

Open Report on behalf of Richard Wills, Executive Director Responsible for Democratic Services

Report to:	Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee
Date:	28 January 2016
Subject:	Review of Scrutiny

Summary:

This report seeks to summarise the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee when it considered the independent report following a review of scrutiny at Lincolnshire County Council and provide a framework for delivering improvements.

Actions Required:

Councillors are invited to:

- 1) note the progress already made on the recommended changes to scrutiny at Lincolnshire County Council.
- 2) establish a working group to consider the recommendations in detail and report back to the Committee on the options for delivery, in accordance with the terms of reference attached as Appendix A to this report.
- 3) agree the membership of the working group and timescales for the group to report back to the Committee.

1. Background

Story so far

1.1 At its meeting on 21 December 2015, the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee considered an independent report prepared by Dr Stuart Young, Executive Director at East Midlands Councils.

1.2 The report included 17 recommendations designed to improve the way scrutiny is carried out at Lincolnshire County Council, both culturally and structurally.

1.3 It had been considered by Council on 18 December 2015, when there had been broad support for the recommendations. Council agreed that the Overview

and Scrutiny Management Committee should lead on the implementation of the recommendations. It was further agreed by Council that structural changes, based on the '5+1 model', should be implemented in time for the 2017 County Council election.

1.4 The Committee accepted responsibility for leading on this work and agreed that a working group of its members should be established to consider the recommendations in detail and report back to the Committee with options for implementation.

Support for recommendations

1.5 The Committee expressed broad support for all the recommendations and noted that there were some areas for improvement that could be implemented with immediate effect. These included:

- Improvements to the communication lines between the Executive and Scrutiny Committees. The Committee felt there should be more feedback from the Executive on its response to recommendations and comments from scrutiny. The Committee also felt there was a role for Scrutiny Chairmen/Vice-Chairmen to attend Executive meetings to give a flavour of the debate at scrutiny.
- There was a view that scrutiny should be involved earlier in the decision-making process to help develop the policy.
- It was felt that corporate communications could help to demonstrate impacts and benefits of scrutiny work.
- There was widespread acceptance that there would be benefit in developing councillors' scrutinising skills. (Members were informed that a development session was being organised for 11 February 2016 with questioning skills and agenda setting among the topics for development).
- The Committee felt that scrutiny officers should assume a greater advisory role.
- It was largely accepted that there was a need for more effective leadership on scrutiny matters. The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee would play a major role in this, which was reflected by the Council's decision to give the responsibility for scrutinising the council's overall budget and performance to the Committee.

Next steps

1.6 Members may have already noticed examples of improvements to the way the Council approaches overview and scrutiny. There has been a marked increase in the detailed comments from the scrutiny committees to the Executive in recent months. There have also been recent examples of increased public engagement. It is suggested that the working group should focus on maintaining that improvement through:

- a) Culture change
- b) Closer working with the Executive
- c) Structural change

1.7 A draft terms of reference for the working group is attached at Appendix A for members to consider.

1.8 In view of the Council's wish to have the new structure in place for the 2017 election, it is suggested that the working group could report back to the Committee in April on closer working with the Executive; in July on cultural change; and November on structural change.

2. Conclusion

An independent report has recommended a number of areas of improvement to the way the Council approaches scrutiny. This Committee has been given the lead role in implementing those recommendations. It is suggested that the Committee establishes a working group to look at the recommendations in detail and report back to this Committee.

3. Consultation

a) Policy Proofing Actions Required

n/a

4. Appendices

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix A	Scrutiny Review Working Group Terms of Reference

5. Background Papers

The following background papers as defined in the Local Government Act 1972 were relied upon in the writing of this report.

Document title	Where the document can be viewed
A Review of Scrutiny at Lincolnshire County Council - Final Report	Democratic Services

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