

By: Overview, Scrutiny and Localism Manager
To: Policy Overview Co-ordinating Committee – 11 February 2009
Subject: **Select Committee Topic Review Work Programme - Update**
Classification: Unrestricted

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

Current Phase of the Work Programme – Spring 2009

Accessing Democracy

1. (1) This Select Committee under the Chairmanship of Mrs Angell produced its report which was considered by Cabinet on 15 September 2008. This report was considered at the County Council meeting on 11 December 2008 where it was well received.

(2) As part of the County Councils monitoring process for Select Committee recommendations the Select Committee will be reconvened in September 2009 to receive a report on progress with each of the recommendations. In the meantime the Corporate Policy Overview Committee will receive, at its next meeting, an action plan showing how it is proposed to take the recommendations forward.

Autistic Spectrum Disorder Select Committee

2. (1) This Committee under the Chairmanship of Mr Simmonds has finished its work and its final report will be considered at Cabinet on 30 March 2009.

Provision of Activities for Young People – Select Committee

3. (1) This Committee under the Chairmanship of Mr Chell has completed its evidence gathering and the report is currently being drafted. The Select Committee are due to submit their report to Cabinet on 30 March 2009.

(2) Prior to the commencement of the Review the Labour Group indicated that they were unable to find two Members to serve on the Select Committee. However, the Group was happy for the Review to go ahead. Members of my team supporting the Select Committee have kept Mr T J Birkett, Shadow Cabinet Member for Communities fully apprised of the activity of the Select Committee.

Future Passenger Rail Services in Kent – Select Committee

5. Members will recall that at the last meeting it was reported that at the request of the Leader of the Council resources to support this review would be provided from within the Environment and Regeneration Directorate, who would supply a consultant

to prepare the report. The report of the Select Committee was considered by Cabinet on 1 December 2008.

Operational Issues for Managing the Topic Review Programme

Resources to Deliver the Work Programme

7. (1) I now have two and a half FTE Research Officers supporting the Select Committee Topic Review Programme one research officer whose time is dedicated entirely to the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

(2) At the September meeting of the POCC when officer resources to support Select Committee reviews was discussed it was agreed that a report would be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee on the range of office support available for Select Committee and IMG's. I will give an oral update on this at the meeting. The Committee may wish to express its views for future consideration at a meeting of this Committee or its successor body following the County Council elections in June.

(3) In addition to the Research Officer resources to support topic reviews, there are three Democratic Service Officers (DSO's) to support the Policy Overview Committee and Select Committee activities.

Programming for Topic Reviews

The following timetable has been discussed with the POCC Chairman as a means of delivering a two year work programme which can be approved and work started as soon as possible after the establishment of the new Council:-

- Jan 2009 – POC's asked to make suggestions for possible topic review and a note in Members bulletin inviting suggestion from all Members. Officers to be invited to put forward potential topics by the end of Feb 2009.
- Feb - end March - assessment forms completed for the suggested topic reviews
- April 2009 - covering report and forms to be published on 20 April for POCC
- 28 April 2009 POCC to look at the forms (and hear from sponsors/officers/cabinet Members) and suggest a priority order for a potential work programme for the new County Council.
- July 2009 - The Chairman has agreed to an additional meeting of the POCC being held on 17 July 2009 at 2.00pm to agree a two year work programme. This will enable Research Officers/DSO's to work on establishing the first round of Select Committees which then hold their inaugural meetings in Sept/Oct 2009.

Cabinet Scrutiny Committee

8. Mrs Anna Taylor, Research Officer to the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee has been in post since 15 September 2008. The role is continuing to evolve but has been effective in providing briefing material for the Committee to focus the Committees attention on the big issues and areas for questioning.

Building Capacity for Policy Overview Committees

9. (1) At the last two meetings of this Committee there have been discussions on the way forward for building capacity for POC's to overcome the increasing challenge for them as they fully exercise their Terms of Reference of trying to carry out their business effectively in 5x1 day meetings per year.

(2) At the request of the Children's Families and Education Policy Overview Committee a Sub Committee has been established to oversee and report back to the POC on the Local Children's Service Partnership. This Sub Committee is due to hold its inaugural meeting in March 2009.

(3) Members will be aware that all of the POC's at their November meeting were given the option of establishing an IMG to look in more detail at the Medium Term Plan, with the exception of the Communities POC the other four POC's did this. (This is the subject of a more detailed report on this agenda for Members to consideration).

Launching and publicising Select Committee Topic reviews

10. (1) As Members will be aware the County Council at its meeting on 11 December 2008 approved the "Public Relations Protocol for Select Committee Reviews and Reports" work is now being carried out to ensure that the remaining Topic Reviews make full use of this to promote their reports.

(2) The County Council also considered how Select Committee reports should be launched at County Council meetings and it was agreed that further discussions would take place between the Policy Overview Coordinating Committee, the Chairman of the County Council and Members of the Cabinet on the process for launching Select Committee reviews. It is hoped that agreement can be reached on a process prior to the April County Council so that the remaining reviews can be launched in this way. I will keep all Members of the POCC informed of progress.

Monitoring of Select Committee Recommendations

11. (1) The Committee will be aware that the Constitution includes the process for the monitoring of Select Committee recommendations. This involves the Select Committee being reconvened to receive a report on progress with their recommendations one year after its report is presented to Cabinet. The Minutes from this meeting are then submitted to the relevant POC.

(2) The POCC received a report at its meeting on 14 November 2008 setting out the progress made with recommendations of previous Select Committees. In order to keep the POCC up to date with the monitoring of Select Committee

recommendations the progress reports which have been received by Select Committees since February 2008 are set out in Appendix 1.

Recommendations

10. The Committee is requested to:-

- (a) note the progress of the Select Committee Topic Reviews Accessing Democracy, Autistic Spectrum Disorder, Provision of Activities for Young People be noted;
- (b) endorse the process for establishing a two year Select Committee topic review programme be endorsed
- (c) note the resources available to support overview and scrutiny and deliver the Select Committee topic review programme.
- (d) note the adoption of the “Public Relations Protocol for Select Committee Reviews and Reports” and the ongoing work to agree a process for launching Select Committee reports.
- (e) note the monitoring of Select Committee recommendations as set out in Appendix 1

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Background Documents: None