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## **SCRUTINY REVIEWS**

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### **Report by Service Director Strategy and Policy**

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## **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**29 January 2015**

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### **1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report gives details of previous Scrutiny reviews and seeks approval for the criteria and processes for future Scrutiny reviews.**
- 1.2 Within its remit, the Scrutiny Committee has a role in reviewing the effectiveness of the Council's work against agreed standards, targets and budgets for the level of services provided, as well as acting as a focus for value for money and service quality exercises. The Scrutiny Committee may also have any matter referred to it for consideration by Council or the Executive. In practice, this will mean that the Scrutiny Committee will likely seek proposals for areas for further review from a number of sources e.g. Elected Members, Community Councils, partner organisations, members of the public, for inclusion in a work programme.
- 1.3 In devising a programme of work for approval by Council, Members should be mindful of the need to demonstrate objectivity by developing a set of criteria against which individual proposals could be assessed. The first stage could be one or two threshold criteria. If the threshold criteria are met, then further points could then be taken into consideration.
- 1.4 There are a number of ways in which the Scrutiny Committee can proceed with reviews: through information hearings; more in depth hearings; and also through Working Groups. Details are given in the Appendix to this report of the actions taken or outstanding on the previous items included in the last Scrutiny work programme. Members are being asked to consider how they wish to take forward a future programme of work for the new Scrutiny Committee.

### **2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 I recommend that the Scrutiny Committee:-**
  - (a) notes the details of previous Scrutiny reviews; and**
  - (b) approves the criteria and processes for use in future Scrutiny reviews; and**
  - (c) considers how best to take forward its future work programme.**

### **3 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 Within its remit, the Scrutiny Committee has a role in reviewing the effectiveness of all the Council's work against agreed standards, targets and budgets for the level of services provided, as well as acting as a focus for value for money and service quality exercises. The Scrutiny Committee may also have any matter referred to it for consideration by Council or the Executive.
- 3.2 In practice, this will mean that the Scrutiny Committee will likely seek proposals for areas for further review from a number of sources e.g. Elected Members, Community Councils, partner organisations, members of the public, for inclusion in a work programme.

### **4 ASSESSMENT OF PROPOSALS FOR REVIEWS**

- 4.1 In devising a programme of work for approval by Council, Members should be mindful of the need to demonstrate objectivity by developing a set of criteria against which individual proposals could be assessed.
- 4.2 The first stage could be one or two threshold criteria. If these were not met then the theme or issue being proposed would not be considered further. This would avoid abortive time being spent on issues or themes which were either inappropriate for review or where review would not be productive. The two threshold criteria proposed are:
  - Is the scope of the review clear and concise?
  - Is the proposed review within the scope of the Council and its objectives?
- 4.3 If the threshold criteria are met, then further points could then be taken into consideration –
  - Is it expected that the outcome of the review will be that services improve?
  - To what extent could the review lead to a reduction in costs of a service?
  - To what extent could the review lead to an increase in income for the Council?
  - How much budget is involved?
  - How important to the public is the topic proposed for review?
  - Does the scope of the review take into account equalities for minority and other groups or particular sections of the Borders community?
  - Is there any performance deficit associated with the topic proposed for review?
  - Is the review business critical to the Council's strategic objectives?
- 4.4 Other factors to be taken into consideration include the potential scale of any review and the resources needed to take the review forward. Members may wish to consider other points for assessing topics for review.

### **5 TYPE OF REVIEW**

- 5.1 There are a number of ways in which the Scrutiny Committee can proceed with reviews. The first of these is through an information Hearing. Depending on the topic for review, invitations are made to officers, portfolio holders and, if appropriate, representatives of other organisations to attend a Scrutiny Committee meeting and make a presentation on a particular subject. Members of Scrutiny could then decide whether to consider the

subject further either through a more detailed Hearing or through the setting up of a Working Group to make a more thorough investigation.

