

When calling or telephoning please ask for

Geoff Durham

Direct line or ext

742222

My ref

GD/EVB – R82/50

24 June 2011

To the Chair and Members

of the

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
CO-ORDINATING
COMMITTEE

Dear Sir/Madam

A meeting of the **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE** will be held in **COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CIVIC OFFICES, MERRIAL STREET, NEWCASTLE** on **MONDAY, 4 JULY 2011 at 7pm**

AGENDA

1. Minutes of previous meeting held on 14 March 2011 (copy attached – grey paper).
2. To consider the attached report of the Executive Management Team.
3. To consider any business which is urgent within the meaning of Section 100B(4) of the Local Government Act 1972.

Yours faithfully

P W CLISBY

Head of Central Services

Councillors Becket, Boden, Cairns, Clarke M, Cooper, Gilmore, Mrs Hailstones, Mrs Heames, Olszewski, Mrs Shenton, Snell, Wilkes and Williams

‘Members of the Council: If you identify any personal training/development requirements from the items included in this agenda or through issues raised during the meeting, please bring them to the attention of the Committee Clerk at the close of the meeting.

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL

**REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM TO THE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE**

4 July 2011

1. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE – ROLE AND FUNCTION

Submitted by: Head of Central Services – Paul Clisby

Portfolio: All

Ward(s) affected: Non-Specific

Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to lay out the role and function of the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee as agreed through various changes to the Constitution.

Recommendation

That the information be received.

Reasons

Members of the Committee are required to be aware of the terms of reference of the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee. By providing this information Members will also be better placed to undertake their role on this committee.

1. Background

1.1 At the meeting of the Council on 23 January 2008, the current structure for Overview and Scrutiny function was agreed. At that meeting terms of reference for this committee were agreed as follows:

Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee

General role

To co-ordinate the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

Composition

The Council will appoint an Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee, and a Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee.

The Committee will consist of 15 Councillors, with 8 members being the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees, a representative of the Health Scrutiny Sub-Committee and a further 6 members appointed by the Council. The membership of this Committee will only consist of non-Executive members of the Council. The membership of

this Committee may be increased or decreased by no more than two (decreased to 13 or increased to 17) to facilitate effective political balance if required.

Role and Functions

The Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee will exercise the following functions:

- (i) To co-ordinate and prioritise the work of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees;
- (ii) To facilitate, where appropriate, Overview and Scrutiny activity on cross-cutting issues, partnerships, policies, strategies in respect of the Local Area Agreement for Staffordshire and the Local Strategic Partnership;
- (iii) To establish ad-hoc Scrutiny Review Working Parties to investigate specific topics on behalf of the Committee
- (iv) To act as a mechanism to ensure effective communication with the Cabinet;
- (v) To act as a forum for the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees to share good practice and to ensure that Overview and Scrutiny procedures are maintained in accordance with this Constitution;
- (vi) In considering the annual work programme, the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee shall have regard to the following:
 - Referrals to it by the Council, Cabinet or another Committee;
 - Petitions received from the public; and
 - Items proposed for the programme by members of the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee, or of one of the Committees.
- (vii) To report annually to Full Council on the workings of Overview and Scrutiny
- (viii) To monitor the effectiveness and application of the call-in procedure, to report on the number and reasons for call-in and to make recommendations to Full Council on any changes required to ensure the efficient and effective operation of the process;
- (ix) To propose amendments to the Overview and Scrutiny arrangements within the Constitution to Full Council for consideration;
- (x) To have the powers of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee in relation to Executive decisions made but not implemented as set out in section 21(3) of the Local Government Act 2000, as do all other Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

2. Background Papers

Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council Constitution

2. **ACTIVITIES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES AND THE HEALTH SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE**

Submitted by: Head of Central Services – Paul Clisby

Portfolio: Not applicable

Ward(s) affected: Non-specific

Purpose of the Report

This report provides an opportunity for the Chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees and the Health Scrutiny Sub-Committee to report on the activities of the individual committees.

