

# **POLICY & PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY PANEL**

**18 June 2020**

## **2020/21 SCRUTINY ACTION PLAN**

### **Report of the Chair**

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#### **Recommendation(s)**

**It is recommended that the Panel agree the priorities and actions included in this report and make recommendations for additions or changes as appropriate.**

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#### **Summary**

1. During 2019/20, the Panel made a concerted effort to update its working practices, for example by engaging earlier in the policy-making process, making greater use of performance data, and experimenting with greater use of “Task & Finish” groups to scrutinise key topics
2. Members of the Policy & Performance Scrutiny Panel met on ??? to reflect on progress in 2019/20 and to identify priorities for the year ahead
3. A number of priorities for the Panel’s ways of working, and topics for scrutiny, have been identified
4. The recommendations in this report will inform the priorities and actions for the Chair, Vice Chair and staff for the coming municipal year

#### **Statutory Powers**

Section 2 Local Government Act 2000

#### **Strategic Implications**

1. Effective scrutiny that holds the executive to account, supports the development of corporate performance monitoring, and adds value to the Council’s policy-making process will make a valuable contribution to all of the Council’s strategic priorities.

#### **Introduction**

2. The Policy & Performance Scrutiny Panel is the Council’s appointed Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Panel, for the purposes described in the Local Government Act 2000.

3. The role of Scrutiny in Local Government is described in Ministry of Housing Community and Local Government's statutory guidance (MHCLG, 2019). The committee must have regard to the statutory guidance when planning and undertaking its responsibilities and welcomes its responsibilities as set out. The guidance says that Overview and Scrutiny committees should:
  - (a) Provide constructive 'critical friend' challenge;
  - (b) Amplify the voices and concerns of the public;
  - (c) Be led by independent people who take responsibility for their role; and
  - (d) Drive improvement in public services.
  
4. Overview and Scrutiny is recognised to be a challenging task, and during the 2019/20 municipal year, partly in light of the new guidance issued in May 2019, the Panel has made a deliberate effort to modernise and improve its practices. Some of the actions have included:
  - (a) Training for all members of the Panel, delivered by the Centre for Public Scrutiny, which was well attended.
  - (b) Training for the Chair, in the form of a day- long course, also delivered by the Centre for Public Scrutiny.
  - (c) Establishment of a "Scrutiny of Scrutiny" group to reflect on the Panel's working practices and consider the implications of the revised statutory guidance.
  - (d) Engagement with officers in the Council's Performance and Governance function, to inform and embed the use of performance data in the Panel's work.
  - (e) Holding a workshop in March, which was well attended by members, to reflect on the Panel's ways of working, successes and failures, and to identify topics for the 20/21 work programme.
  
5. This report primarily draws on the discussions that took place at the March workshop and sets out the strategic direction for the Panel in 2020/21.

### **Reflections on past performance**

6. Members of the Panel reflected on performance in 2019/20, and noted the following positive aspects:
  - (a) A willingness and effort to change and improve how Overview & Scrutiny is conducted, among members and staff.
  - (b) Good relations with Cabinet, and positive experience of working on portfolio-based scrutiny in formal sessions and informal task and finish groups.

- (c) Greater use of Task and Finish groups has allowed for more detailed pro-active scrutiny of particular areas.
  - (d) An increase in the number and substance of recommendations made to Cabinet in 19/20, over previous years.
  - (e) Incorporation of key performance monitoring data into the Panel's work, and positive improvements in how data is presented to the Panel.
  - (f) The Corporate Action Plan, which includes priority actions for each Cabinet portfolio, has been a useful tool for supporting and challenging portfolio holders.
7. Members of the Panel also identified some areas where they'd like to see improvement:
- (a) Reliance on verbal reports is too high and makes it hard to prepare for effective scrutiny.
  - (b) Performance data collection and presentation – while much improved – is a largely manual and labour-intensive process, which limits the Panel's ability to request alternative presentations or undertake exploratory “deep dive” analysis.
  - (c) Some questions raised in meetings are not always followed up in a timely way.
  - (d) Late reports make preparation for scrutiny meetings difficult.
  - (e) Sessions of the Panel do not always leave adequate time for feedback and recommendations to be incorporated prior to Cabinet.
  - (f) The Panel does not always engage early enough in the policy-making process to add substantial value.