- 5.2 In a similar way to an information Hearing, a more focussed Hearing could be arranged, whereby members of Scrutiny submit in advance to officers, portfolio holders and representatives of other organisations, questions which they wish answered. At the relevant Scrutiny meeting, these pre-submitted questions would be supplemented by others, to allow Scrutiny members to delve deeper into the particular topic. The Scrutiny Committee could either make recommendations based on their findings or decide that the matter required the setting up of a Working Group to probe further.
- 5.3 Again, depending on the topic, the Scrutiny Committee could decide to set up a Working Group straight away as the best way to take matters forward, with a report on the findings and conclusions of the Working Group being considered by the Scrutiny Committee. Membership of these Working Groups would not just be confined to members of Scrutiny, but include other Councillors, as well as, where appropriate, representatives from other agencies. Should specialist knowledge be required, then invitations could be made to experts to address a Working Group or to become a member of, or advisor to, such a Group.
- 5.4 Any Working Group set up by the Scrutiny Committee to investigate a particular topic should be required to submit for approval of the Committee a detailed remit in advance of its work. This will ensure that the Committee can check that the Working Group has not strayed from its original remit.
- 5.5 The breadth of some reviews will need to be taken into consideration, as will the number of reviews being undertaken at any given time, to ensure that members do not become over-burdened and resources are not stretched too thinly. Depending on the subject matter, officers from various Services of the Council can provide support to Scrutiny hearings and Working Groups.

## **6 PREVIOUS SCRUTINY REVIEWS**

- 6.1 At its meeting on 16 August 2012, Scrutiny received a briefing note listing the subject areas which had been included on the Scrutiny Work Programme for 2013. Given the forthcoming change to the committee structure at that time, Scrutiny agreed actions for each of the subject areas. Details are given in the Appendix to this report of the actions taken or outstanding on the previous items included in the last Scrutiny work programme.
- 6.2 Members are now asked to consider how they wish to take forward a future programme of work for the new Scrutiny Committee.

## **7 IMPLICATIONS**

### **7.1 Financial**

There are no costs attached to any of the recommendations contained in this report.

### **7.2 Risk and Mitigations**

There is a reputational risk to the Council should the Scrutiny Committee adopt a programme of work that is either too onerous and risks not being completed, or that it focuses on 'soft' subjects or easy options so that the programme fails to deliver sufficient independent scrutiny of the particular

subject matter. Establishment of a realistic, appropriate programme of work is thus essential. Another risk could be if any outcomes or recommendations arising from reviews are too impractical or unrealistic e.g. for financial or service resources available, to be taken up or put into effect. This risk is addressed through the Scrutiny Code of Practice.

### 7.3 Equalities

In developing a programme of work, the Scrutiny Committee will take into account any potential impact on any particular group of clients, residents or staff by ensuring that any subsequent recommendations do not discriminate on the basis of age, disability, gender, race, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity or religion and belief and where possible promote equality and good relations with equality groups.

### 7.4 Acting Sustainably

There are no specific economic, social or environmental effects of the proposals in this report.

### 7.5 Carbon Management

There is no impact on the Council's carbon emissions.

### 7.6 Rural Proofing

Rural proofing is not required as these proposals apply to all areas of the Borders.

### 7.7 Changes to Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation

No changes are required to either the Scheme of Administration or the Scheme of Delegation as a result of the proposals contained in this report.

## 8 CONSULTATION

8.1 The Council's Corporate Management Team, the Monitoring Officer, the Chief Legal Officer, the Chief Officer Audit and Risk, and the Chief Officer HR have been consulted on the contents of this report.

### Approved by

**Name**            **David Cressey**                            **Signature .....**  
**Title**            **Service Director Strategy and Policy**

### Author(s)

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**Background Papers:** Previous Scrutiny reports

**Previous Minute Reference:** Scrutiny, 16 August 2012

**Note** – You can get this document on tape, in Braille, large print and various computer formats by contacting the address below. Jenny Wilkinson can also give information on other language translations as well as providing additional copies.

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