

### Scrutiny Workshop: Ways of Working

Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2018

#### Workshop Tables – Session Notes

##### Table 1

##### Session One

###### *Commission meetings*

- Re: Work programme setting – OSMB having control – is this a “safeguard” against chairs veering off course?
- Re: Agenda planning meetings – critical to plan outcomes, plan questioning, arrange continuation between meetings to ensure the line of questioning continues on a given topic.
- Importance of engaging the **right** officer for a particular issue to ensure that the right information is provided.
- Alternative arrangement for selecting chairs? Could this be agreed by members within their political party – not just by whips?

###### *Working Groups*

- Chairs could be elected by the Working Group once membership has been decided.
- Collective agreement re: when meetings are scheduled.
- Investigate different digital methods of meeting or working eg. site visits, Skype/digital conferencing
- Criteria for topic selection need to be clear BUT also open-ended enough to allow further refinement/focus.
- Balance between people having their say and dominating the discussion – needs to be the right balance to ensure we make maximum use of time (this applies to Commissions as well).
- Use members with specific skills/interests to find out/research specific areas and report back (this applies to Commissions as well).
- Chairs need to be able to lead/manage BUT also need a check/balance on this.
- Methods of communication need to address the issue of less resources eg. making better use of Alfresco to display relevant information (NB. Mod.gov is not popular).
- Need to be very clear about outcomes.
- Topic selection – all members need to have the opportunity to put topics forward, but subsequent to this, clear criteria is needed for selection – this should include the requirement to focus down on which part of the topic is relevant and what the possible outcomes could look like.

- Need to ask Cabinet members what their priorities are and what they need help with or what they would like Scrutiny to focus on.

## **Session Two**

- Working Groups should be reporting back to Commissions and not to OSMB.
- Working Groups should be established in consultation with chairs of all commissions in order that any cross-cutting issues are picked up and incorporated into the scope of the working group, where appropriate.
- Agreed that working groups do not have to be politically proportionate (although need to be mindful of the political makeup i.e. a single party working group is not desirable). No requirement for pol prop means that groups can attract people with interest/relevant skills.
- Important that working groups can operate informally i.e. without bureaucracy.
- Agreed that the departmental model (Sample 3) was preferred as this model is the most logical and the clearest, but with a 60/40 split (i.e. 60% commission meetings) – therefore we need to reduce the number of formal commission meetings. Also agreed that the MTFP/Budget group should become a Finance sub-committee of OSM (with the chair receiving a SRA), and OSM should deal with Resources issues thereby taking on the 2x Resources meetings (so OSM would have 6 meetings).

## **Session Three – Sourcing Priorities for the Work Programme**

- Possible 'pipeline' for potential items for the work programme
- Members could be encouraged to lobby for items
- It's important to identify what's working / where are we failing as a council
- A process is needed or criteria developed to help decision making – criteria must be met
- Suggestion of a monthly Leads Meeting at which Chairs of groups and commissions feed ideas / suggestions into
  - Should potential items have to show they meet the criteria /check list before they get to a Leads Meeting
  - Or
  - Should members just be asked to make a case for items to be added?
- Suggestion of just inviting Cabinet Members to OSMB to provide information about what they are currently doing and what they will be doing in the next year or so – to help selection of topics
- Or invite Cabinet Members to an event – either way their input was seen as essential
- Cabinet Members key performance indicators – use these to identify issues
- Cabinet Members at scrutiny meetings for Q&As

- Perhaps shouldn't fully populate the work programme – instead leave some space for future unknown items
- Participants were divided about if they thought an event was a good idea

## Table 2 Session Notes

### Session 1 Future Key Principles

#### Working / Task and Finish Groups:

- Members said it was difficult to agree on the allocation of resources for something that hadn't yet been defined –don't yet know how big or small the projects will be.
- It was suggested that a feasibility phase could be undertaken to enable OSMB to determine the viability of the topic before any work commences. Feasibility stage would encompass the following points:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Scopes<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Well-defined parameters aims and objectives</li><li>- Agreed by OSMB</li></ul></li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Scheduling and timing are crucial and must be checked before initiating work</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Clear criteria for topic selection</li></ul>