### **Priorities and Actions for 2020/21**

8. In this municipal year, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Panel, with support from members, will focus on the following priorities:
- (a) Ensuring that, wherever possible, reports are in a written format and received on time.
  - (b) Working to secure meetings that provide adequate time, of at least one clear week where possible between pre-decision scrutiny by the Panel and the relevant meeting of Cabinet.
  - (c) Building upon the Panel's success in using Task and Finish groups for proactive scrutiny of Cabinet portfolio areas and specific topics, by developing a protocol and schedule for proactive scrutiny of portfolio holders to happen in Task & Finish groups. Recommendations from Task and Finish groups are to be suggested and ratified by plenary

meetings of the Panel, and areas of specific concern to be added to the Panel's work programme.

- (d) Working with staff and Cabinet colleagues to ensure that, where possible, recommendations made by the Panel are accounted for in the reports that are presented to Cabinet.
  - (e) Continuing to place performance data at the heart of the Panel's work programme; use performance data to question, challenge and support the executive; and support the continued development and refinement of the Council's performance monitoring processes.
  - (f) Ensuring that answers to questions raised in meetings are pro-actively sought and circulated in a timely manner.
9. Training needs for councillors newly appointed to the Panel have not been included in list of priorities, as no new appointments are planned for 20/21. However, the Chair should be mindful that any new appointments to the Panel should be offered training and support in their role.

### **Work Programme Topics for 2020/21**

10. Panel members at the March workshop discussed potential work programme items for the year.
11. The impact of COVID-19 on the Council, and the likelihood of ongoing disruption for the foreseeable future, has interrupted the Council's usual policy making and service delivery. Responding and recovering from the pandemic will likely form an important cross-cutting concern for scrutiny in the current year, and the Panel will need to consider the value of scrutinising some topics outside of "business as usual".
12. Topics suggested for the year are listed below. Topics with particular relevance to the COVID-19 response and Recovery are indicated by a \*
- (a) Public transport, to include an invitation to public transport providers that operate within the Borough;
  - (b) Supporting our Parish Councils \*;
  - (c) Economic Development and Local High Streets \*;
  - (d) Encouraging Sustainable Prosperity;
  - (e) Future Population Growth and Service Delivery;
  - (f) Housing Policy (for a which a Task & Finish group was scoped at the last meeting);
  - (g) Waste & Recycling
13. The Panel should engage with the Council's proposed constitutional review.

14. Given the importance of the Council's commitment to tackling the Climate and Environmental Emergency, the Panel will establish a protocol to receive regular updates on, and review of, progress and changes to the Council's Climate Change and Environmental Emergency action plan.
15. To support aspirations around policy development, the Panel will seek to establish and maintain a list of policies due for review, and to engage with relevant officers early in the process.
16. The Panel will continue to review, challenge and support the actions that are included in the annual Corporate Action Plan.

### **Financial Implications**

17. There are no direct financial implications from this report, which is not seeking a decision.

### **Risk Assessment**

18. No risk assessment has been carried out as the report is not seeking a decision.

### **Equality and Diversity Implications**

19. The Equality Act is not relevant to the decision in this report because it has been assessed against the criteria and an Equality Impact Assessment is not necessary because the report is not seeking a decision.

### **Climate Change and Environmental Implications**

20. There are no direct impacts on greenhouse gas emissions or ecology from the actions included in this report. However, effective scrutiny and performance monitoring is an essential part of the council's Climate and Environment Emergency plans. The inclusion of regular scrutiny of the Climate and Environmental Action Plan by the Policy and Performance Scrutiny Panel is expected to enhance the Council's efforts.

### **Conclusion**

21. The Panel has made significant progress in reviewing its working practices in light of the revised statutory guidance, and the Council's developing performance management processes.
22. The priorities identified in this report will allow the Panel to continue questioning, challenging and supporting the executive, and adding value to the Council's policy-making process.

CLLR DR RICHARD GOMER  
CHAIR, POLICY & PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY PANEL

Date: 18 June 2020

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Appendices Attached: None

### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - SECTION 100D**

The following is a list of documents which disclose facts or matters on which this report or an important part of it is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. This list does not include any published works or documents which would disclose exempt or confidential information.

\* MHCLG, 2019, "*Overview and scrutiny: statutory guidance for councils and combined authorities*," URL: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/overview-and-scrutiny-statutory-guidance-for-councils-and-combined-authorities>