

Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families Committee (virtual meetings from May 2020 due to Coronavirus)

Thursday 12 November 2020
1.00 pm Virtual Meeting



SUPPLEMENT TO THE AGENDA

To: The Members of the Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families Committee (virtual meetings from May 2020 due to Coronavirus)

We are now able to enclose the following information which was unavailable when the agenda was published:

Item 6	Scrutiny Review Update (Pages 3 - 6) Presentation from Scrutiny Manager.
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Democratic Service Team, County Hall, Taunton

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Scrutiny Review at SCC – Context

- 2018 Peer challenge identified that a review of scrutiny function was required in order to make it more effective, ensure all councillors are equipped to play an active role and contribute to policy making and key decisions and governance arrangements need to reflect this.
- Scrutiny review completed by Centre for Public Scrutiny in spring/early summer 2019.
- Final report with eleven recommendations agreed by Full Council in January 2020.
- Implementation of recommendations in part have been delayed due to on-going pandemic and subsequent change to ways of working.
- Target is to ensure all recommendations have been fully embedded by March 2021.





Recommendations – Status update

- 1. Completed** A Scrutiny review has been completed by the nationally renowned Centre for Public Scrutiny and their report and 11 recommendations were agreed by Full Council in January 2020.
- 2. Partially completed.** Reduction in number of Committee meetings planned from March 2020, however plan has had to be amended due to Committee's expectation of public monthly Coronavirus updates. Changed ways of working has also led to delays in increasing Task and Finish Groups, although 2 recent T&F Groups have proved successful, especially the Schools Exclusion focused work, which resulted in Cabinet welcoming and agreeing all recommendations proposed. Have run informal workshops - next one scheduled for 7th October, a joint workshop between adults and children's scrutiny committees.
- 3. Partially completed.** Some Cabinet members have now started presenting reports at Scrutiny Committee meetings, with support from senior officers although further work to be done.
- 4. Completed.** As far as we are aware the political pre-meetings have ceased.
- 5. Partially completed.** In terms of work planning and agenda setting, there is a more stringent approach to information reports on all agendas, however pandemic has made this more challenging. Further tweaks are required to new information sharing process with Committee's between meetings in order to free up further agenda time for key considerations.
- 6. Completed.** All agendas now have a maximum of 4 main items of business. Between October and March 2021 the aim is to reduce the average to 3.



Recommendations – Status update

7. New Scrutiny work programme methodology to be drafted and agreed with 3 Scrutiny Chairs, relevant Cabinet Members and lead director by the end of October 2020, for implementation in November cycle. Intention is to maintain a standardised approach across all 3 Committees.

8. Partially completed. This had been implemented prior to introduction of virtual meetings, however this will need revising once formal meetings are resumed in County Hall and as we work towards a hybrid meeting solution.

9. Partially completed. All agendas provide a public question slot and virtual meetings mean the meetings are far more accessible to the public. Work still to be done on increasing wider public engagement and input. Research has been completed with other Authorities to establish alternative ways of working. The newly recruited Scrutiny Officer will be tasked with embedding new practice.

10. Member training and specifically scrutiny training is an area of work that the Democratic Services have had to reduce due to capacity pressures and the pandemic, however with the recruitment of new staff with training expertise, this is a priority area for the team in autumn 2020 and during much of 2020 the training focus for Members has for necessity been IT specific.

11. Partially completed. Similar to update above, however research has been completed by the team on Chairs' training programmes being run virtually, which will be shared to 6 Chairs and Vice Chairs by end of September, supplemented by further support from the Centre for Public Scrutiny. This support will also provide for further training and support for all Scrutiny Committee members. It is worth noting that the level of Chairing has considerably improved during the virtual process and the adaptability of all 3 Chairs has been impressive.



Summary and Next Steps

- Key progress has undoubtedly been made, and some key step changes embedded, although not quite at the rate predicted due to impact of pandemic and requirement to establish virtual meetings, which thus far has been very successful.
- Key work on recommendations 5,7 and 10 in winter 2020, with an update report back to all Place Scrutiny, Cabinet and Full Council scheduled for November 2020.
- Further work to be done in terms of partnership scrutiny, such as Joint Waste Scrutiny, SRA Scrutiny and most crucially the A&S Police and Crime Panel.
- Shadow Authority Scrutiny