Although the Health and Scrutiny Sub-Committee will not have met before your meeting, the opportunity presents itself for consideration to be given to the recommendations made by the Scrutiny Peer Review Group in respect of the future of that sub-committee (see item 3 on this agenda).

Recommendation

That the Committee receive verbal updates from the Chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees and the Health Scrutiny Sub-Committee.

Reasons

This provides an opportunity on the agenda for the individual committees to report on their activities. Such reports will enable the Co-ordinating Committee to perform its role of overseeing scrutiny activity and ensuring that there is no unnecessary duplication in workload. Likewise, it provides an opportunity to ensure that committees are not trying to do too much.

3. **NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL SCRUTINY PEER REVIEW**

Submitted by: Head of Central Services – Paul Clisby

Portfolio: All

Purpose

To consider the report of the Scrutiny Peer Team into the Borough Council's scrutiny arrangements.

Recommendation

That Committee is asked to decide how it wishes to scrutinise the report of the peer review of scrutiny.

Reasons

For Members to review the Council's current scrutiny arrangements and to recommend any changes thereto to improve scrutiny and the performance of the Council.

1. **Background**

- 1.1 Attached at Appendix 'A' (salmon paper) is the report of the Scrutiny Peer Review Team.
- 1.2 The 4 themed overview and scrutiny committees have considered the above report and their comments will be provided to you for your consideration.
- 1.3 In particular the Transformation and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee resolved to consult with all 60 Councillors and with officers to ascertain their views on scrutiny. Those consultation responses will be available at the meeting.

2. **Issues**

- 2.1 The Committee has to decide the parameters of scrutiny – who, what, when and how. This could be through this Committee meeting or a working group, by a desktop exercise or by hearing information from officers, the public and any other sources and questioning them. It is important that the process be seen as open and fair.
- 2.2 If the Committee decides on a task and complete working group it is important that there is an appropriate balance of skills.

3. **Options Considered**

- 3.1 Any and all means of considering what has been done to date and what is to be done can be utilised.

4. **Proposal**

- 4.1 Committee is asked to decide how it wishes to scrutinise the Council's scrutiny processes.

5. **Reasons for Preferred Solution**

- 5.1 The preferred solution should be open and transparent, providing a critical friend challenge, enabling the voices and concerns of the public and driving improvement in accordance with the principles of good scrutiny.

6. **Outcomes Linked to Sustainable Community Strategy and Corporate Priorities**

- 6.1 Scrutiny impinges on all of the 4 corporate priorities. Proper scrutiny will provide a 'critical friend' challenge, enable the voices and concerns of the public and will drive improvement in according with the principles of good scrutiny as defined by the Centre for Public Scrutiny.

7. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

- 7.1 The Local Government Act 2000 established the scrutiny framework.

8. **Equality Impact Assessment**

8.1 Equality issues should be considered in the process of scrutiny.

9. **Finance and Resource Implications**

9.1 There will be a cost in terms of officer time and overheads which will be met out of existing budgets.

10. **Major Risks**

- Undue delay if scrutiny is too onerous
- Reputational damage if scrutiny is not seen as independent, open and fair
- Missed opportunities if scrutiny fails to make a positive difference to the outcomes identified at paragraph 6 above.

11. **Sustainability and Climate Change Implications**

11. None identified for the scrutiny process.

12. **Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions**

Council - 23 January 2011.

13. **Background Papers**

The report of the Scrutiny Peer Review Team.
The Constitution.

4. **THE FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS – JULY TO OCTOBER 2011**

Submitted by: Head of Central Services – Paul Clisby

Portfolio: All Portfolios

Ward(s) affected: Non-specific

Purpose of the Report

To identify items listed in the Forward Plan of Key Decisions to see if further examination of any issue is considered appropriate.

