

SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATION COMMITTEE

Meeting: 30 September 2019

At: 6.00 pm

PRESENT

Councillor Lisa Smart (Chair) in the chair; Councillors Keith Holloway, Steve Gribbon and Wendy Meikle.

1. MINUTES

The Minutes (copies of which had been circulated) of the meeting held on 19 August 2019 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors and officers were invited to declare any interests they had in any of the items on the agenda for the meeting.

No declarations of interest were made.

3. CALL-IN

There were no call-ins to consider.

4. LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

The Chair welcomed the Leader of the Council (Councillor Elise Wilson) to the meeting and invited her to outline her view of the role of scrutiny in Stockport.

The Leader of the Council began by stating her view that the discharge of scrutiny functions in Stockport was done well, and compared favourably. She voiced concerns that there was a temptation, reflective of the political balance of the Council, that the committees were used as a 'clearing house' for reports to be considered by the Cabinet, and that this could impair the ability of councillors to have more constructive discussions about the issues facing the borough. She suggested that reporting to scrutiny committees could move toward being on an exception basis to reduce the burden on both officers and the committees. She also acknowledged the work underway to rethink the Council's programme of meetings and how to ensure changes in cabinet portfolios could be reflected more quickly in scrutiny committee remits.

The Leader also highlighted Greater Manchester working, and devolution to the GMCA as particular challenges for the future of the Council, including for scrutiny, and thought would be needed about how to harmonise the work of scrutiny locally with that of the GMCA and other local authorities. She stressed the importance of the scrutiny co-ordination role in providing a stronger link with GMCA scrutiny, but also in a more general role of evaluating the efficacy of local arrangements and activity.

Members then asked questions, including:-

- The Committee had previously stressed the importance of 'parity of esteem' between scrutiny and executive functions; was the balance right in Stockport, and if not, how could it be improved? In response the Leader agreed with the need for parity and stated that her expectations of her cabinet members was that they made themselves available to scrutiny and provide reports that were asked for. She also stated that she believed it was inappropriate for her, as Cabinet Leader, to state how that parity was achieved but was open to discuss suggestions made.
- Training provided to councillors in relation to scrutiny often stressed the need to try to eliminate 'politics' from the discussion. Was this naïve? The Leader acknowledged that councillors operated in a political context, and in Stockport that was more prominent than in other councils, but she stressed the need for committees and councillors to be clear about their role and remit when scrutinising, and to seek to think strategic as far as possible to avoid becoming too parochial. In response to a follow up question about possible differences in how each committee operated, the Leader acknowledged that differences existed and was to be expected. She contrasted the ways of operating favourable with equivalent meetings of GMCA Scrutiny Committee.
- The governance of the GMCA remained a challenge for local authorities, in particular the relationship between a leader's GMCA role/ portfolio and their local role and accountability. In response, the Leader stated that the Greater Manchester dimension to a leader's role was constantly evolving and meaning they were becoming increasingly outward-of-the-council facing. These arrangements were relatively new and adjustments were needed as time progressed, but it was important for the underpinning governance arrangements to be agile enough to respond to changes.

There was discussion about the role of scrutiny committee in scrutinising Greater Manchester activity, particularly in relation to the Greater Manchester Strategy, but that local arrangements had not necessarily kept pace with the changing demands from the city-region. Comment was made that in comparison to Stockport the GMCA scrutiny arrangements could appear more cumbersome, reflective of the different culture of the GMCA. It was suggested that GMCA Scrutiny had an important role to play in driving culture change at the GMCA to involve non-leaders and constituent councils more, and earlier, in decision making.

RESOLVED – That Councillor Elise Wilson be thanked for her attendance.

5. UPDATE ON Q2 PPRR AND IMPLEMENTATION OF NEW PERFORMANCE DASHBOARD

Katheryn Rees (Service Director for Strategy & Commissioning) and Katy Forde (Strategy and Performance Manager) attended the meeting to update the Coordination Committee on changes to the Portfolio Performance and Resource Reporting for 2019/20; the format of mid-year reports, and an update on the development of the performance dashboard.

Councillors were reminded that there had been agreement to have a 'lighter-touch' approach to performance reporting, to reduce duplication and focus on exception reporting. Reports had been re-aligned with new cabinet portfolios and scrutiny committee remits.

The mid-year (Q2) Portfolio Performance and Resource Reports would be submitted to the October round of scrutiny committee and would be based on highlight and exceptions, with data on all portfolios included in a separate appendix that would include a RAG rating for current performance and trend analysis.

Work with the performance dashboard was ongoing, including ensuring data accuracy and completeness, as well as usability. It was proposed to provide testing for scrutiny councillors in January 2020.

Councillors welcomed the update, and stressed the importance of ensuring the right information was shared with scrutiny committees to ensure the best possible scrutiny.

The proposal to demonstrate the new dashboard for councillors was welcomed, although it was suggested that encouraging early engagement for councillors with a particular interest would be useful as a way of testing the robustness of the system and creating councillor 'champions' to help reinforce its use.

RESOLVED – (1) That the presentation be noted.

(2) That the Service Director for Strategy & Commissioning be recommended to invite scrutiny councillors to participate in targeted demonstrations of the new performance dashboard.

(3) That the Deputy Chief Executive be requested to arrange an extraordinary meeting, if needed, on 13 January 2020 to allow for further demonstration and discussion of the performance dashboard.

The meeting closed at 7.08 pm