

Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee

**23 July, 2012, at 1.15pm
at Fire Service Headquarters, Vauxhall Road, Birmingham**

Present: Councillor Chambers (Chair);
Councillor Spence (Vice-Chair);
Councillors Delaney, Hogarth, Tranter, Wright and
Young.

Apology: Councillor Eustace.

1/12 Scrutiny Committee Terms of Reference

The Committee noted its terms of reference.

The scrutiny function had been established in response to the Fire National Framework, which stated that authorities must have arrangements in place to ensure that their decisions were open to scrutiny.

The purpose of scrutiny was to inform policy development, hold officers and the Service to account and conduct reviews into specific issues. It would support the Authority in achieving its strategic objectives and ensure that its policy and budgetary framework was followed and developed to reflect changing needs and demands in meeting its statutory obligations.

2/12 Member Training

Members discussed their training needs and the options available to meet them.

Members felt that they had some level of experience from scrutiny work they had been involved with in their own local authorities, however they felt that refresher training would be useful. Options discussed included in-house training, sharing training with another authority or commissioning an external facilitator.

Scrutiny Committee
23 July, 2012

Resolved that officers investigate the options available for training and report back to the meeting on 10 September, 2012.

3/12 Corporate Performance Review Arrangements

The Committee noted the current arrangements in place for monitoring, challenging and reporting on the performance of the corporate strategy – The Plan - and discussed how this could support the scrutiny role.

Corporate performance review meetings were held on a quarterly basis and attended by Directors and Senior Managers within the Service. The meetings provided a cross-functional approach to managing, monitoring and reporting performance at a corporate level. The meetings had also been attended by the former Lead Member for Performance Management. The purpose of the meetings was to monitor and review the following:-

- Corporate Strategy (The Plan) and any supporting strategies & plans.
- Utilisation of resources and capacity.
- Management of cross-cutting issues.
- Delivery of Service performance, ensuring that the strategy remained relevant and effective by making changes as necessary.
- The sharing of working practices, knowledge and experience in support of joined up working.

The output from the meetings would provide the Scrutiny Committee with a quarterly overview of performance against 'The Plan', as well as the opportunity to challenge/question/explore areas of performance further.

Resolved that the Chair be invited to attend quarterly corporate performance review meetings.

4/12 Equality and Diversity Report and Objectives for 2012-2015

Further to Minute No. 10/12 of the Executive Committee (11th June, 2012), the Committee received the Authority's Equality and Diversity Report and Objectives 2012-2015.

The report provided a snapshot of the Service's achievements with regard to current equality and diversity issues and challenges and its objectives for 2012-2015 and was produced on an annual basis.

Scrutiny Committee

23 July, 2012

The report detailed examples of the excellent work the Service had done to promote equality and diversity both within the Service and within the community. This included reporting on a range of performance indicators such as workforce profiles, progression, and implementation of policies and community engagement.

The report also outlined the challenges and the successes with regard to the profile of the workforce. Due to budget restraints that had resulted in a recruitment freeze, the inclusion agenda was a vital concept within the heart of the Service's equality and diversity approach.

A member expressed concern that the Service had not taken a sufficiently active approach to the recruitment and retention of black and minority ethnic employees. The Director - Human Resources responded that equality and diversity remained a priority for the Service despite the recruitment freeze and he outlined the progress that had been made in this area since 2006-2007. It was acknowledged that it would be a challenge for the Authority to ensure that the organisation remained diverse as well as skilled in the face of future budget cuts.

It was noted that the report required updating in respect of reference to lead members. It was also requested that examples of good practice from across the whole of the West Midlands be included in the report.

Resolved that the Equality and Diversity Report and Objectives for 2012-2015 be referred to the Authority on 24 September, 2012 for approval.

5/12 Work Programme 2012-2013

The Committee considered what items it wished to include in a work programme for 2012-2013.

The Committee's terms of reference indicated that it would carry out a minimum of two reviews each year, selected by its members. Recommendations from these reviews would then be submitted to the Executive Committee.

The Committee heard advice on what to consider when selecting issues for scrutiny to ensure that the process was meaningful and produced recommendations that would result in tangible improvements to services and added value.

Scrutiny Committee
23 July, 2012

The Committee noted that its work programme would include receiving quarterly reports on performance monitoring against The Plan. The Committee would also receive the final report on the outcome of the Operational Peer Assessment that had taken place in July, 2012.

Members decided that they would like to look further at the work the Service is doing in order to meet the equality objectives set out within its Equality and Diversity Report and Objectives 2012-2015.

Resolved that the following items be included in the Committee's work programme and that the work programme be submitted to future meetings:-

- quarterly reports on performance monitoring against The Plan;
- report on the outcome of the Operational Peer Assessment;
- review of the work being done to meet the equality objectives set out within its Equality and Diversity Report and Objectives 2012-2015.

6/12 Future Meetings

The Committee noted the dates of its meetings in 2012-2013.

(Meeting ended at 2.07 pm)

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Contact Officer: Stephnie Hancock</i> <i>Democratic Services Unit</i> <i>Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council</i> <i>0121 569 3189</i></p>