Recommendations

(a) That the Committee receive the information and identify what examination, if any, of the proposed decisions is required.

(b) That the Committee identify a lead overview and scrutiny committee where there are incidences of dual responsibility or interest in respect of items listed in the Forward Plan.

Reasons

The inclusion of the relevant proposals listed in the Forward Plan of Key Decisions gives Overview and Scrutiny the opportunity to identify possible issues for committees to look at prior to submission to the Cabinet. This is not intended to replace other processes but is designed to give an opportunity for the committees to provide a view on any particular issue.

1. **Background**

- 1.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee is responsible for co-ordinating scrutiny activity. One of the ways that the committee can assist in this sense is by examining the Forward Plan and identifying areas where there may be confusion over responsibility for scrutiny and allocating responsibility to one lead committee.

2. **List of Appendices**

Forward Plan of Key Decisions – July to October 2011 (blue paper)

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL SCRUTINY PEER REVIEW –APRIL 2011

Introduction

The Chief Executive, John Sellgren commissioned a team of Member and officer peers to complete a short, sharp review of the Borough Council's scrutiny arrangements.

Terms of Reference

To review Newcastle's scrutiny arrangements and make recommendations which can be implemented in the new council (post May 2011) bringing the council into line with best practice.

The Peer Review team was asked to assess the council's scrutiny arrangements against the Centre for Public Scrutiny's four principles:

- Scrutiny is owned and led by elected Members.
- Scrutiny provides a 'critical friend' challenge to the council's decision-making process.
- Scrutiny reflects the interests and concerns of the public.
- Scrutiny drives improvement.

Specifically, the team was asked to make recommendations upon:

- (i) The structure of the council's scrutiny committee arrangements
- (ii) The membership of scrutiny committees
- (iii) The format and content of reports and other material presented to scrutiny
- (iv) Best practice in the operation of scrutiny studies
- (v) Indicative scrutiny work programme
- (vi) Requirements for Member and officer training to support scrutiny
- (vii) Resourcing requirements for scrutiny

Programme of Work

The Peer Review team was asked to undertake a series of structured interviews with councillors, officers and other relevant individuals and representatives. This included the following:

- (i) The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee
- (ii) A selection of members of other scrutiny committees and their chairs
- (iii) The Political Group Leaders
- (iv) The Head of Central Services
- (v) The Executive Directors
- (vi) Representatives of partner organisations who have participated in scrutiny studies

Members of Peer Review Team also had an opportunity to observe two scrutiny meetings and to review documents including previous scrutiny reports; papers from Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee and other scrutiny committees; the scrutiny structure; the constitution and key corporate documents.

Timescale

The review took place on 31 March-1 April 2011.

Reporting

The team presented a short summary of their key findings to Members who had been part of the review process and others who wished to attend on the final afternoon of their work on-site.

This report details the key findings from the review and the team's recommendations to improve scrutiny post May 2011.

The Peer Review team

Cllr Dennis Andrewartha - Stroud District Council and Gloucestershire County Council (Lib Dem)
Cllr Derek Bateman - Cheshire West and Chester Council (Labour)
Cllr Liz Staples – Staffordshire County Council and East Staffordshire District Council (Conservative)
Cllr Alan White - Staffordshire County Council and Lichfield District Council (Conservative)
Jane Burns - Assistant Chief Executive, Gloucestershire County Council
Keith Gordon – Scrutiny Manager, North West Leicestershire District Council
Michelle McHugh – Overview and Scrutiny Manager, Warwickshire County Council

Thank you

The team would like to thank all those who participated in the review for their openness and co-operation. They would particularly like to thank Cllr Julie Cooper, Vice-Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Coordinating Committee, John Sellgren, Chief Executive, and Angela Hodgkinson, Chief Executive's PA, for their hospitality and support.

Our Findings

Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council (the council) should be applauded for inviting in an external review team. Our role was to provide you with a reflection of your progress and to highlight areas where further improvements could be made.

