

THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

18 February 2013

BATCH 4 INFORMAL SCRUTINY GROUPS

REPORT OF HEAD OF POLICY

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RECENT REFERENCES:

None

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report sets out options for batch 4 Informal Scrutiny Groups (ISGs). Potential topics have been submitted by both Members and officers.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1 That the following three topics as proposed by the scrutiny chairs are agreed as part of batch 4 ISGs:
 - Making Member involvement & decision making more effective
 - The Guildhall as a commercial venue
 - Access, exclusion and how we address it
- 2 That the Committee appoint a scrutiny chair to lead each ISG.
- 3 That up to a further three ISGs are appointed during the remainder of the municipal year as topics arise for investigation.

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report sets out options for batch 4 ISGs as nominated by Members and officers, as well as a brief update on progress with batch 3 ISGs.

2 Options for Batch 4 ISGs

- 2.1 Elected Members were canvassed via their groups for potential ISG topics, as were senior managers. The following table sets out the suggested topics which were received, a comment from the chair of The Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the six scrutiny chairs appointed from the Committee and an officer comment where provided.

	Topic	ISG Chairs' Suggestions	Officer Comment
1	As ISG to support the review of the Community Strategy, focussing on the priorities for the Winchester District	Not supported at this time.	ISGs are often used to review strategies, and the Community Strategy is up for review in the coming year.
2	Troubled Families –progress of this initiative so far, along with the work of voluntary organisations and the Council to support the families.	Premature – agreed to re-consider after the new system to support Troubled Families is established.	It is very early on in the process for an ISG to be able to make any meaningful recommendations however it is felt that this would be a good topic for 13/14.
3	Public Health and the City Council's role.	Premature – agreed to recommend after the changes to how public health is delivered are established and running for a period	Officers feel that this would be a useful topic for an ISG.
4	Implementation of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL).	Agreed that this should initially be considered as a training opportunity for members & officers	<p>A project has been set up to deal with CIL and is something that will need to come back to Members to agree processes and policies therefore it is unclear what an ISG will achieve over and above the Member input already scheduled.</p> <p>Officers are looking at organising training on CIL as requested by scrutiny chairs.</p>

	Topic	ISG Chairs' Suggestions	Officer Comment
5	Impact of Welfare Reform and support from the City Council for those affected.	This topic is important albeit premature and should therefore be considered in 2013/14.	Suggested that Welfare Reform needs a bit more clarity (and time for Council Tax changes to bed down), so would be a useful topic in later 13/14 or even 14/15.
6	Making Council meetings more effective.	Supported, but amended to suggest how we can make member involvement & decision making more effective. Officers have been asked officers to consider re-scoping accordingly.	In the past a number of one-off Member/officer meetings have been held to discuss this subject, but they achieved very little. More effective was using the periodic Group Leaders meetings which did achieve some consensus on a few procedural changes.
7	Ability to Implement Scrutiny Group Recommendations	Include within revised scope for 'Making Council Meetings more effective'	
8	The issue of returning to the Committee system of running the Council a) in order to get more elected member involvement and b) in order to save money (a Cabinet system is much more expensive in Special Responsibility Allowances)	Include within revised scope for 'Making Council Meetings more effective'	The comparative cost could be reviewed; however the principal issue is what the most effective way of representing the community is, taking robust decisions and offering genuine accountability. Terms of reference should reflect that and be open to a variety of options. If the concern put forward by Members is ensuring Members have enough to do, an alternative topic could be to consider what is

