THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

23 January 2012

INFORMAL SCRUTINY GROUPS 2011/12 – UPDATE

REPORT OF HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND HEAD OF POLICY

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RECENT REFERENCES:

OS2 - Appointments to Informal Scrutiny Groups and External Bodies 2011/12 – 1 June 2011

OS12 – Appointments to Batch 1 and 2 Informal Scrutiny Groups 2011/12 – 20 June 2011

OS19 – ISG Batch 1 Terms of Reference – 26 September 2011

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This Report brings Members up to date with progress of the Batch 1 Informal Scrutiny Groups (ISGs) and with proposals for Batch 2 ISGs. Following discussion amongst the six scrutiny leads and the Chairman of The Overview and Scrutiny Committee (in consultation with officers), the topics originally proposed for in-depth scrutiny investigation under Batch 2 have been revised, with Lead Councillors assigned.

The Report also asks Members to begin to consider potential topics for Batch 3 ISGs to be undertaken in the new Municipal Year.

In light of the experience of the Batch 1 ISGs, this Report also proposes that the membership of ISGs be revised to have a membership of up to six Councillors, including the Chairman, whilst remaining broadly politically balanced.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That the Committee support ISGs having a membership of up to six Councillors, including the Chairman, whilst remaining broadly politically balanced.

2. That the Batch 2 ISGs for the 2011/12 Municipal Year be agreed as set out in paragraph 3.2 and that their terms of reference as set out at paragraphs 3.3 – 3.5 of this report be endorsed.

3. That the Committee suggest any potential future ISGs for Batch 3, for agreement at a future meeting.

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1   Introduction

1.1   For the Municipal Year 2011/12, a new system for overview and scrutiny has been introduced, emphasising the role of the Informal Scrutiny Group as a key tool for scrutinising the Council's and its partners' services. The new system seeks to formally programme ISGs throughout the year to enable both Members and officers to plan their workloads effectively and to spread the load more evenly. This report offers Members an opportunity to review the success or otherwise of the system of ISGs so far and to begin to consider the next Batch of ISGs.

2   Batch 1 Informal Scrutiny Groups

2.1   The first batch of ISGs has been completed. The final reports of the Young People and Employment, Air Quality and The Application and Weight of Local Criteria in Allocating Housing ISGs are elsewhere on this agenda, and will be discussed by Cabinet on 8 February 2011.

2.2   The remaining three have had their final reports discussed at Cabinet.

2.3   Cabinet agreed that a further report on The City Council's Efforts to Reduce its Carbon Footprint ISG be prepared by officers, setting out the probable costs and effects of its proposals, together with which proposals the Council had already implemented and which could be practicably implemented.

2.4   Cabinet agreed the recommendations from the Asset Management ISG (Report CAB2269 refers). However when discussing recommendation 2 which suggested that a wider group of Members oversee the Plan's implementation, Cabinet noted the possibility that some of the decisions arising from the Plan may require a prompter response than could be provided by committee. Therefore, it was considered inappropriate to establish a standing Scrutiny body for this issue. Cabinet also concluded that wider member involvement in the implementation of the Asset Management Plan should be facilitated through an annual report to The Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and that it may wish to use an Informal Scrutiny Group as a part of this process to facilitate wider member involvement.

2.5   Cabinet agreed the Allocation of Gypsy and Traveller Sites ISG's recommendations in their entirety (Report CAB2242 refers).

3   Batch 2 Informal Scrutiny Groups

3.1   At their meeting on 14 November 2011, the six scrutiny leads and the Chairman of The Overview and Scrutiny Committee discussed the progress of Batch 1 Informal Scrutiny Groups (ISGs) and also referred to the topics originally proposed to be included in Batch 2.

3.2   At the conclusion of discussion, it was agreed that Batch 2 topics be slightly revised and Lead Councillors confirmed. The remainder of their membership has been subsequently agreed by the Group Managers. These are as follows:

(i) **Planning Management Performance** - Councillors Pearson (Lead), Cook, Gottlieb, Jeffs, Nelmes and Johnston

(ii) **Leader funding** - Councillors Power (Lead), Clear, Jeffs and Gemmell

(iii) **Project Integra/recycling rates** - Councillors Thompson (Lead), Collin, Mather and Witt

(iv) **Local and National Performance Indicators and their value to the Council -** Councillor Huxstep (Lead), Izard, Warwick, Bodgter and Newman-McKie

(v) **Public access to data and information via the Council's website** - Councillors Wright (Lead), Warwick, Gemmell and Maynard