The council's scrutiny arrangements have evolved over the years to reflect changing circumstances and priorities. There is consensus among members and officers about the need to improve further and, importantly, a real willingness to change.

We found a number of **positive** aspects of scrutiny:

- Overview appears strong. Members on Overview and Scrutiny Committees felt well informed of the issues that related to their particular Committee.
- There are examples of scrutiny making a real difference. The most quoted example was the Waste Recycling Task and Finish Group which led to improved recycling rates.
- Partners are willing to engage with the council and to be scrutinised; probably more than is happening now.

Inevitably with a review of this type, we focussed attention on areas where they council might improve.

Reaching its Potential

Scrutiny is now an established way of working for all local authorities and there are many examples of innovative and good practice, with scrutiny driving tangible improvements in local services. The review team brought together experience from nine other local authorities.

We found that the potential of scrutiny is not recognised in Newcastle. There appeared to be limited scrutiny input into the development of the corporate plan and the budget. Whilst we found some evidence of performance reporting, this appeared to be minimal and with no evidence of performance management resulting from this. We were told of numerous instances of very local issues being raised in scrutiny meetings and a focus on anecdotes, rather looking at the bigger picture. Partners described light touch scrutiny, where it happened. Furthermore, scrutiny appeared internally-focussed, for example the constitution, rather than outcomes and with very little public involvement or interest.

Duplication

We were told about examples of duplication in scrutiny activity. The most notable was on parking issues where separate scrutiny reviews has been commissioned on the Blue Badge Scheme, parking and a county-wide joint review of parking. It was not clear to the Review Team how cross-cutting issues get scrutinised.

Disconnected

There appeared to be a real lack of clarity about which scrutiny committee does what. This would account for the duplication point above and also the absence of scrutiny on key issues like the budget and business plans. It was also reflected in feedback about the review of the constitution in terms of who actually undertook the review, the time taken and what was achieved.

No Co-ordination

The Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee is not co-ordinating scrutiny activity. It appeared that no-one had the big picture of what was needed or what was going on in terms of scrutiny. This had probably been exacerbated by the absence of a Scrutiny Officer. We found a lack of clarity about the roles of and the relationships between chairmen and vice chairmen. Very little appeared to happen outside of the scrutiny meetings themselves.

Not Embedded

There are a number of individuals who are clearly passionate about scrutiny. However, we witnessed a lack of understanding and ownership about scrutiny across the organisation. In councils where scrutiny works best, scrutiny is everyone's responsibility and everyone wants it to be effective.

Officer Support

Most senior officers have some involvement with scrutiny; some are heavily involved (probably too heavily involved in 1 or 2 cases). We found that the role, value and potential of scrutiny was not well understood across the board. Officers have an important role to play in supporting Members to fulfil their scrutiny responsibilities and to develop the scrutiny function. However, some officers highlighted that they were unsure what their role should be in supporting Overview and Scrutiny. We felt that more officers should be involved in scrutiny to help develop their political acuity and to help the organisation to succession plan.

Attendance

Again with some notable exceptions. attendance at scrutiny meetings can be poor. A number of members felt disengaged with scrutiny - "I don't go because they don't do anything useful". Others, more worryingly, felt disenfranchised "What's the point of scrutiny, Cabinet never listen". There are

a large number of Members (60) for a council of Newcastle's population. It is important that they are all engaged in the business of the council. Effective scrutiny is a rewarding activity.

Holding to Account

We found very few opportunities for Scrutiny to hold the Cabinet to account or for scrutiny to be involved before decisions were taken. Neither did we find many examples of where Scrutiny had asked for such opportunities. Cabinet wait to be invited to attend scrutiny meetings.

Councils work best where there are strong Cabinet and Scrutiny arrangements. Both need to understand their relative roles and focus and there needs to be mutual respect. On the whole, good scrutiny is apolitical.

