Group	Meet
Barrow	1	6 wk cycle	Yes WG	As required	No	-
Carlisle	3	8 per year each	No	-	Yes Ad Hoc	2-3 per year
Copeland	1	monthly formal & monthly informal	Budget Monitoring WG Budget Development Analysis WG	Monthly Multiple p/m on build up to setting budget	Yes	Average 6 mtgs in 3 month deadline
Fylde	No	-	No	-	No	-
Ribble Valley	No rely on committee	-	Yes WG	Ad hoc	Yes -not Scrutiny	-

	system					
Rossendale	1	8 per year	No	-	Yes	3
Sedgemoor	(2) 1 1	8 wk cycle 8 wk cycle	1	Topic dependant	No	-

4.5 Of all the responses received it is a pretty even split which model Authorities work two.

5.0 TASK & FINISH GROUPS

5.1 Each authority who has Task and Finish Groups, similar arrangements are in place. Members volunteer to be a member of the group, and selection is made on the members particular interest and expertise in the area being scrutinised.

5.2. Meetings are ad hoc dependent on the nature of the topic, eg if there is a set deadline for a review to take place and conclude in order to make a decision, the group will meet several times within a short timeframe.

5.3 Initial meetings set out the Remit, membership, timeframe, and reporting of recommendations by the group, be it to Committee or Council or Cabinet.

6.0 FEEDBACK ON WHAT HAS WORKED WELL AND BEST PRACTICE

6.1 Preston: What has worked well with current arrangements:

- The Priority Setting Workshop has generally captured the interest of Members. We try and engage the person who suggested a topic which has been picked to give the background as to why they want the subject considered – this fits into the aims of the Task and Finish Group under the Scoping Document compiled by the Director and Lead Officer.
- The Sub-groups work well especially if you have some interested Members and it gives the back benchers influence plus they make their arrangements to visit organisations themselves and make their own notes – they usually are set up in threes.

6.2 Preston: Best Practice:

- Preston re-vamped Scrutiny arrangements in 2016 and engaged the help of North West Employers. They were very good at listening to what arrangements were currently in place, what Members expected, and then making proposals and coming up with a solution.
- Ultimately financing and resources has a big impact on topics suggested. It is therefore vital to include the Director at the initial input after the Priority Setting Workshop. Directors can discuss the proposed topics at their Management Team meetings which would identify if there were any concerns right at the beginning. A Director present at the Priority Setting Workshop is also helpful as they are aware as to what projects and commitments are in the pipeline and can direct Members accordingly.

- 6.3 Wyre: What has worked well with current arrangements:
- Current arrangements in place for Overview and Scrutiny Committee works in a positive way. Scrutiny enjoys significant support from Senior Officers and Democratic Services, the Cabinet recognise the benefits of scrutiny in terms of good governance and democratic accountability, and Members of scrutiny want to ensure improved outcomes for the council and the communities it serves.
 - Having a single Overview & Scrutiny Committee structure seems to work well and the task group work is very effective.
- 6.4 Wyre: Best Practice:
Making sure the committee is member led. Making sure that it is the Cabinet who are the focus of scrutiny, not officers. Having a shared common goal. Work programming prioritization, and Maintaining a strategic rather than operational focus.
- 6.5 Carlisle has three Scrutiny Committees- Business and Transformation, Economic Growth, Health and Wellbeing. They use Use Task and Finish groups on a variable/ ad-hoc basis, based upon business need determined by one of the scrutiny panels, on average 2-3 per year.
- 6.6 Carlisle's three Panel system was not well reviewed in their recent LGA Peer review, and there is an acknowledgement that our scrutiny arrangements could be better. This was an issue previously considered by the Authority in some depth, and is something that prior to the July announcement on Local Government Re-organisation (LGR) in Cumbria, was on their agenda for further action.
- 6.7 Carlisle: What has worked well with current arrangements:
- The Chairs work well together, coordinating their activities through an informal Scrutiny Chairs Group that meets on a quarterly basis.
 - Task and Finish groups have also proved to be very constructive.
 - The Panels generally manage to work well within their remits, and seem to have good clarity about their roles. This helps with work-planning; although there are times when our work-planning could be more robust and this would potentially help the Panels when they come to make recommendations.
- 6.8 Copeland: Best Practise: The implementation of informal meetings which have allowed us to communicate more effectively and ensure that Overview and Scrutiny Committee are able to understand the topics being brought to them in a less public forum, so that when the formal meetings do take place, the discussion can be more in depth and there can be a debate around possible

improvements rather than being the meeting becoming an educational session. No decisions are made at the informal meetings.

- 6.9 Rossendale have an Overview and Scrutiny Committee but not Sub Committees or Working groups. They do have Task & Finish Groups, which hold a scoping meeting, a meeting held on one day, if possible, to complete scrutiny, and a meeting to confirm findings and recommendations.
- 6.10 Rossendale: What has worked well with current arrangements: We have found Scrutiny to be more focused on what is to be achieved, sticking to short timescales, and invited guests more likely to attend. Having one committee looking at everything has made it easier to schedule items going to Overview & Scrutiny, and there is only one work programme.
- 6.11 Ribble Valley is a fourth option authority that has a committee system. They don't have a separate scrutiny committee as all their committees have 'backbenchers' on them and are therefore scrutinised at that point. The Chairs do not have executive powers to make any decisions without them going through committee.
- 6.12 Fylde have 4 programme committees that cover the main areas eg Environment, Health & Housing; Tourism and Leisure; Finance and Democracy and Operational Management. Each committee can set up a working group as and when it feels there is need. These are usually done to research and explore options on a given area and then recommendations are made by the full committee.
- 6.13 Fylde also have the facility of Referral and Recovery. If an item is set to go to a particular committee but a set number of members feel it is in the interest of the borough for the decision to be made at full council then the item can be "referred" to go straight to full council. The recovery process is when a decision has been made at a committee, then within a set timeframe it can be recovered and set to go to full council. Previously known as the "call in" process, before changing to a committee system, but instead of a going to a scrutiny committee it goes to full council.
- 6.14 However Fylde are expecting a major overhaul, in time for the next borough - election in 2023, when seeing a reduction of the number of councillors from 51 to 37 following a Boundary Commission Review. They are therefore not sure what model will be in place, but one option is to consider replacing the programme committees with 2 scrutiny committees.
- 6.15 Rossendale have one committee now, but the structure looked very different in the past. Members decided to streamline the process and have just one committee. This was tied in with the need to make savings so payment was only being made to one Chairperson.

7.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no significant sustainability impacts associated with this report and, in particular, no significant impact on crime and disorder.

8.0 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no significant financial or resource implications arising from this report. However dependent on how members wish to proceed there could be financial implications to resource future Scrutiny structures.

9.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

9.1 This item is for information only and makes no recommendations. It therefore does not require a formal risk assessment and no changes have been made to risk registers.

10.0 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no health and wellbeing implications arising from this report.

Background Documents

*There are no background documents (as defined in Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) to this Report.

Equality Impact Assessment

The decision does not have any direct impact on members of the public, employees, elected members and / or stakeholders. Therefore no Equality Impact Assessment is required.

Appendices

1. Overview & Scrutiny Questionnaire