

Norwich City Council

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

REPORT for meeting to be held on 10 September 2009

Implications of Establishing Scrutiny Panels

Purpose

At the 16 July 2009 meeting of the scrutiny committee, members asked the officers to prepare a report on the implications of establishing scrutiny panels for all service areas starting with housing.

This report suggests a way forward within current resource provision for the consideration of the scrutiny committee.

Recommendation

That members consider the report towards coming to a view on the future possible shape and focus of the Council's scrutiny function.

Executive Member: Councillor Alan Waters – Corporate Resources

Ward: All

Contact Officers: John Jones – Head of Legal and Democratic Services -
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Report

1. The Council currently has one scrutiny committee that considers Performance reports, service development (through ad hoc task and finish groups) and can pre-scrutinise proposals to the Executive.
2. Members of the Scrutiny Committee have expressed the view that they could be more effective in their role by setting up Service Review Panels, as this would enable them to become more familiar with the operation of services across the council.
3. As members will be aware from discussions at your last meeting the council will be undergoing a major improvement and efficiency programme in the next few months to achieve savings of £8.5 million from the general revenue fund budget and improve the way we work. In the light of this programme of work it is suggested that a two stage approach is adopted to reshape the way Scrutiny Committee works.
4. Stage one will be to revisit the Scrutiny Committee work programme in November and consider employing themed meetings of scrutiny for up to 12 months instead of the current more comprehensive approach. This would allow members to focus in on a particular service/topic area for two hours at a time and allow for more adequate advanced planning for officers and members. The scrutiny committee would be able to scope questions before the meeting in time for the witnesses to be informed for their preparations.
5. In order for the scrutiny committee to carry out its performance management role and pre budget scrutiny it is suggested that the themed meeting approach along with scrutiny's other commitments on the work programme could operate on an alternately monthly basis by swapping between corporate scrutiny issues one month and themed meetings the other.
6. By adopting the above approach the resource commitment should remain largely the same as Scrutiny Committee would still be meeting 12 times a year.
7. Stage two is to then review the overall approach for Scrutiny as part of the new organisation, and this to be considered for the next Civic year, in collaboration with the Constitution Working Party.