(vi) **Delivery of support for a strong and vibrant community and voluntary sector coupled with arrangements for the Council's commissioning approach to service delivery** - Councillors Hutchison (Lead), Banister, Phillips, Scott and Jackson

3.3   The following terms of reference have been proposed for the **Leader Funding** ISG (subject to agreement at the first meeting of this ISG due to take place on 13 January), and this Committee is asked to formally agree them:

'This ISG will review the LEADER Fieldfare programme from the perspective of Winchester City Council as the Accountable Body. It will seek to establish:

1. the achievements of the LEADER programme in the Winchester District to date, measured in terms of:

    a. businesses supported

    b. jobs created

    c. long term benefits to the economy

    d. long term benefits to businesses in the rural areas and market towns

2. the strengths and weaknesses of Winchester City Council in its partnership with both the Fieldfare Local Action Group and East Hampshire District Council

3. the full costs to Winchester City Council as the accountable body

4. the strategic fit between the LEADER programme and Winchester City Council's economic strategy

5. selection criteria for future programmes to extend and develop the economy in the rural areas and market towns

6. lessons learnt from the LEADER experience on which Winchester City Council can draw in considering future major funding opportunities.'

3.4 Terms of reference have been proposed for the **Commissioning and Voluntary Sector ISG**, and these are also recommended for approval by this Committee:

'At a meeting of The Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June 2011, it was agreed to establish an ISG to consider:

> "delivery of support for a strong and vibrant community and voluntary sector, coupled with arrangements for the Council's commissioning approach to service delivery."

It is suggested that Members of the ISG approach this topic by considering three key questions:

a) How much progress has the Council made so far in becoming a commissioning organisation, and with what success?

b) Is the voluntary sector of the Winchester District prepared and able to take up the challenge of the commissioning approach?

c) How does the commissioning approach support delivery of the Community Strategy?

In answering these questions, Members of the ISG will seek to identify pragmatic and low cost improvements designed to enhance current practice and impact'.

3.5 Terms of reference have been proposed for the **Public access to data and information via the Council's website ISG**, and these are also recommended for approval by this Committee:

'At a meeting of The Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June 2011, it was agreed to establish an ISG to consider:

How applications made to the City Council (including licensing and planning) are displayed and made accessible on the website'.

At its first meeting Members of the ISG made the following observations, which would form the basis for a work programme for remaining meetings:

Website Appearance and content
- That, on the website front page, the top tabs should make it clear what the subject was about and that they be simple and provide a suitable lead-in.
- Tabs such as "I want to (report this, complain etc)" were supported and should include further detail as a second layer, including an acknowledgement facility and an action for someone to reply to the enquiry.
- The increased use of an A-Z was supported, although its priority in prominence with the top tabs would be given further consideration.
- It would be beneficial if there was a facility to type in a message which would be forwarded to the Ward councillor under:" I want to talk to". The provision of information generally to councillors should be improved upon.
- That the site's navigation should not be too complicated, or creative, so as not to deter casual visits.
- That there should be harmonisation of terminology to avoid confusion and also the same format should be used between pages to achieve a uniformity of presentation.
- Where forms were included, any requirements to complete names and addresses should be at the end of the form so as not to deter their

completion. In addition, a progress bar be included and that where possible all information should be kept on the same page.
- Google maps should be used where they provided added benefit.
- That the possibility of including security access to provide online payments or more basic information through postcode and address be investigated further.
- Website visitors should be able to find it easy to leave a comment and also have sufficient information to do their own research.

Planning and Licensing
- That a map should be included on the Planning pages to ease the finding of locations.
- That a licensing portal be developed to build on good practice within the redesigned (more user friendly) planning portal. For example, the licensing portal could include applications, environmental health and police comments.

Social Media
- A live Twitter feed could be used to provide information in times of emergency such as severe weather or a traffic incident.

Website Development – proof of concept
- That evidence of good practice in website development should be demonstrated.
- That the Winchester University's Arts Department be involved as required.
- That user testing be undertaken by people not inside the authority.
- That evidence from other local authorities be obtained to prove that the approach works (good practice websites).

Councillor Information and access etc.
- That access to information for Councillors be improved, for example in judging public opinion through access to social media.
- That links to parish council websites be included.
- That an improved public interface to the website within the City Council's reception area be investigated.
- The speed of access to the website for Councillors should be considered, including easy access to the phone book.

