

Committee: Scrutiny

Date:

25 September 2018

Title: Centre for Public Scrutiny Action Plan

Author: Richard Auty, Assistant Director – Corporate Services

Summary

1. The Council commissioned The Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) to carry out a review to consider the effectiveness and impact of its current approach to overview and scrutiny.
2. This report contains the outcome of initial discussions between officers and the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee and members.

Recommendation

3. The Committee endorses the approach and actions proposed in the action plan to address the points raised by the CfPS.

Financial Implications

4. None. There are no financial implications associated with this report.

Background Papers

5. None

Impact

- 6.

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Communication/Consultation | Further discussion with Scrutiny members and members of the Executive will need to take place |
| Community Safety | None |
| Equalities | None |
| Health and Safety | None |
| Human Rights/Legal Implications | None |

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Sustainability | None |
| Ward-specific impacts | None |
| Workforce/Workplace | Addressing some recommendations will require changes in working practice |

Situation

7. Following the CfPS review of the Council's overview and scrutiny arrangements, Ian Parry from the CfPS presented his findings to the Committee earlier this year. The Committee accepted these recommendations.
8. The CfPS report was then considered by Cabinet, which also accepted the recommendations.
9. The CfPS report highlighted several strengths:
 - Scrutiny is generally well organised and is welcomed in the council.
 - Relationships between scrutiny members and officers are good and there is a general willingness to support scrutiny.
 - Scrutiny and executive members in general have a good relationship and scrutiny aims to be objective. It is not seen as threatening or negative.
 - Members appreciate the role of scrutiny and want it to become better.
 - In the main cabinet decisions are transparent and accessible for call-in or scrutiny.
 - Scrutiny members take their role seriously and are willing to develop and improve.
10. The report also summarised key areas for improvement:
 - Overview and scrutiny is underachieving. It lacks purpose and authority.
 - It is widely valued, but not consistently understood and there are wide differences of opinion about its purpose, potential and function.
 - It does not provide sufficient impact and value in shaping and improving decision-making and performance in the council.
 - Scrutiny is too focused on monitoring and therefore missing opportunities to provide strategic input.
 - There are signs that scrutiny is not integral to or valued as part of the decision and policy making process.
 - Cabinet is not sufficiently visibly accountable to scrutiny. Scrutiny is not effectively holding it to account. Cabinet members are often observers or not present at scrutiny meetings.

- There is too little structured scrutiny and too much consultative activity - information giving or clarification-seeking in scrutiny meetings.

11. The report then gave a series of recommendations.

12. Subsequent to these meetings, officers have discussed what improvements could be made to meet these recommendations and have also met with the Chairman of Scrutiny.

13. Attached as Appendix A is a table giving the CfPS recommendations, any additional commentary from the report and the views of officers about these recommendations.

14. The committee is invited to discuss this progress so far and make suggestions for any further areas of work required.

Risk Analysis

10.

| Risk | Likelihood | Impact | Mitigating actions |
|--|---|--|--|
| The council fails to act on the recommendations of the CfPS report, missing an opportunity to make lasting improvement to the council's scrutiny function. | 1 – The recommendations have been accepted by both the Scrutiny Committee and the Cabinet | 2 – The CfPS report acknowledged that some aspects of scrutiny work were effective | Officers will continue to work with members to develop the proposals to meet the recommendations |

1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.