- Acknowledged that it's not always possible to set dates for group working far in advance i.e. we can't always predict when relevant information will be available. Has meant it's been difficult for some members to engage the process of group working.
- Acknowledgement that the current trial has been taking place whilst there's been an organisational re-design taking place within the council. This has caused some additional difficulties with some groups.
- Member development needs – members still feel they'd like to highlight learning needs. Not had the chance since induction sessions
- Add 'agreed senior officer involvement' to working group guiding principles (as well as commission meetings).
- Agreed protocol regarding Cabinet Member involvement –suggested that each individual group should decide depending on the topic
- The policy/report/outcomes 'cycle' or process for scrutiny recommendations should be made more explicit.

#### ➤ ***General consensus on the tabled 'guiding principles' for group-working***

### Scrutiny Commissions

- Chair selection:
  - Whips need to be aware of the views of other group members with regards to the choice of future chairs

- There was interest in the recommendation from the Parliamentary Select Committee regarding trial of secret ballots for choosing commission chairs
- Public Engagement – as a separate subject needs requires further discussion.
- ‘Update Reports’ should also be ‘information only’ reports i.e. published in papers but not take up precious meeting time
- General agreement about widening the invitation to planning meetings
- Add a point to the list that says briefing should be separated from commission meetings. Anything that resembles a briefing should be removed from the agendas.
- Could the KPI Reports be for ‘information purposes only’ and only concerns raised when required?
  - Pre-scrutiny briefings – request that they are part of a member induction process.
  - General briefings – Members would like officers to explain the ‘what /why/ & why now’s’ (basic information) when they send notification.

***General consensus on the tabled guiding principles for scrutiny commissions***

**Table 2 - Session 2: A hybrid scrutiny model?**

- Suggestion that scrutiny is divided between 3 types OSMB / Overview / Working groups
- Members undecided if working groups should stem from OSMB or the commissions
- Suggestion that cross-cutting subjects should be always be considered for joint working between commissions or working groups.
- Concerns raised again about commission chairs politicising position and whips role in assuring the right people were selected.
- Majority of table in favour of the Departmental Mode. The split should not however be tilted so much in favour of commission and should be rebalanced to 70 /30 or 60/40 (80/20 was deemed to be too far).

**Table 2 – Session 3 -Sourcing Priorities for the Scrutiny Work Programme**

- Members stressed the importance of scheduling the work programme in terms of short term, medium term and long term considerations
- Importance of identifying cross cutting themes
- Importance of understanding the remit of the directorates
- What do council services look like to real people- how do we know – what can we do about it
- The need for Cllrs to be informed before engaging the public
- How was the work reflecting the voice of the public
- Importance of balancing needs of the individual over needs of the city or a wider group
- Importance of a process to funnel items and understand where scrutiny can and cannot have an impact or add value
- There was a role to make the Council better for citizens who need to interact with the Council e.g. is Full Council the only or last resort for people in the form of protest?
- What is the one city plan? Communicating that better
- Start by populating the work programme with the statutory items and then consider the issues and allow some flexibility for emerging items

- Look for big items like recommissioning of services
- Avoid duplication – is the subject being considered elsewhere
- Some members felt that OSMB should have a strategic overview function which requires different skills to commission function and should focus on the corporate view
- Some members felt that a strict hierarchy could waste precious time micro managing whilst others felt that it was important that Commissions did not veer off course
- Some agreement that commission chairs attend OSMB planning for consensus/agreement around new agenda items or working groups but concern that timing may be an issue
- Process for funnelling should include suggestion with justification and desired outcome into a ranking system
- Cllrs need to understand what has gone before as not to duplicate work of previous years
- Need list of services along with recommendations from Directorates, quality of life surveys
- Agree work programme setting should involve an information session followed by discussion in political groups, political groups feed in priorities with justification and desired outcome and system for monitoring scrutiny recommendations
- Induction could be programmed to Committees Cllrs are on or give them the option to choose – couple of months of learning before scrutiny work programming
- Need Cllr development as a complimentary/parallel programme – to understand what to do and how to do it
- Scrutiny councillor development important