	Topic	ISG Chairs' Suggestions	Officer Comment
			right number of Councillors for the district, rather than what to do with numbers that currently exist.
9	The operation of a good Council Tax and Housing Benefits System	Not supported at this time	Due to the upcoming changes to the benefits system it is suggested that if relevantly scoped, this ISG be linked to the above ISG on Welfare Reform in 13/14 or 14/15.
10	Arrears of Council Tax and Arrears of Housing rents	Not supported	
11	A ISG about recreational facilities i.e. River Park Leisure Centre (RPLC)	Too late to be effective scrutiny, but a future ISG may well depend on the outcome of the current investigation.	Timing will need to be considered as given Cabinet will want to take a decision, possibly in early summer, following the report of the consultants recently engaged to look at RPLC and options for a replacement leisure centre.
12	The Guildhall as a commercial venue, including aspects such as cleanliness and toilets	Supported but this may well conflict with work being undertaken by Audit Committee – wait until those considerations have been made	How the Guildhall can be most effectively run as a 'commercial' venue would be useful topic, noting the constraints imposed by its democratic function. Regarding the Guildhall toilets, a project for their refurbishment is under development for

	Topic	ISG Chairs' Suggestions	Officer Comment
			implementation this year. The project is funded in the Capital programme.
13	To review the City Museums (the Square & Westgate) and various collections we hold to see if we could combine our resources with the County and find a better space for the museum and free up the current space for more efficient use.	Topic should be deferred until current discussions between the authorities are clearer.	This ISG would need to be timed to fit in with current work on the Fully Integrated Merger work – reviewing opportunities to share museum services with HCC and Southampton City Council.
14	An ISG to examine the effectiveness of our communications - how well is the "Good News" message getting across the District. How does the day to day life of the Council touch people, and do they know what is provided and how well it is provided?	Not supported at this time	The Access to Services ISG recently concluded and had a number of recommendations on the communication function (particularly around communicating with the whole district).
15	Access, exclusion and how we address it, with reference to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals with Mental Health/ Asperger's/ Autism: • At Risk/Vulnerable individuals (e.g. children or young people at risk; people facing domestic violence, abuse, harassment, intimidation): • Aged/ infirm • Access (communication & physical access) by those living outside the City 	Supported	This ISG is supported by officers, however due to the breadth of issues listed, it is suggested that the scope be reviewed to focus the ISG on the key issues and make the most of officer/Member time.

	Topic	ISG Chairs' Suggestions	Officer Comment
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Training across these fields; sharing of information; maintaining standards & reviewing provision periodically; Trigger Training and cascading;• Best practice examples		

3 Scrutiny Chairs' recommendations

3.1 Having undertaken an initial review of the topics put forward for selection, the Chair of The Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the scrutiny chairs recommend to the Committee that the following three ISGs are taken forward into batch 4:

- Making member involvement & decision making more effective (combining 6, 7 & 8 above)
- The Guildhall as a commercial venue (12 above), with regard to be paid to the timing of the review
- Access, exclusion and how we address it (15 above)

3.2 Due to the limited number of suitable topics put forward for 2012/13, it is recommended that up to a further three ISGs are appointed during the remainder of the municipal year as topics arise for investigation through the course of The Overview and Scrutiny Committee's business.

4 Update on Batch 3 ISGs

4.1 The following table gives an update on the progress on batch 3 ISGs.

Informal Scrutiny Group	Progress
Localism ISG	Final report submitted to The Overview and Scrutiny Committee 21 January 2013
Access to Services in Rural Areas and Market Towns ISG	Final report submitted to The Overview and Scrutiny Committee 21 January 2013
Provision of Public Transport in Town and Rural Areas ISG	Final report anticipated at March meeting of The Overview and Scrutiny Committee
The Impact of Houses of Multiple Occupation on City Estates ISG	Final report anticipated at February meeting of The Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Review of the Statutory Basis of City Council Services	This ISG had its first meeting on 24 January and it is hoped that it will present its recommendations in March/April.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

5 SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY AND CHANGE PLANS
(RELEVANCE TO):

5.1 Overview and scrutiny plays in a key role in ensuring the City Council remains an Efficient and Effective organisations.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

6.1 This report does not have any additional resource implications, other than staff costs in supporting the ISGs.

7 RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

7.1 None

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

None

APPENDICES:

None