MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD

12 AUGUST 2013

PRESENT:

Members of the Board:
Councillors Dr Shera (Chairman), Mrs Avis, M Francis, Miss Lawrence, Mahoney, Roodhouse, Sewell and Helen Walton

Councillors Ms Edwards and Mistry

Officers:
Andrew Gabbitas, Executive Director; Paul Ansell, Scrutiny Officer; Debbie Dawson, Scrutiny Officer; Linn Ashmore, Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer

10. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 June 2013 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

11. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Butlin.

12. TO NOTE THE MINUTES OF CRIME AND DISORDER COMMITTEE, CUSTOMER AND PARTNERSHIPS COMMITTEE AND CORPORATE PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

The minutes of the meetings held by Customer and Partnerships Committee on 20 June 2013, Corporate Performance Committee on 27 June 2013 and Crime and Disorder Committee on 25 July 2013 were noted.

13. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REVIEW ACTION PLANS

The Board considered an exception report on the progress of review action plans (Part 1 – agenda item 6).

Localisation of Council Tax Support

The Board noted the attempts made by the Head of Resources to obtain agreement to the recharging of council tax payment transaction charges to the county council and the police and crime commissioner. There were no legal grounds to support the reclaiming of these charges and it was not believed that other collecting authorities had recharged these costs.

Members requested that the experiences of any other authorities who may have attempted to recover transaction charges in this way be monitored with a view to possibly exploring opportunities for a joint approach. It was noted,
however, that this was not a matter of great public concern because the taxpayer would ultimately bear the cost regardless of which authority paid the transaction charges.

Planning for Play
Customer and Partnerships Committee will consider a report on progress at its meeting on 12 September.

Inward Investment
Work is continuing on the commercial showcase pack and it is believed that the action will shortly be completed.

RESOLVED THAT – the report be noted.

14. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY EVALUATION

The Board considered the report (Part 1 – agenda item 7) concerning survey results and feedback from members on overview and scrutiny at the council.

The Scrutiny Officer gave a presentation on the outcomes of the member survey and feedback from a training event, outlining some key challenges for the future of scrutiny. A copy of the presentation is attached to the minutes.

During discussion the following points were raised:

The level of response to the member survey was poor, making it difficult to draw conclusions from such a small sample. It was suggested that there was a need to find better ways of engaging with, and seeking feedback from, the wider body of members, particularly as the make-up of the council changes frequently. In addition to the survey, discussions with group leaders would be useful to evaluate the future arrangements and operation of scrutiny.

Since its inception, the council’s scrutiny work has evolved and matured. The work of the task groups was considered particularly successful and enjoyed by members.

When the current overview and scrutiny arrangements were put in place, it was envisaged that the board would adapt and change over time. A suggestion was made that it should now review its original terms of reference to ensure they are fit for purpose for the future. It was felt that the wider membership of the board brings added value.

The council website was identified as a key priority. The website does not showcase the good work that has been carried out to bring projects to fruition. It is more of an information portal and could be better used as a promotional/communication tool. The council should share stories and celebrate its successes more.

Members of the public are unlikely to be familiar with the concept of ‘overview and scrutiny’, but more could be done to present the role and work of councillors through the website and social media in a simple, accessible way.
Stories compete for the front page of the website, but it was felt that the work of members should be given greater priority.

It can be difficult to engage with outside agencies and organisations but an outside voice can be a valuable critical friend. Connections and relationships should be sought with external agencies, emphasising a positive, partnership approach.

The fact that 31 of the 36 non-executive members took part in scrutiny work in 2012/13 is a measure of the strength of overview and scrutiny at the council, particularly in view of the time pressures on members. The number of review reports approved by Cabinet is also evidence of how well the scrutiny function works. Generally, it was felt that overview and scrutiny in Rugby compares favourably with other authorities.

The Leisure Centre Task Group and the Crematorium Task Group (and subsequently the Rugby and Daventry Crematorium Joint Committee) have overseen the two biggest capital projects the council has carried out in recent times. The work undertaken by these task groups, which led to the recommendations to build a new leisure centre and crematorium, illustrated scrutiny’s ability to produce original and practical solutions to complex and difficult issues facing the council.

RESOLVED THAT –

(1) an evaluation of the way the council website publicises and promotes the scrutiny function and work of members be carried out and reported to a subsequent meeting of the board; and

(2) the Board should review its future role and its terms of reference.

15. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME PROGRESS

The Board considered the report (Part 1 – agenda item 8) concerning progress in task group reviews and the work programmes of the scrutiny committees.

Recycling Centres
The review’s recommendations will be considered by Cabinet on 19 August.

During Phase 2 the task group will focus on options for recycling and waste collection in new large scale developments with a view to ensuring that policies for waste collection and for the planning of new developments are mutually supportive. The review will also follow up matters raised during Phase 1 including Warwickshire County Council’s long term strategy for waste disposal sites and issues relating to the Hunters Lane recycling centre such as opening hours and restrictions on use.

