

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

23 JULY 2012

1. WORK PROGRAMME 2012/13

Report of the Clerk and Monitoring Officer.

RECOMMENDED that the Committee consider what items it may wish to include in a work programme for 2012/13.

2 PURPOSE OF REPORT

To invite the Committee to consider what items it may wish to include in a work programme for 2012/13.

3 BACKGROUND

Scrutiny Reviews

- 3.1 The Committee's terms of reference indicate that it will carry out a minimum of two reviews each year, selected by its members. Recommendations from these reviews will be considered by the Executive Committee. The Scrutiny Committee may wish to source external support to assist with certain aspects of these reviews such as benchmarking and evidence collection and financial provision in the region of £10k can be made available from existing resources to buy in such external support. The reviews will form part of the Committee's work programme.
- 3.2 A review is usually a relatively large piece of work that looks at a policy or piece of service provision that could involve:
- Evidence gathering [questioning people and obtaining information eg performance monitoring data]
 - Site visits
 - Review of policies and benchmarking
 - Research including surveys and focus groups.
- 3.3 Advice from the Centre for Public Scrutiny indicates that scrutiny committees need to consider the following issues before devoting resources to a scrutiny review:

'Is there is a simple underlying problem that scrutiny can help to resolve. Is it, for instance, a problem in service delivery traceable to a simple fault, which is relatively easy to put right? In this case, a full-blown scrutiny review may not be required. A scrutiny review needs to be able to add value – to add a unique perspective and deliver results which, arguably, no other local decision-maker could. These are normally likely to be structured around documenting the existing situation, highlighting difficulties and opportunities and making suggestions for improvements. Sometimes this will involve a tightly focused piece of work – sometimes a wider approach will need to be taken.

Any scrutiny review needs to be cost effective. The focus of scrutiny needs to be on making recommendations that are value for money and that deliver tangible improvements to services, although some scrutiny work may be able to suggest opportunities for cost efficiencies as well. The fresh eyes that scrutiny brings to a given subject make it easier for members to identify new ways of working that might be less apparent to officers. If a subject being suggested for a scrutiny review relates to a service that is high-performing, has recently gone through an executive-led review, or where user satisfaction is particularly high, the value of a review should be questioned.

There also needs to be clarity and realism about the likely amount of time [members] will need to dedicate to the work...The nature of a particular issue might mean that a review has to be concluded within a certain time span to be relevant.'

3.4 It is good practice for the Committee to spend some time initially scoping the review, that is, drawing up a project plan setting out the direction and timing of that review. Putting the plan together will require some basic background research, and a meeting to narrow down the area under discussion.

3.5 At the end of the review the Committee will produce a series of recommendations. The Centre for Public Scrutiny advises:

'Developing firm findings will allow you to draw conclusions which can themselves form the basis of recommendations for action. This is often an organic process, and a meeting of the review group will often serve to very effectively tease out recommendations once the evidence-gathering phase is complete. As this happens, scrutineers will need to critically examine any proposals, and look at potential drawbacks or barriers to their implementation. It is possible that there will be more than one option to improve any specific area and therefore scrutineers should make suitable comparisons. For any proposed change there

needs to be clearly identified benefits, which outweigh any risks or costs. Scrutineers must think about the potential acceptability of any proposed improvements – principally, whether the outcomes being suggested are ones that would make a tangible, positive impact on the community. Scrutineers must be prepared to ground their recommendations in achievable reality, and to back them up with robust evidence if challenged.'

3.6 To be effective and capable of implementation these recommendations need to be 'SMART':

- **Specific** – it is not sufficient to say that a service or policy should be improved. The recommendation should make suggestions as to how this should be achieved.
- **Measurable** – wherever possible it is more persuasive to suggest what improvement the implementation of a recommendation will bring about by reference to a tangible measurement or benefit.
- **Attainable** - Recommendations need to be capable of implementation take into account any constraints facing the organisation
- **Realistic** – Recommendations need to lead to an achievable and beneficial result for the organisation including value for money considerations.
- **Timely** – the recommendations should set realistic deadlines for the implementation of recommendations.

3.7 Research is ongoing on scrutiny work programmes in other fire authorities and examples of areas selected for review will be provided at your meeting.

The remainder of the work programme

3.8 The Committee will also have other regular items of business that form part of its work programme, for example:

- Regular performance monitoring reports
- Information and statistics on grievance monitoring
- Monitoring of sickness levels, promotion policies and employee exit information.
- Monitoring of HR policies.
- Monitoring of Health & Safety.

3.9 Other business may come to the Committee from time to time, for example:

- The Service may wish to engage with members on a particular issue using a process that provides effective challenge and is a vehicle for meaningful engagement –

scrutiny can fulfil this role and can be used for policy development or for policy review.

- Matters may be referred to the Committee by the Authority or Executive Committee, the Chief Fire Officer, Clerk and Monitoring Officer or Treasurer.

3.10 Eventually the work programme will also include the tracking and monitoring of the implementation of review recommendations.

3.11 The work programme will enable the Committee to manage its time and resources, to spread the work over 12 months and to plan the conduct of its reviews to enable it to report to the Executive Committee in a timely fashion.

4. **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

In preparing this report, an initial Equality Impact Assessment is not required and has not been carried out, as the matters contained in this report will not lead to and do not relate to a policy change. Equality and diversity implications will be taken into account in the conduct of any future reviews.

5. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

6. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. Financial implications will be taken into account in the conduct of any future reviews.

N SHARMA
CLERK AND MONITORING OFFICER