

NOTE OF PRINCIPAL ISSUES RAISED AT INFORMAL MEETING OF MEMBERS OF THE STRATEGIC MONITORING COMMITTEE – 25 APRIL 2008.

Subject	Development Plan Reference or other action
Reporting	
The quality of documentation submitted to Members needed to be substantially improved and the volume reduced. Reports should be in plain English, concise and to the point. Reference should be made to more detailed supporting papers, where appropriate. Save in exceptional circumstances, the reasons for which should be spelt out, papers should not present only one option. Instead, the pros and cons of meaningful options should be set out concisely.	4.2
Exception reporting should be used– helping Scrutiny to focus on the key issues on which Members might comment to Cabinet	4.2
Members should be enabled to drill down to gain a better understanding of the reasons for under-performance, such as whether there were the necessary staff with the right skills and other resources. Members should also be given a clear picture of the expected or actual impact of policies and programmes on the ground.	1.4
Arrangements needed to be strengthened for tracking reports to Scrutiny, work in progress, the recording of questions and issues raised at meetings, and actions being taken in response.	Democratic Services to action.
There was a need to consider and have greater regard to the contribution Town and Parish Councils could make to development of policy and programmes and the monitoring of their impact.	2.1 and Directors to be notified.
Structural Issues	
That the interrelationship and communication between Cabinet and SMC was not working effectively.	Assistant Chief Executive
The functional areas covered by Cabinet portfolios, Directorates and Scrutiny Committees were not aligned. This should be considered.	Assistant Chief Executive
Member Development	
There was a need for a more rigorous and consistent approach to providing training for Members in the scrutiny role. This needed to be allied to raising officer awareness of the role of Scrutiny within the Council.	3.6 & 3.7
More work should be done to develop information on the skills, knowledge and expertise of Councillors to ensure that these were	Democratic Services

Appendix

employed to best advantage and, where necessary, enhanced.	
There was support for work shadowing, with Members accompanying officers on day to day work to gain insight. This would have the corresponding benefit of improving officers' knowledge of Councillors and their role, including their relationship with constituents.	Directors to be notified
It was important to engage all members of the Scrutiny Committees in the work of the Committee and in questioning at meetings rather than leaving a few members to lead all the questioning.	Chairman and Vice-Chairmen of Scrutiny Committees
A member survey regarding scrutiny should be undertaken but not until next year, by when the improved arrangements could fairly be tested. There should also be a survey of officers.	3.3 & 3.4
There was support for a programme of visits to other authorities but the timing of these visits in the life-cycle of the administration was important and should not take place close to an election. Visits in 2008/09 would therefore be appropriate.	3.2
Work Programmes	
The proactive overview role for Scrutiny Committees, allowing them to input before decisions were made and make an effective contribution to policy and programme development, needed to be enhanced. This could only happen if the timetable for Cabinet's consideration of policies and programmes was made known in good time and sufficient time allowed for Scrutiny to consider matters fully.	1.3
Scrutiny of the public service arrangements for better joint working with the PCT should be deferred to allow those responsible for introducing them to do so, with Scrutiny then examining how these were operating in a few months' time.	Added to Work Programme
The need to prepare well for Comprehensive Area Assessment, already encompassed in the Work Programme, was reinforced.	Reports programmed in the Work Programme.