Leisure Centre
There will be an opportunity for members of the task group and Cabinet to visit the centre before it opens to the public. The task group will hold a final mop-up
meeting on 26 September and the official opening of the centre will be in October.

**Alcohol Misuse**
On 25 July the Crime and Disorder Committee had considered a number of possible areas of scrutiny relating to alcohol misuse including street drinking, underage drinking, domestic violence, pubs and clubs in the town centre and health services. It had decided that the most productive focus for the review would be the use of powers proposed in the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Bill. The committee had concluded that the overview and scrutiny of health issues associated with alcohol misuse was more appropriately within the remit of Customer and Partnerships Committee. Involvement of the Crime and Disorder Committee would further complicate the still-evolving arrangements for health scrutiny.

The Crime and Disorder Committee routinely maintained an overview of the Community Safety Partnership’s initiatives on crime and anti-social behaviour associated with alcohol and would continue to do so.

Members debated this topic and raised the following points:

Some concern was raised that the review would not include the health aspects of alcohol misuse. It was suggested that any review should be carried out by one task group body and cover all aspects of alcohol misuse including health issues to avoid duplication and omission of any important issues. On the other hand, the view was also expressed that Crime and Disorder Committee should focus on the anti-social behaviour and crime-related aspects alone.

The importance of schools and education programmes, and the work on this being carried out by the county council, should be recognised.

The Scrutiny Officer advised that, although health issues were a matter of legitimate local concern, they were being addressed by the Warwickshire Alcohol Implementation Plan 2012-14, which had only relatively recently been produced. It was too early to challenge the plan, and its success in reducing the incidence of alcohol-related conditions could only be assessed over a period of years. It was hard to identify what tangible improvements might reasonably be sought by a borough council scrutiny review of alcohol and health, but progress in this field would nevertheless be a suitable topic for continuing overview, along with other health issues.

It was agreed that officers would produce a brief report outlining the key issues and highlighting what action is being taken by each agency. This should include timescales. This would provide a clear overview of the different strands of activity and establish whether they are all being effectively covered and which areas warrant inclusion in a scrutiny review.

**Health Services**
The Customer and Partnerships Committee continues to develop its role in relation to health. Representatives from Coventry and Rugby CCG and Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership Trust are due to attend future committee meetings. There is no particular focus for a task group at this time.
**Fixed-term Tenancies**
The first meeting of the task group will be held on 2 October.

Light touch reviews to be carried out later in the year included:

- Meeting the needs of the customer – meaningful measures of success
- Best value in service charge contracts
- Neighbourhood Planning
- Road surface condition and response of WCC, combined with footpath/pavement repairs (CUSP will review the proposal later in the year)

The Board agreed to invite the Leader and Executive Directors to attend a meeting in January 2014 to talk on key issues facing the council and to participate in discussion arising from these.

The Board supported the proposal that the Scrutiny Forum should be scheduled for the autumn and focus on issues arising from the member survey. Members also agreed that local secondary school councils should be invited to an event at the Town Hall to coincide with the Customer and Partnerships Committee meeting on 14 November. A small working group of members, to include the chairman and vice chairman of Customer and Partnerships Committee and the children and young people’s member champion, would be formed to prepare for the event.

RESOLVED THAT –

1. the following items be included on the agenda for the next meeting:
   - a report setting out the key issues relating to alcohol misuse, the actions being taken by the relevant agencies, and the possible topics for inclusion in the Alcohol Misuse review;
   - improvements to the council website;
   - the future role and terms of reference of the Board; and

2. an item on key issues facing the council for discussion with the Leader and Executive Directors be included on the 20 January 2014 agenda.

CHAIRMAN
Overall satisfaction

Overall Satisfaction 2013

- very poorly: 2%
- fairly poorly: 2%
- neither well or poorly: 17%
- fairly well: 14%
- very well: 65%

CLEAN, GREEN & SAFE
Survey responses:
O&S roles

• Policy review – slight dip
• Holding Cabinet to account – reversed previous low satisfaction
• Engagement with external agencies – slight dip, only one “very well”
• Supporting improvement in services – high satisfaction
Survey responses: support and member confidence

Broadly positive, BUT

– only two “very well” supported
– only one “very” satisfied with contribution they were able to make in O&S role
Successes

• Tangible positive outcomes, eg. capital projects, policy development, corporate improvements
• Better monitoring of implementation of review outcomes
• Valuable ‘checks and balances’ and transparency
• More focused scrutiny work
Challenges: Communication

- Communicating outcomes
- Demonstrating value of scrutiny
- Website
- Better information about role of non-executive councillors and overview and scrutiny
Challenges: External scrutiny

• Better engagement with outside agencies
• Making an impact where services delivered in partnership
• Wider remit – using new powers to scrutinise local partners and look at public services delivered across locality
• Opportunities around health, crime and disorder, education, community cohesion
Challenges: Role of OSMB

• Is there a continuing role for OSMB?
• Duplicating role of Committees?
• Could the coordinating role be done differently?
Next steps

For discussion:

• What are the priority areas for improvement?

• What are the key actions to be taken?