

SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATION COMMITTEE

Meeting: 8 February 2021

At: 6.00 pm

PRESENT

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

1. MINUTES

The Minutes (copies of which had been circulated) of the meeting held on 21 December 2021) were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

No declarations were made.

3. CALL-IN

There were no call-in items to consider.

4. THE DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVES (CORPORATE AND SUPPORT SERVICES) AND (PLACE)

The Chair reported that Michael Cullen (Corporate Director for Corporate and Support Services & Deputy Chief Executive) and Caroline Simpson (Corporate Director for Place & Deputy Chief Executive) had been invited to the meeting to discuss issues relevant to the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee.

The Chair stated that the aim of the discussion was to consider what improvements could be made the functioning of scrutiny in Stockport, to understand what worked well and discuss examples of good practice elsewhere in the country.

The following comments were made by the Corporate Directors:-

- Robust scrutiny was considered to be a key feature of effective decision-making.
- Scrutiny at Stockport was considered to be both robust and healthy.
- Pre-decision scrutiny was an important feature of the governance arrangements in Stockport.
- The corporate leadership team placed a high degree of importance on the scrutiny process.
- The political balance of the Council has played a role in shaping the decision-making structure in Stockport which has resulted in greater transparency.
- Scrutiny was a welcoming and constructive process that had added value to the decisions that were being taken.

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- Consideration needed to be given to whether it was appropriate or desirable for reports to be considered by multiple scrutiny committees.
- The process by which the Council's partner organisations were scrutinised also needed rethinking. It was noted that there had been improvements to the performance framework that made it easier to assess the performance of some of the Council's partner organisations such as TLC.
- The reduction in the business programme had resulted in the agendas for some scrutiny committees being excessively long.
- The model of scrutiny at Stockport was one that other authorities could learn from.

The following comments were then made/ issues raised by members:-

- The Scrutiny Committee was due to undertake an evaluation of the revisions to the business programme at its last meeting of the municipal year. It was noted that the balance of meetings during 2020/21 had been uneven as cycles had been 'lifted-out' of the pre-approved programme resulting in some lengthy gaps between meetings. However, the 2021/22 programme had been recast over the year which it was anticipated would smooth out some of this variance.
- The boundaries between cabinet portfolios were not always logically delineated which sometimes made for confused reporting lines for individual items.
- It was the role of the scrutiny co-ordination committee to determine which cabinet portfolios should report to which committee.
- The impact of remote meetings on the transaction of scrutiny was discussed. It was agreed that this had generally worked well and that meetings had continued to achieve their objectives.
- It was noted that holding meetings remotely had facilitated attendance by officers and external stakeholders at some meetings where this might otherwise have been difficult.
- Consideration should be given as to how technology could be exploited in the future including the use of hybrid technology.
- It was noted that the Regulations that permitted the use of remote technology for committee meetings were due to expire on 6 May 2021.
- There had been recent high-profile cases where local authorities had found themselves in significant financial difficulties, including at Northamptonshire and Croydon councils, where failures of governance had been identified as material contributory factors.
- Remote meetings had generally been a positive experience.
- It was questioned whether there could be a greater role for members of the public and other organisations within scrutiny, although it was acknowledged that this would be a challenge in the light of the current length of agendas and range of business covered.
- A discussion took place in relation to the functioning of scrutiny at the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and its inter-relationship with Stockport.
- The use of all-member briefings had a part to play in disseminating knowledge and understanding of GM initiatives before they entered into the formal scrutiny processes.
- It would be useful to develop a readily digestible and easy-to-understand briefing note on the role and function of scrutiny that could be provided to the public, partners and external agencies.

RESOLVED – (1) That Michael Cullen and Caroline Simpson be thanked for their attendance and contributions.

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(2) That the Acting Statutory Scrutiny Officer and Strategic Head of Service & Monitoring Officer (Legal and Democratic Governance) be recommended to give consideration to arrangements for reducing the number of reports that are submitted to more than one scrutiny committee.

The meeting closed at 6.43 pm