

APPENDIX B

REPORT TO THE SCRUTINY TASK GROUP MEETING OF 07 JANUARY 2016

Status:	For Consideration
Title:	Review of the Scrutiny Function at Harborough District Council
Originator:	Cllr Paul Dann
Where from:	Scrutiny Commission – 3rd September 2015
Where to next:	Scrutiny Commission – 3rd March 2016

Objective:

To inform the Scrutiny Task Group of the results of informal consultations carried out by the Chairman of the Scrutiny Commission on the future of the scrutiny function.

1 Background

- 1.1 At its meeting on 3rd September 2015 the Scrutiny Commission received a report on the future role of Scrutiny function at Harborough District Council and resolved to establish a Scrutiny Task Group to review the scrutiny function and report back to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Commission; the Scrutiny Commission report is attached as Appendix A to this report. Membership of the Task Group was subsequently agreed and the Scrutiny Commission resolved on 26th November 2015 that the first meeting of the Group should be held on 7th January 2016.
- 1.2 Between the two Scrutiny meetings, the Chairman of Scrutiny invited a small group drawn from members of the Scrutiny Commission to meet as an informal 'sounding-board' to bring forward ideas that could then be fed into the formal work of this Task Group. The 'sounding-board' members were also asked to share ideas with other members in their political groups to broaden involvement and stimulate a wider debate. The group met on two occasions and its discussions have been distilled to form the body of this report, under the following headings:
- Assessment of existing arrangements
 - Structure
 - Reporting arrangements
 - Timetable.

2 Assessment of Existing Arrangements

- 2.1 Things that were considered to work well and should retained included:
- Scrutiny Task Groups / Task and Finish Groups:
 - allow informal discussion

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- focussed
- Annual budget meeting for Resource & Performance Panel, which is open to all Scrutiny members

2.2 Things that were considered to be less successful included:

- the size of the Scrutiny Commission could be cumbersome
- involvement of the whole Scrutiny Commission in setting the Scrutiny Workplan might be streamlined by allowing a smaller group to produce the draft workplan, which would then be available for comment / signed off electronically by all Scrutiny Members
- the method for dealing with reports back from Task Groups
- dealing with performance reports by Executive portfolio holders

2.3 Themes which could be explored in greater detail:

- electronic sign-off of the Scrutiny Workplan
- the idea of the Scrutiny Commission acting as a third Scrutiny Panel
- timing of Scrutiny meetings, so that the sequence of Scrutiny Commission and Panels would take place within the same month

3 Structure

3.1 The structure could be based around a smaller Scrutiny Commission that would function as a steering group for the scrutiny function, but with the option of it taking on the role of another Scrutiny Panel, if desired.

3.2 Scrutiny Commission / Steering Group:

- Functions:
 - to establish the draft Scrutiny Workplan
 - to determine the final version of the Scrutiny Workplan (technology to be used to sign-off workplan)
 - to receive recommendations from Scrutiny Panels
 - to receive draft TEN reports:
 - look at 'red' items
 - make it more exciting
 - restrict the report to one side of A4 - template: where are we? - good / bad / changes
 - report to go to Scrutiny Commission first – to check if it is ok, or if more information is needed, before going to Scrutiny Panel(s)
- Composition:
 - politically balanced
 - membership:
 - Scrutiny Commissioner x1
 - Scrutiny Panel Chairs x2
 - other scrutiny (i.e. non-executive) members x7
 - quorum: 6 members
 - substitution:
 - allowed by other non-Exec. Members (no system of named substitutes required)

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- Vice-Chairs of Panels to be the first substitute for Panel Chairs
- non-Scrutiny Commission members can ask to speak at Scrutiny Commission

3.3 Scrutiny Panels:

- Options for Panels:
 - Panels could have flexible terms of reference, allowing reports to go to the next available Panel. This would help to equalise the workload between Panels.
 - 2 panels or 3 panels (2 + Scrutiny Commission)
- Functions:
 - to receive reports from Task & Finish Groups
 - to make recommendations to the Scrutiny Commission
 - to receive TEN reports (jointly or as two Panels)
- Composition:
 - Options:
 - combine two Panels to hold The Executive to account (only item on agenda)
 - split the portfolios between the two Panels, twice per annum (other items on the agenda)?

3.4 Task & Finish Groups

- Functions:
 - to scrutinise specific items as decided by the Scrutiny Commission
 - to report back to the Scrutiny Panel(s)
 - meetings to be private
 - only two Task & Finish Groups to be in existence at any one time, unless agreed in consultation with the Scrutiny Commission and the Head of Paid Service
- Composition:
 - recruited from all non-Exec. Members
 - the Scrutiny Commission will decide what business goes to Task & Finish Groups and who each T&F Group reports back to
 - Membership - 7 members, politically balanced
 - quorum: 4 members
 - substitution allowed

4 Reporting Arrangements

4.1 Draft TENS reports and the first draft of the Scrutiny Workplan could be dealt with electronically, by circulation to all Councillors. A formal meeting of the Scrutiny Commission would then agree the final Workplan.

4.2 TENS / half-yearly reports:

- only those Exec. Members who were required to address specific issues arising out of the TENS report would attend Scrutiny

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meetings, rather than all Exec. Members having to attend as a matter of course. The Chair of the Panel would decide which Exec. Members needed to attend.

- Portfolios might be divided between the Scrutiny Panels (and Commission, if a three-panel option is agreed)
- Portfolio holders would produce a written update (1 side of A4). Executive reports would not be restricted to historic information, but could include:
 - 'good news' / risks
 - historic data
 - forward looking / "emerging issues"

5 Timetable

5.1 The following timetable was agreed by the Scrutiny Commission:

- the Task Group to report back to the Scrutiny Commission at its meeting on 3rd March 2016
- New arrangements to be fed into Constitutional Review Committee at its meeting on 26th April 2016
- New arrangements to be approved at Annual Council on 23rd May 2016

5.2 It is suggested that the Task Group hold two meetings before reporting back to the Scrutiny Commission in March 2016.

Appendices:

A. Report to the Scrutiny Commission, 3rd September 2015