## **Table 3 – Session notes**

### **Session One – Key Principles**

#### **Working Groups**

- Chairs
  - should not necessarily steer the work of the group
  - be responsible for Agenda management
  - have Good communication with officers to facilitate and ensure understanding and focus of the group
  - Must want to Chair the group
  - Must be able to Chair in respect of skills and availability
  - Should know the subject matter or be willing to research the topic
  - Must have experience or have access to training
- Membership
  - Should incorporate a system of nominated substitutes (to take account of a range of personal circumstances including health issues)
- Scheduling and timing
  - Should have flexibility to allow for recurring groups eg MTFP/Budget
  - Should have a process for activating and deactivating groups when workflow dictates
- Attendance
  - Invite Cabinet Members to all meetings in an advisor/observation role
  - Be clear when Cabinet members attendance is required or optional
  - Not passive attendance use opportunity for Cabinet members to take actions away
- Communication
  - Group members should be proactive in liaising and engaging with their political groups to ensure that the groups' views are represented and the groups are kept informed
- Accessibility
  - The Status of the meeting can affect members ability to attend a meeting particularly in respect of members who require taxis for medical reasons or disability – may require a change in the constitution

#### **Commission Meetings**

- Chairing:
  - facilitating members to express their opinions, consensus building and have a role of summing up, confirming agreed outcomes
  - Agenda management
  - Good communication with officers to facilitate and ensure understanding and focus of the meeting
  - Must want to Chair the meeting and commission
  - Must be able to Chair in respect of skills and availability
  - Should know the subject matter or be willing to research the topic

- Must have experience or have access to training
- Dates and frequency
  - - achieve consensus around balance of evening and daytime meetings
  - - awareness of timetabling so cllrs/officers do not have 16hr days
- Meeting papers
  - should not be larger than capacity manageable in mod.gov circa 200 pages, is there a way to reduce size of documents. Must give consideration to accessibility. Complications on iPad where there is constant shifting between portrait and landscape. Try to maintain a consistent and accessible format.
  - Important to circulate papers as soon as possible to give Cllrs the time needed to prepare
  - Officers to give more consideration to report layout – e.g. planning reports- photographs can be too small
  - Use of Appendices to capture very technical information instead of within reports
  - Use of web links or web addresses to allow members to link to other policy documents or web based information rather than within reports
  - Reports and Slide decks must be circulated in advance of the meeting so that accessible from iPad. Large screen presentations not always accessible to all members depending on the meeting space, room layout, font etc.
  - Important for officers to be prepared to engage in Q&A, for scrutiny and discussion not just present reports
- Agenda Planning Meetings
  - more need for draft papers at this stage to engage properly
  - open invitation to all members welcome or mechanism to feed in ideas, concern that proportionality may reduce the influence of the leads
  - more use of technology such as Skype Business or Lync to enable remote access communications
- Cabinet Member involvement
  - Acknowledge everyone's time is equally precious
  - More flexibility – use Lync technology to advise officers/Cabinet members when actually needed in the meeting
- Technology
  - Makes sense to make more use of technology including video
  - Explore/Pursue video access in meeting rooms
  - Explore/Pursue Skype for Business for ipads
  - Ensure that skype is able to 'talk' to Lync, which would increase accessibility and engagement eg around childcare, health, availability, substitutes
  - design protocol for remote access to exempt meetings – involving a level of trust Cllr discretion
- Committee Rooms
  - Lighting is terrible - too dim in most cases – please do something to address
  - Book appropriate rooms for the membership access requirements eg are there 2 wheelchair users – think about the space

