

To: Council

Date: 14th. April 2014

Report of: Chair of the Scrutiny Committee.

Title of Report: Scrutiny Briefing

Purpose of report: To update Council on the activities of scrutiny and other non executive councillors since the Committee was appointed in May.

Introduction

1. As this will be my last report to Council as Chair of Scrutiny Committee, I thought I would share some thoughts on the Committees work. Hopefully these will give other members and especially next year's committee something to mull over.

The transition to a single committee

2. Having one rather than two scrutiny committees has produced a number of benefits. Having a more select group of members sitting on the main Committee has resulted in an uptick in engagement. We no longer have members who go whole meetings without contributing. This is obviously a plus for the quality of discussion.
3. The extra emphasis placed on panels has produced some excellent work. I would particularly highlight the extraordinary efforts of Cllrs Campbell, Benjamin, Clarkson and Fooks to deliver an excellent report on the Covered Market.

The structure of individual meetings

4. As previously mentioned our meetings are getting longer. This is a product not just of the number of items we look at but also of the fact that a more engaged committee has more to say. This has drawbacks;

discussion at the end of a two and a half hour meeting is generally less illuminating or constructive than at the start.

5. The obvious option of delegation has its limits. There are many issues that deserve consideration by scrutiny but which cannot practically be dealt with by a panel or are not substantial enough to merit that option.
6. I would suggest that you consider imposing a time limit on each agenda item. As well as containing the lengths of meetings, this would also make it easier for people coming for items later on in the agenda, to know when they should arrive.

The use of surveys

7. Much of the evidence that comes before the committee comes from surveys. We need to ask how meaningful these are. They often produce a large number of statistics based on small samples that are not representative of the larger population. They may very well be statistically valid but we ought to perhaps ask whether these responses represent the experiences of anyone other than the survey respondents themselves.
8. If we are going to be working with small groups of respondents then I would suggest that a qualitative approach might be a more appropriate way of handling them.

Thanks

9. Many people have contributed to the work of the committee over the past year and there are a number to whom I wish to record my gratitude.
10. I would like to thank all the members who have sat on the committee or on a panel, and City Executive Board members who have discussed their portfolios with us. I owe a particular debt to Cllr Sanders for her work as my Vice Chair.
11. One of the encouraging facts about our work has been that so many members of the public have sought to contribute to our discussion. Their contributions are most welcome and I hope they will continue to come forward to assist us.
12. The Committee could not function without support from officers. Over the past year, dozens of them have stayed after hours to give us evidence. Even more important has been the sterling work of officers who directly contribute to the running of the Committee: Lois Stock and, most especially, Pat Jones.

Current Activity

13. The current programme is coming to an end and I attach the document containing all the recommendations from the year's work. This shows a high success rate for recommendations and serves to practically illustrate the hard work and good will of all.

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