

Minutes of the meeting of Scrutiny Management Board held at Herefordshire Council Offices, Plough Lane, Hereford, HR4 0LE on Thursday 16 June 2022 at 2.00 pm

Present: Councillor Christy Bolderson (chairperson)
Councillor Yolande Watson (vice-chairperson)

Councillors: Toni Fagan, Phillip Howells, Graham Jones,
Councillor Felicity Norman, Louis Stark and David Summers

In attendance: Councillors B Baugh (Secretary), J Coleman (Secretary), Jonathan Lester, Elissa Swinglehurst and William Wilding

Officers: John Coleman – Democratic Services Manager, Ben Baugh – Democratic Services Officer, Michael Carr – Interim Statutory Scrutiny Officer, Alice McAlpine – Senior Solicitor

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Graham Andrews, with apologies also from Councillors Lester, Swinglehurst and Wilding who were in attendance virtually online.

2. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

None.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None received.

4. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

None received.

5. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

None received.

6. ROLE OF THE SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD

The Chairperson explained that the purpose of this item was to consider the draft Statement of Intent of the Scrutiny Management Board, at Appendix A to the officer report circulated. Intention of the document was to set out the overall objectives for what the Scrutiny Management Board wished to achieve. It was anticipated that the other scrutiny committees would also set out their own strategic objectives in conjunction with this. This would help to provide some overall criteria to assess the performance of the scrutiny committees at the end of the year as part of an annual effectiveness review of the scrutiny function.

The Chairperson then invited the Interim Statutory Scrutiny Officer to present the report. He explained that the report set out the role and approach of the Scrutiny Management Board for the year ahead, how the committee's intended to operate and coordinate the scrutiny

activities of the Council through the Board, including the Annual Scrutiny Work Programme 2022-2023, dealing with any cross cutting issues, coordinating the scrutiny process and relationships with the Executive and other key stakeholders, the further development and improvement of the Scrutiny function and scrutiny of corporate cross cutting issues, such as the Council Budget, corporate performance, strategic management and partnerships.

Members of the Board were invited to discuss and to comment on the draft Statement of Intent and to offer their considerations, amendments or additional actions for the interim Statutory Scrutiny Officer to update the statement.

It was proposed that Key Role 1, Objective c; “to consider scrutiny member training and development requirement” should be amended to replace the word “consider” with “oversee” so that it is more definitive.

The extent to which the Scrutiny Management Board would direct the work programme of the other scrutiny committees was raised and Key Role 2, Objective b) “where a matter falls within the remit of one or more committees, decide which committee will consider it...”. The Chairperson said that it was her expectation that each scrutiny committee would develop its own work plan and that these would then be brought together into a combined Work Programme, as set out at Role 2 Objective a) “agree the Annual Scrutiny Work Programme, that being the combined work programmes of the scrutiny committees”. It was commented that this role was to provide effective oversight of the scrutiny committee’s work.

It was proposed that the title of the Statement of Intent should be changed to “Memorandum of Understanding”. The Senior Solicitor advised that the terminology “Memorandum of Understanding” may carry some unintended legal connotations, which may imply an arrangement with third party organisations, which was not the case here. It was proposed that the title be changed to “Committee Objectives”.

It was queried if there may be some way of normalising virtual attendance at scrutiny committees to recognise attendance and voting of members attending virtually. The Senior Solicitor advised that the legislation did not allow for members to attend meetings and vote and that there was therefore no scope for local arrangements to allow for this.

The Statutory Scrutiny Officer commented that the Annual Scrutiny Work Programme was intended to foster a more collaborative and consistent approach, provide greater transparency and to assist in foreword planning items for the scrutiny committees. He suggested that there was a distinction between the “Scrutiny Work Plans” that were agreed by the scrutiny committees and the Annual Scrutiny Work Programme”, which was agreed by the Scrutiny Management Board, made up of the agreed Work Plans of the scrutiny committees. He suggested that the terminology at Key Role 2 a) be amended to reflect this by changing the word “programmes” to “Work Plans”.

The question of resources to support scrutiny was raised, in particular the officer resources to support the scrutiny committees. It was suggested that the scrutiny function needed its own dedicated scrutiny officers and to consider the resources required to deliver the scrutiny work effectively. It was proposed that Key Role 1 a) be amended to include reference to resources after “timing”.

It was asked how Call In of Executive Decisions and other requests for consideration of issues by scrutiny committee would fit within the arrangements for work planning. The Statutory Scrutiny Officer clarified that the provision for Call In would still require the matter to be referred to the appropriate scrutiny committee, so long as the grounds were valid as set out in the Council Constitution, so the proposed scrutiny work planning arrangements would not affect this.

It was suggested that officer knowledge and skills was also important to effective support to scrutiny committees.

The Democratic Services Manager commented that there was a commitment to provide sufficient resources to support the scrutiny function and that in addition to the appointment of an Interim Statutory Scrutiny Officer there was to be dedicated Democratic Scrutiny Officer support staff for scrutiny committees.

Councillor Summers expressed the view that there should be something in the committee's objectives to say that officers need to be working with the Statutory Scrutiny Officer. The Senior Solicitor advised, however that this may be inappropriate for inclusion within the committee's objectives.

At the conclusion of the debate it was thereafter moved and

RESOLVED:

That the Statement of Intent of the Scrutiny Management Board at Appendix A to the report be agreed subject to the following amendments:

- i). The amendment of Key Role 1 a) to include the word "resources" after "timing",**
- ii). The amendment of Key Role 1 c) to replace the word "consider" with "oversee",**
- iii). The amendment of Key Role 2 a) to replace the words "work programmes" with "Work Plans".**

The Chairperson then concluded the meeting and thanked all contributors for their participation.

The meeting ended at 2.51 pm

Chairperson