## Session Two – a Hybrid Scrutiny model

- Departmental Alignment agreed as preferred model
- More likely to get the right officers in the room
- More clarity around remits
- Commission members build expertise in a subject matter
- some members were concerned more meetings required and wanted flexibility for planning extra meetings if and when required
- task and finish a good model for junior cllrs to get feet wet, gain knowledge and experience in an informal setting, concern that senior cllrs tend to take a lead in public meetings
- Care and Safeguarding not as suited to task and finish
- Agreed health needed more prominence
- Concern that things could still fall through the gaps
- Type: Ideal to focus on horizon scanning and policy development. Engaging early enough to ask the awkward questions that will make the greatest influence/impact.
- Not as useful to focus on Cabinet decisions, which may not be the priority for scrutiny activity
- Role of good scrutiny: focus on critical friend role and making an impact on delivery of public services

Model	Balance of Scrutiny Activity			
	OSMB	Formal Meetings	Informal working Groups	%Split
Departmental Alignment	4 meetings	18 meetings	5 groups	80%-20%

## Session Three – Sourcing Priorities/Work Programme

1. Technical information and statutory changes to be fed in by officers
2. Review of regular/standing items – all needed? Some items can be dealt with by briefings
3. Topics prioritised by a small group ie OSMB but topics sourced from a wider pool of members
4. Cabinet members can make suggestions
5. Topics can be sourced from external partners but not general public
6. Officer input welcome – but over control should be avoided
7. Balance between having enough information and member's selection process
8. Councillors could support officers by keeping a watching brief
9. Pre-briefing materials needed before picking topics not at the session
10. Flex to add things – keep space on each agenda – plan at planning meeting. 50% long term items, 50% last minute.
11. Short updates to be used more but not updates for the sake of it
12. Define Key Lines of Inquiry – what is it?, why is it coming?, how can scrutiny contribute?
13. Reports in plain English/accessible/avoid jargon. Quality varies – need standardised formatting. Not all accessible currently. Need better templates. Report length an issue – wastes time.
14. Briefing notes and reports are different
15. Pictures need to be high resolution

## **Table 4 – Session notes**

### **Session One**

#### Working / Task & Finish Groups

- Chairing – training would be beneficial. Consideration of a fair way to allocate SRA's is a matter for the independent remuneration panel.
- Agendas – forward Plan needed. Need to set a good work programme initially
- Decision pathway must work
- Need to keep watch on WECA's forward plan too
- Meeting papers – agree that published information reports shouldn't be discussed at the meeting.
- Could the use of skype-type technology be used more widely?
- Table didn't agree on the point about an open invitation to planning meetings

#### Commission Meetings

- Training for Chairs would be beneficial
- Membership, agree about continuity & whips allocating.
- Proportionality of groups – mixed views about this point. Seven members is a good guide but shouldn't be fixed. Could also be a minimum of four i.e. one from group – skills are vital.
- Scopes – agree. Have a feasibility stage and OSMB sign-off (flexibility is good to a degree but must avoid mission-creep).
- Timing point – agreed.
- Topics – need to focus on the question-in-hand and suggestions should come from the commissions but is for OSMB to allocate the work.
- Try not to do things too far in advance.
- Agreed - protocol for Cabinet Members
- Public involvement is up to the chairs discretion
- Meetings without officers are ok

### **Session Two**

- Option 5: No - is too briefing orientated
- Option 1: No - we need areas of focus
- Option 3: Yes - Departmental alignment. Could have more than 1 department within a commission (would allow more T&F time).
- T&Fs – crosscutting topics / work – so commission work is more focussed

### Session Three

- Forward Plan should to an extent determine the work of the Commissions. However it is acknowledges that lots of items will not be on it.
- Need information from officers at the workshop session: list on ongoing workstreams in departments; areas where officers require scrutiny input; work coming up in near/longer term; areas where performance is a concern; what officers consider to be the department's priorities/challenges
- Important to define success measures/ outcomes of scrutiny items (especially working groups) **at the time of setting the work programme and if these are unclear to be prepared to reject them as scrutiny topics.**
- KPIs are critical when setting work programme - members should focus on the red ones and also on where the council does badly re: VFM – this latter should be a major red flag for scrutiny.
- We need to incorporate external sources of information and views into the setting of the work programme eg. ask the "Voice" groups for their suggestions for scrutiny priorities and feed these into the work programme setting process.