

By: Paul Wickenden, Overview, Scrutiny and Localism Manager
To: Scrutiny Board – 1 February 2011
Subject: **Select Committee Work Programme**

Summary: To receive an update on the current Topic Review Programme and the resources available to deliver it.

1. Resources to Deliver the Select Committee Work Programme

(1). I currently have two and a half FTE Research officers supporting the Select Committee topic review programme. They are supported by three Democratic Services Officers from the Overview and Scrutiny team who also support the Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committees. In addition I have one Research officer who is dedicated entirely to the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee. There is also the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee Research Officer, who in addition to supporting this Committee also carry's out a number of specific projects to support the development of the Overview and Scrutiny function.

2. Select Committees that have completed their work

Renewable Energy and Extended Services Select Committee

(1) The Select Committees on Renewable Energy, under the Chairmanship of Mr Ferrin, and Extended Services under the Chairmanship of Mr Burgess, presented their reports to the Cabinet on 29 November 2010 and to County Council on 16 December 2010 where their reports were well received.

(2) In accordance with the monitoring process agreed by the County Council, an action sheet for the recommendations will be submitted the relevant POSC in March/April 2011 and the Select Committee will be re-convened at the end of 2011 to receive a report on progress with their recommendations.

3. Select Committee – Topic Review Programme

Educational Attainment Select Committee

(1) The Select Committee on Educational Attainment of *Pupils in Schools in Areas of High Deprivation* is due hold its inaugural meeting on 3 February 2011. Mr C Wells is the Chairman designate. Mr Wells as Chairman designate, and Mr Vye one of the proposers for this review met with the Cabinet Member and Managing Director on 3 November 2010 and discussed the scope of the review to narrow its focus into a manageable review.

(2) At the November meeting of the Board it was reported that the anticipated timescale for this Select Committee would be hearings taking place up until February 2011 with a report to the County Council in the summer

May/July. It is vital that we get the preparatory work before Select Committee start gathering evidence in person. This timetable has slipped which has enabled the support Team to engage the relevant people and get the focus right for the review before the hearing sessions start in earnest. As a consequence we are looking at a revised timetable of hearings in May/June/July – with a report to Cabinet and County Council in November /December respectively.

Select Committee: Dementia

(3) The Select Committee on Dementia has held its inaugural meeting and Mrs Dean has been elected Chairman. Work is being carried out, including the use of focus groups, to develop/finalise the Terms of Reference.

(4) At the November meeting of the Board it was reported that the anticipated timescale for this Select Committee would be to aim to submit a report to the July meeting of the County Council. Once again this timescale has proved to be optimistic - as once the work started in earnest to develop the terms of reference it became apparent that as a review this was an opportunity to explore different ways of working to deliver the anticipated outcomes for the review. Mrs Dean will wish to share her proposals with the Scrutiny Board which are in keeping with improving the effectiveness of the suite of Scrutiny Committees which have been discussed by the Board. (see paragraph 4 below) This review is now being planned for completion and reporting to the Cabinet and County Council in November /December respectively.

Select Committee - The Student Journey

(5) This review was agreed at the meeting of the Scrutiny Board on 3 November 2010, with a view to it starting work in Spring 2011. Background research is underway to support this Select Committee. The membership of the Select Committee and the Chairman Designate have yet to be identified. This review also presents an exciting opportunity to deliver a review in a new and innovative way.

(6) I anticipate that this review will not be completed and ready for reporting to the County Council until April 2012.

Timetabling of Reviews

(7) The Board will recall that the Leader asked that only one Select Committee should be on a County Council agenda so that all members of the County Council have the opportunity to debate the report in full. The Board will therefore need to bear in mind there are currently two reviews Education Attainment and the report of the Select Committee: Dementia which we currently envisage being ready for reporting to the December County Council meeting.

4. Webcasting of Select Committee meetings.

(1) The Select Committee on Dementia has suggested that hearings of that Select Committee should be webcast. The Scrutiny Board is asked to consider

this suggestion as it has the potential to set a precedent for other Select Committees.

(2) Whilst there are advantages in relation to potential engagement with the public in webcasting Select Committee hearings, there are a number of factors that need to be taken into account. Firstly permission of the witnesses would need to be sought and some, for example carers may be inhibited from giving evidence in a session that is posted on the web and their exact words publicly available. Currently an audio recording is made of all Select Committee hearings (to assist with the preparation of the minutes, and in case of any dispute over the evidence given) and a set of minutes (which are a detailed summary of the evidence rather than a verbatim note) produced and agreed with the witness. Another option would be to record the session using the webcast equipment and give witnesses editing rights before the recording is posted to the website.

(3) There is also an issue around resources available to webcast Select Committee hearings. Each review tends to hold an average of 20 hours of hearings. As we currently have three Select Committees there is the potential for approximately 60 hours of Select Committees, which has an officer resource and may have budgetary implication as the webcast contract is based upon a fixed number of hours (which additional hours being charged at a per hour basis). Further information on cost will be provided at the meeting if required.

(4) If the Board is minded to agree to the request to webcast the hearings of the Dementia Select Committee Members may wish to make it clear whether the webcasting of a Select Committee review hearings should be agreed by the Board on a review by review basis, subject to resources being available, and that if a witness does not wish to be webcast then there should just be an audio recording of that session, kept for office use.

4. Recommendations that

- (a) the progress of the Select Committee topic reviews on Renewable Energy and Extended Services be noted;
- (b) the progress and timescales for the Select Committees on Educational Attainment and Dementia and the Student Journey be approved;
- (c) the Boards views be sought on the principle of webcasting of Select Committee meetings if requested to do so.

Paul Wickenden
Tel No: 01622 694486
e-mail: paul.wickenden@kent.gov.uk

Background Papers – Nil