

By: Overview Scrutiny and Localism Manager
To: Policy Overview Co-ordinating Committee – 16 October 2009
Subject: Select Committee - Topic Review Programme – 2009 - 2011
Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report sets out for the Committee the topics which have come forward from the Policy Overview Committees, Individual Members and Cabinet Members for potential inclusion in the Select Committee Work Programme 2009-11.

Context

1. (1) The Committee will be aware that underpinning an effective Overview and Scrutiny function is a Work Programme which is realistic, deliverable, within existing resources, but retains the ability to be responsive and flexible. This is a constant challenge, to identify those issues/topics and widening the conversation to engage local people, service providers, neighbourhood users, communities as well as elected Members. There is unanimity of all members that the Topic Reviews are successful in influencing policy and decision makers both within the County Council and outside with the Councils external partners. Members have stressed the importance of ensuring that the overview and scrutiny process adds real value, reaching positive and realistic recommendations. It is not about duplicating the work of Regulators and Inspectorates.

(2) This report needs to be put into the context of the extensive discussions which have taken place since the first meeting on the new County Council on 25 June 2009, when the Leader announced a thorough review of the Overview and Scrutiny function would be carried out to ensure that it is fit for purpose in relation to the shape and structure of the new Council and in the context of external developments. The outcome of this review will be debated at the County Council on 15 October which might impact on the deliberations of this Committee at today's meeting. For example the report to be debated at the County Council proposes:-

(a) the strengthening of the role of this Committee in determining the appropriate mechanism pieces of work are to be delivered; and

(b) the potential to develop a rapporteur scheme (which it is proposed should be developed by this Committee in collaboration with the Cabinet)

(3) The Committee are reminded that the County Council policy is to ensure that the Work Programme is sustainable, and can be delivered within the resources available, the topics selected:-

- (a) must add value to the County Council and the residents of Kent;
- (b) must not duplicate other internal or external work being undertaken by the Cabinet or a Managing Director or their staff;
- (c) must not be the subject of external inspections; and
- (d) must not have been the subject of topic reviews by other Councils from which details of best practice can be obtained.

Resources

2. (1) My Team comprises of:-

- Three full time Democratic Services Officer posts supporting 7 of the 8 Policy Overview Committees and providing the administrative support to the Select Committees and Informal Member Groups.
- Support for the Environment, Highways and Waste POC is provided by a Democratic Services officer in the Council and Cabinet Team.
- Three research officers (2.5 full time posts) who provide the research and prepare reports on behalf of Select Committees.
- One research officer who is dedicated to the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC).
- One research officer who is dedicated to the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee

(2) I take the lead for the Policy Overview Co-ordinating Committee and HOSC providing the administrative support to the HOSC as well..

Identification of Potential Topic Reviews

3 (1) The following topics have been identified by the Policy Overview Committees, individual Members and Cabinet Members for possible inclusion in the Work Programme.:-

- Dementia (Pages 9 - 10)
- Educational Attainment of pupils and schools in areas of high deprivation (Pages 11 -12)
- Extended School programme and links with youth and community services - (Pages13 - 21)
- The Future of Waste (Pages 22 – 23)
- How the young people of Kent can interact with and help older people of the county and conversely how the older citizens of Kent can interact with and help young citizens (Pages 24 – 26)
- The impact of the slowdown of existing, and absence of new, Developer Contributions- on the Kent Economy and Regeneration in Kent (Pages 27 – 29)
- Renewable energy – what should Kent’s role be? (Pages 30 – 33)
- Safeguarding and Adult Protection (Pages 34 – 36)
- Skills Shortage and help for finding work opportunities during difficult times (Pages 37 – 39)

(2) In order to assist the Members of this Committee in setting the work programme an assessment form has been completed for each of these proposals. The first part of the form is where the proposer of the review sets out the detail for the proposed review. The remainder of the form has been completed by the Directorate in consultation with the appropriate Cabinet Member(s). The proposer, Directorate representatives and Cabinet Member(s) (or their Deputies) have been invited to this meeting to express their views on the topics prior to the Co-ordinating Committee setting the Work Programme. Attached as Appendix 1 are the completed assessment forms for each of these topics.

(3) On each of the assessment forms there is a section asking whether there is any specific timeframe for the review. The response to this question should be taken into consideration when placing any review in the work programme.

(4) To assist The Committee in assessing the topics that have been put forward I attach at Appendix 2 a spreadsheet showing which if any other Local Authorities have also carried out reviews on these subjects. For those topics that have had a lot of in depth work done by other authorities Members may wish to consider whether it would be a better use of resources to draw on the best practise identified in those reviews rather than KCC carrying out its own review.

(5) It is for this Committee to determine which topics should be included in the Work Programme to be supported from within existing resources.

Work programme – selection and next steps

4. (1) . A total of 9 reviews could be carried out in the period 2009-2011 which means that all topics put forward could be included but Members may wish to leave some flexibility in the programme for topics that may forward during this period. Alternatively, the Committee may decide that a suggested review could be delivered by another mechanism.

(2) It should be borne in mind that one of the research officers works on a part time basis so the review that this colleague supports will need to have a very sharp focus or be carried out over a longer period of time.

(3) Topic reviews are usually allocated for a period of 6 months, for the review to be carried out and the report submitted to Cabinet. It is suggested that the first three reviews identified should start immediately, with the Select Committee Members being identified as quickly as possible. This will enable arrangements to be made for a cross party group drawn from the Membership of the Select Committee to meet with the research officer to discuss the terms of reference for the review.

(4) Following this stage there would be an inaugural meeting of the Select Committee to agree their terms of reference, list of witness, timescale for hearing etc,

(5) Throughout this early stage of the process there would be liaison with the Directorate(s) and the Cabinet Member(s).

(6) Once the Committee have produced their draft report based on written evidence, oral evidence from hearing sessions and visits a draft report will be prepared and agreed by the Committee. The draft will then be shared with the Directorate(s), Cabinet Member(s) and partners for their comments, before the Committee agree the final version for submission to the Cabinet endorsement and later to County Council for debate.

(7) POC(s) will be kept fully informed of progress of their Select Committees by an update at every meeting. It would be anticipated that this first tranche of reviews would start to submit their final reports to Cabinet from April 2010 onwards. It is anticipated that there may be some natural slippage in the programme which will avoid all of the reviews going to a single Cabinet Meeting or it may be necessary to phase their submission.

(8) It is intended that there will only be a maximum of one Select Committee report to each County Council meeting in order that there can be a full debate.

(9) The work programme will be kept under constant review by this Committee so that it can be amended to respond to changes which may arise.

(10) I would welcome the flexibility to agree the order of the reviews with the Chairman, Vice- Chairman and Liberal Democrat Spokesman and other stakeholders outside of this meeting so that I can allocate the most appropriate research resource to each respective Topic Review.

Recommendations

5. The Committee are requested to :-

- (a) note the resources available to the Policy Overview Committees to carry out the Topic Review Work Programme;
- (b) agree which of the topics proposed the Policy Overview Co-ordinating Committee wish to form the Select Committee Topic Review Programme for 2009/11;
- (c) delegate to the Overview and Scrutiny Manager the authority to agree the order of the Select Committee Topic Reviews in consultation with the Policy Overview Co-ordinating Committee Chairman, Vice Chairman and Liberal Democrat Spokesman and other relevant stakeholders.

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Background documents - Nil