

Update from Chairman of Overview & Scrutiny Committee on the workload of the Committee

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee considered a report at its meeting in January, which sought to build upon the strength of scrutiny at Warwick District Council and address its workload capacity. This was built upon feedback from the Committee itself over discussions at its meetings this municipal year.

The Committee took this opportunity to significantly overhaul its work programme and consider why reports were due to be considered by them. They agreed that in all cases a matter must meet at least one of five agreed criteria. The workplan has been updated by officers, to be more focused on set themes at each meeting, providing focus for the Committee. This revised format will be considered by the Committee on 6 February to confirm the approach being taken.

To supplement this the Committee will also become more focussed on key areas of risk, looking at themes within the Significant Business Risk Register and risks associated with high value projects and contracts. To this end the 10 most valuable contracts are appended to the work plan in February for the Committee to consider if it wishes to look at any of them in greater detail.

The Committee recognises the importance of scrutinising the finances of the Council and while this is one of the criteria for adding items to the work programme the Committee have also decided to look longer term in respect of finances. To achieve this they will be receiving a report on the Medium Term Financial Strategy, to look at the challenges predicted and the actions being proposed to achieve this. This will be combined with a briefing to ensure the Committee are aware of the importance of the MTFs. A similar report has also been requested on the Housing Revenue Account. This approach, to looking more longer terms is supplemented by retaining the ¼ budget reports as standing items for the Committee to consider as a further piece of assurance.

The Committee have implemented a new report template for itself to provide more focussed reports on key aspects, such as performance, budget control and risk.

As previously explained the Committee now has four additional meetings a year (away from the Cabinet Cycle) to focus on key themes it wants to explore further (one such meeting was the January meeting). The Council has established the Budget Review Working Group which meets in public to look at fees and charges and the budget in detail.

These also supplement the set criteria for the Committee to look at Cabinet items to provide more of a consistent approach.

The Committee are also becoming aware that Councillors more widely need to be briefed on specific issues it identifies and it is now also keeping a record of these and times when it will be appropriate for officers to be briefing all Councillors.

The Committee takes the opportunity to remind all Councillors they have access to service area plans (which include performance and risk management data amongst other information) which they should all be looking at regularly.

Combined the Committee feels this work makes their role more manageable/sustainable, but it will continue to be self-reflective on this area and will provide further feedback to Council as part of its end of term report.

Andrew Milton
Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee