

SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATION COMMITTEE

Meeting: 27 September 2021
At: 6.00 pm

PRESENT

Councillor Mark Roberts (Chair) in the chair; Councillors Keith Holloway, Oliver Johnstone, John McGahan and Wendy Meikle.

1. MINUTES

The Minutes (copies of which had been circulated) of the meeting of members of the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee held on 31 July 2021 were approved as a correct record.

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 of interest were made.

3. CALL-IN

There were no call-in items to consider.

4. VENUE FOR SCRUTINY MEETINGS

The Strategic Head of Service & Monitoring Officer (Legal and Democratic Governance) submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) requesting that the scrutiny committee gives consideration to agreeing a way forward with regard to the venue for scrutiny committees with specific regard to whether they would wish for such meetings to return to face-to-face, and if so when and whether any criteria needs to be satisfied before such meetings re-commence.

The Strategic Head of Service & Monitoring Officer (Legal and Democratic Governance) further reported that the Council's Director of Public Health had advised that the decision on the format of future meetings was a balancing act and that consideration should be given to the rising rate of covid-19 infections in the borough. Physical meetings should also to have appropriate mitigations in place such as screens, social-distancing and encouraging the use of face-masks.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- A number of scrutiny chairs had canvassed members of their committees on their preferences which had produced a wide-range of views.
- It was suggested that scrutiny had worked well when undertaken remotely over the past 18 months and it was felt that nothing had been lost from the integrity of the process.

- It was noted that if members agreed to return to face-to-face meetings, then they would also be requiring officers to come back to the civic complex to support and facilitate those meetings.
- It was commented that constitutionally, meetings held remotely were not constituted meetings of the relevant committee and that the recommendations of these meetings were only attached any weight by the good faith of the Cabinet. This might prove a challenging relationship as more contentious issues arose in the coming months.
- As the restrictions had eased the rest of the country was returning to a degree of normality, there should be an expectation that scrutiny meetings should also return to their previous format.
- It was recognised that a number of members may have anxieties about returning to face-to-face meetings.
- Remote meetings afforded members a degree of flexibility to attend meetings they might otherwise not have had the ability to attend.
- There were mitigations in place for meeting in the civic complex that permitted face-to-face meetings to continue in a safe environment.
- It was useful to see the reactions and body language of members during a debate which was sometimes difficult to appreciate during remote meetings.
- It was important that the scrutiny committee was appraised of the evolving position of the Director of Public Health based on the position at the time in the borough.
- There needed to be a commonly understood threshold for when a return to face-to-face meetings would be considered appropriate.

RESOLVED – (3 for, 2 against) (1) That the forthcoming cycle of scrutiny committees continue to be held on a remote basis with a decision on the format for future meetings being subject to further and ongoing review by this scrutiny committee as a standing item on its agendas.

(2) That the Director of Public Health and the Strategic Head of Service & Monitoring Officer (Legal and Democratic Governance) be requested to submit a report to the next meeting of the scrutiny committee identifying (i) a criteria for the return to face-to-face meetings of scrutiny committees; and (ii) a mechanism for ameliorating concerns expressed by members with regard to the constitutional position of undertaking scrutiny on an informal basis.

5. SCRUTINY REVIEW TOPIC SELECTION - 2021/22

The Strategic Head of Service & Monitoring Officer (Legal and Democratic Governance) submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) inviting the Committee to consider Scrutiny Review topics that had been identified and proposed by scrutiny committees for inclusion in the 2021/2022 Work Programme.

RESOLVED – That the proposed Scrutiny Work Programme of scrutiny reviews be approved, subject to addition of a further scrutiny review proposed by the Children & Families Scrutiny Committee as follows:-

‘Strategy for School Places – Pupil Place Planning in the Borough’

The meeting closed at 6.46 pm