

TO: ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 15TH JULY 2003

SUBJECT: FUTURE METHODS OF WORKING AND PROSPECTIVE WORK PLAN

FROM: STRATEGIC DIRECTOR

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To consider a work programme for the forthcoming year and to agree the means of tackling that work.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 At its meeting in June 2003, the committee looked again at the prospective work plan that had been drafted before the end of the last municipal year. Members identified a number of issues that were thought to be a priority for this committee as follows:

- The work of partner organizations, in terms of nexus with the Council's corporate strategy and also performance review;
- Car Park income and usage;
- The work of Action 21; and
- The public conveniences contract.

- 2.2 Other items were considered that in the future will be unlikely to fall within the remit of this committee, as the proposed constitutional changes in respect of overview and scrutiny arrangements will allocate them elsewhere, such as:

- Review of Warwick Market Place; and
- The Cultural Quarter.

- 2.3 In addition, after every quarter of the financial year, performance monitoring reports will be presented for close consideration by each of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees simultaneously.

- 2.4 A further copy of this prospective work plan is attached at Appendix 1, amendments having been made to reflect the matters debated at the June meeting.

2.5 In order to refine it further and to construct a work plan that makes a full contribution to the corporate governance of the Council (whilst recognizing the need to ensure that it can be reasonably achieved in practice), members are invited to consider the core issues, themes and topics upon which they would like the committee to focus its attentions to deliver an effective overview and scrutiny function. By way of background information, officers have conducted some research on the evolution of this function in other councils. Attached at Appendix 2 is a diagram which shows the 7 stage process adopted by the London Borough of Newham. Whilst it is not wholly appropriate to the needs of this council, it is suggested that members test its applicability to the key issues that they would like to progress in their own work plan.

2.6 Reaching agreement as to the issues to be adopted for this committee is represented by stage 1 of the Newham model. The next step will be to answer the following questions in relation to the issues themselves:

- Upon which aspect of a particular issue is it appropriate to focus?
- What evidence is required and from whom?
- Is an expert witness required?
- How is each piece of evidence best presented; in written form, by telephone, or face to face?
- Where will evidence be taken?
- Is the co-option of a user or expert appropriate?
- What level of research is required?
- How can the public best be involved?
- Is it desirable to generate publicity for this work?

2.7 Consideration of these questions will allow officers to devise a final programme for approval by members. Naturally, this process will be undertaken for all of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees simultaneously and at the same time, officers will ensure that any matters common to all of them, such as the quarterly consideration of performance management information, joint development events, or consideration of aspects of the corporate strategy, are treated consistently in the work programme of each of the committees.

3. POLICY AND BUDGETARY FRAMEWORK

3.1 The decisions of the Committee in respect of the work programme will determine implications for the use of resources – primarily officer time. However, this in itself should not cause any additional expenditure to be incurred outside that already contained within agreed budgets. Should this not be the case (and if additional resources are likely to be required), then officers will inform members in advance.

3.2 Recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny committees make a crucial and significant contribution to the Council's corporate governance, as well as positively influencing the development of its policy framework.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 That the Committee agrees the key items that will be overseen and scrutinized over the next year as the basis for its work programme;
- 4.2 That the Committee agrees to use the model attached at Appendix 2 as a trial approach;
- 4.3 That the Committee agrees responses to the questions listed at paragraph 2.6 for each item that will form the work programme; and
- 4.4 That officers report to the next meeting with a final timetable for the work programme for the Committee's consideration.

Nigel Roberts
Strategic Director

Background Papers

Report to Scrutiny Committee – 17th June 2003

Areas in District Affected: All

Key Decision: No

Included in Forward Plan: No

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