3.6 The remaining Batch 2 ISGs (**Planning Management Performance**, **Project Integra/recycling rates** and **Public access to data and information via the Council's website** will consider their respective terms of reference at their inaugural meetings. These will be reported to The Overview and Scrutiny Committee in due course.

3.7 The six scrutiny leads and the Chairman of The Overview and Scrutiny Committee also discussed the progress of the Batch 1 ISGs to date. It was noted that there was often attendance at ISG meetings of Members who had not been appointed to the ISGs, who occasionally wanted to take part in discussions. Whilst the observers at ISG meetings were encouraged, their participation was at the Chair's discretion. It was considered that it was preferable to increase the number of Members appointed to ISGs to up to six plus the Chair (was previously up to five members, plus the Chair.

3.8   The Scrutiny Leads have, where appropriate, encouraged the attendance of 'expert witnesses' at ISG meetings to assist with discussion of topics. This wider participation at ISG meetings has included officers from other local authorities and other organisations.

4   Batch 3 Informal Scrutiny Groups

4.1   As the Batch 2 ISGs are starting to get underway, Members are asked to begin to give thought to potential topics for Batch 3 ISGs, which will take place at the beginning of the next Municipal Year. Group Managers have been asked to canvass views from all Members, and a further report with a long list of potential topics will be brought back to a future Overview and Scrutiny Committee for agreement.

4.2   When considering future topics for scrutiny, Members are reminded of the Council's Change Plans and their priority areas for action, which are outlined below. The table below also sets out where a previous ISG has been undertaken into a priority area in the last three years. Members are also reminded that when considering a topic for scrutiny, thought should be given to the significance of the topic and its impact on residents or on whether the Council is working efficiently and effectively, as well as whether the ISG can make meaningful and practical recommendations which are likely to be implemented.

Community Strategy Outcome	Priority area for action	Recent ISG?
All	Wellbeing of older people	Older Persons ISG (08/03/10)
	Access to services	
	Reducing our carbon footprint	The City Council's efforts to reduce its carbon footprint ISG (07/12/11)
	Stanmore and Winnall	
Active Communities	Community Planning and volunteering	
	High quality, affordable housing	The application and weight of local criteria in allocating housing (23/01/12)
	Children and young people	Youth Facilities (16/07/09) Young People and Employment (23/01/12)
	Low levels of crime	
	Reducing health inequalities	
High Quality Environment	Reducing the District's greenhouse gas emissions	Energy Efficiency (17/11/10)
	Protect and enhance our rich biodiversity and habitats	
	Protect and improve our landscapes and townscapes	
	Use the District's natural resources wisely	
	Minimise the impact of traffic and transport	Air Quality (23/01/12)

	Waste minimisation	
Economic Prosperity	Exploiting the District's cultural strengths	Culture and the Economy (04/02/10)
	Low carbon economy	Low Carbon Economy (20/06/11)
	Skills and ambitions	
	Businesses are good neighbours	
Efficient and Effective Council		Treasury Management (12/07/10)
		Asset Management (07/12/11)

4.3   It was previously agreed that a Planning Policy and Exception Sites ISG should be moved to Batch 3. It was anticipated that this ISG would look at the process of engaging with Parishes with regard to planning through to the actual development taking place and why this process took so long. Members will want to consider whether this topic should still be considered and whether it would cover issues sufficiently different to those discussed as part of the Planning and the Rural Economy ISG. Members may also like to consider whether the ISG should take a wider look at the question of 'devolution' to parishes/localities.

4.4   The Committee previously also expressed an interest in looking at the new Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) process as a topic for an ISG. A report elsewhere on this agenda sets out planned work on CIL and the relevant points for Member input. It is suggested that an ISG held during Batch 3 would not add further value to developing a CIL scheme for the District, over and above the member involvement set out in the CIL report.

5   Review of new scrutiny framework

5.1   As agreed, a review of the scrutiny system introduced for 2011/12 will be undertaken this spring. Members will be asked for their views via part 2 of the Members' Survey in February 2012 which will look at formal committee structures in the Council and how overview and scrutiny is delivered. The results of this survey will be the subject of a report to The Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a view to making any necessary adjustments to the system for 2012/13.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

6   COMMUNITY STRATEGY AND CHANGE PLANS (RELEVANCE TO):

       When establishing Informal Scrutiny Groups, the Committee should be satisfied that these arrangements are supporting or scrutinising the delivery of the Council's priorities, or working towards identifying future priorities.

7   RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

       Scrutiny is currently undertaken within the existing staffing resources of the Council.

8   RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

       None specifically.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

Files held in the Democratic Services Division.

APPENDICES:

None