

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2005/2006

MEETING TITLE AND DATE:
Overview & Scrutiny Committee
- 9 March 2006

Contact officer and telephone number:

Matt Clack (4884)

E mail: matt.clack@enfield.gov.uk

Agenda Part 1

Item: 7

Subject:
 Best Value Review of Scrutiny - Update

Wards:

Cabinet Member consulted: Cllr Nicholas
(Best Vale Core Team)

UPDATE ON SCRUTINY BEST VALUE REVIEW - WORK BLOCK PROGRESS

The 8 'Work Blocks' that form the basis for the review are listed below, together with an outline of progress to date:

Quantifying Existing Resources	Initial research has been completed to consider budget positions and resources for support arrangements. Further work (linked to the Benchmarking block) is due to start to consider comparisons with other local authorities
Consultation	600 Community Surveys have been distributed to residents and community groups (around 70 returns so far). Questionnaires aimed at Members and officers have also been published. All versions will appear on the Council's website and an advert has been posted in the local papers requesting members of the public to complete the survey. Deadline for returns: 17 th March 2006
Process Mapping	A Map of the Scrutiny cycle has now been completed, and a pilot is being run in the Housing Scrutiny Panel to ensure the map is accurate. Environment, Social Services and Education Maps have also begun, and are being compiled by Support Officers.
Impact of the Process	A database of all Scrutiny reviews completed in the last 4 years has been compiled, and work has started to analysing their impact. Members of the Executive, Scrutiny Chairmen and Lead Support Officers have been approached to arrange interviews, due to take place in March/April.
Evaluation of Support	Areas to be evaluated have now been agreed, and most of the work will start once the Consultation, Process Impact and Quantifying Existing Resources blocks have been completed.
Benchmarking & Comparison	A Questionnaire considering support arrangements has been distributed to all London Boroughs, and the deadline for returns has now passed (9 received, others to be chased). A piece of work is being completed quantifying officer support to scrutiny meetings, and an analysis of Working Group arrangements has been completed.
Member Engagement	The work in this block will be included as part of Consultation, Process Impact, Evaluation of Support and Benchmarking.
Creation of an Evaluation Framework	The BVR Project Manager is due to start drafting this framework, and will be completed as further development is made in the other work blocks.

UPDATE ON OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

- A Consultant is now in place as the Project Manager- he will provide a coordination role in managing how best to combine the various aspects into a final report
- The Core Team has now filled all vacancies, with 10 Officers and 3 Councillors (Councillor Nicholas, Zinkin & Stafford)
- The Report of the Findings is due to be completed early in the new administration.

CABINET BEST VALUE SUB COMMITTEE

Cabinet Best Value Sub Committee was provided with a progress update on the Scrutiny Best Value Review at its meeting on 21 February 2006. A copy of the minute from that meeting has been attached as Appendix A, for background information.

APPENDIX A

MINUTE EXTRACT FROM BEST VALUE CABINET SUB COMMITTEE – 21 FEBRUARY 2006

BEST VALUE REVIEW SCRUTINY

Martin Keay, Assistant Director of Environment, Street Scene and Parks (Strategy and Support), presented a briefing note to Members providing an update on the work block process in relation to the Best Value Review - Scrutiny.

Members were advised that the review team was now in place, three Members had been nominated – Councillors Andrew Nicholas, Ann Zinkin and Andrew Stafford.

The work programme had been divided into 8 work strands, as detailed on the update circulated with the agenda. Progress had been reviewed from the 4 C's perspective, as follows:

1. Consultation

A considerable amount of work had already been undertaken. A questionnaire had been sent out for public consultation (600 organisations/individuals on the Democratic Services Team database) approximately two weeks ago, to date 60 responses had been received with the responses being generally favourable with many useful additional comments being received.

Members and relevant Officers would be receiving a consultation questionnaire shortly and this would be followed by some detailed 1 to 1 discussions.

2. Compare

Existing benchmarking information had been gathered. A questionnaire had been issued to all London Boroughs about their structures and arrangements. To date three responses had been received from Islington, Havering and Greenwich. In addition, copies of two previous Best Value Reviews of Scrutiny had been obtained from Ealing and Waltham Forest.

Martin Keay highlighted to Members the variable structures and arrangements that existed in other authorities and, that the degree of influence of the Scrutiny function varied between councils. Any comparisons would need to be considered carefully in the light of the differences which existed.

3. Challenge

Members from both political parties had been invited to be part of the review. Martin Keay was the lead officer for the review as an officer independent of the scrutiny process. The internal challenge would be from Mark McLaughlin, Director of Finance and Corporate Resources. The external challenge would be undertaken by a senior officer from Southwark Council.

Members were advised of the issues which had already been identified including the existence of recurring items on Scrutiny Panel agendas (comfort zone); agendas were overloaded; many support arrangements were reliant on ad hoc support and good will. Members felt that Scrutiny Panels should be encouraged to use the Forward Plan to consider the proposed key decisions and identify areas where the scrutiny process could input into the decision-making process.

Members noted that many Scrutiny Panel agendas were overloaded and that varying practices were adopted by the Panels. It was acknowledged that the membership of the Panels was an influencing factor. There were some effective examples of working groups being set up by the Scrutiny Panels to focus on particular issues outside of the main Scrutiny Panel meetings. It was noted that the Health and Social Services Scrutiny Panels had undertaken some major projects recently. It was also noted that there had been significant public involvement in some areas of review although this was not always necessary to achieve a positive outcome from scrutiny.

Members acknowledged the issues with regard to the current support arrangements for Scrutiny Panels.

4. Compete

Members were advised that this was likely to present a major hurdle. There was not really an existing external market for this activity and other local authorities did not have consistent arrangements. It might be necessary to fall back on examination of day rates to comment on Value for Money issues. It was noted that in many instances the resource input to scrutiny was either accounted for elsewhere (day job) or was given free of charge.

Members highlighted the value of using officers external to the Council to provide a challenge role. Martin Keay confirmed that an officer from Southwark Council was to undertake this role.

Martin Keay advised Members that it was proposed to provide the final report arising from the Best Value Review of Scrutiny early in the Council's new administration following the Council election in May. It was acknowledged that the existing Scrutiny Panel structure did not reflect the Council's current structure following re-organisation.

Elaine Duncan questioned whether the review would also consider the future role of Scrutiny Panels in relation to issues such as LAAs and the development of the ALMO. Martin Keay advised that the review would not try to anticipate potential work areas. The Scrutiny Panels held "away-days" early in each municipal year to consider the areas that they would wish to scrutinise in the coming year. It was felt that this was an issue for the Scrutiny Panel Members to decide and take ownership of.

Councillor Andrew Nicholas praised Martin Keay's effective leadership of the best value review process of scrutiny.