Planning, Programmes and Pace

Good planning is essential in the complex and changing world of local authorities. Councils have limited resources. Good planning and work programming are tools to prioritise what will have the most value and impact.

Good work programmes – devised and owned by Members – help to focus scrutiny and make sure things happen as a result. The connection with the Cabinet Forward Plan, which should provide good intelligence on decisions to be made, was not obvious. The work programmes we saw appeared to lack ambition and imagination. They also appeared reactive not proactive.

Most of the scrutiny committees meet 4 times per year. We think this can restrict the business that needs to be covered and the pace of work. We did hear about task and finish groups that took too long to finish and by the time they did, they had missed the boat. More flexibility would help.

Again, with 1 or 2 notable exceptions it was difficult to garner many examples of scrutiny making a positive impact. All too often scrutiny lacked measurable outcomes. This added to the frustration of those members who feel disengaged.

Conclusions

The Team acknowledged that this review was short and sharp. In the time available, it was only ever going to be possible to reflect back a partial picture of arrangements in the council. Nevertheless we had the benefit of meeting a cross-section of people who were happy to 'tell it like it is'; and our experience from nine other local authorities – some good and some not so. We feel confident in offering a number of recommendations for improvement and some issues which you will wish to consider further.

Recommendations

1. Committee Structure

- 1.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee should be disbanded and replaced with a smaller group to oversee and co-ordinate all scrutiny activities.

This "work planning group" should operate on an informal basis and should not be a formally constituted committee, thereby removing the support and administration that is associated with formal committee meetings. The remit of the group should be to oversee and co-ordinate the work programmes produced by each of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees and to commission Task and Finish Groups.

- 1.2 Consideration should be given to reducing the number of Overview and Scrutiny Committees and to developing a greater focus on informal Task and Finish Group work.

This approach would enable small groups of members to investigate issues and report their findings and recommendations to a Committee. The current number of Overview and Scrutiny Committees limits the capacity of members and support services to manage Task and Finish Groups in addition to the Committees. It is widely recognised at a national level that the most effective Overview and Scrutiny outcomes are achieved through Task and Finish Group work. Ultimately, a balance needs to be struck between effective 'overview' through Committee structure and in-depth scrutiny through Task and Finish Group work.

- 1.3 Regardless of the number of Overview and Scrutiny Committees that the Council deems appropriate, their remit should be refocused to reflect service delivery and council priorities.

The thematic remits of the current Committees leaves it open to interpretation where particular services and issues fall. Refocusing the Committees to mirror operational and service delivery structures will provide greater clarity and focus and reduce duplication across the Committees. It will also enable Senior Officers to provide better support. Task and Finish Groups are an ideal way of addressing cross-cutting issues.

- 1.4 The Health Scrutiny Sub-Committee should be disbanded and alternative mechanisms for members to be informed of changes in the health economy should be developed, including strengthening links with the County Council Health Scrutiny and providing informal briefings for members.

We recognise the value members place on the Health Scrutiny Sub-Committee, however we feel that given the changes in the health and the Council's limited resources, Overview and Scrutiny should focus on those areas where the biggest local impact can be achieved. Formal Health Scrutiny powers, as outlined in the Health and Social Care Act 2001, rest with the County Council, where there is a Joint Health Scrutiny Committee which includes a Newcastle-under-Lyme scrutiny member.

- 1.5 The frequency of Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings should reflect the nature of the business.

Committees should not necessarily be required to meet according to a fixed schedule. If a Committee has identified an issue of concern, there should be scope for the Committee to meet earlier than the next scheduled meeting in order to achieve timely scrutiny and improve the pace of impact.

- 1.6 Consideration should be given to developing local-level scrutiny to complement the Council-wide scrutiny undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Committees and related Task and Finish Groups.

The Council's Local Area arrangements should be used to encourage members to identify issues specific to their local area that would benefit from a scrutiny exercise. In line with relevant legislation, Cabinet members should be excluded from this scrutiny activity, therefore Local Area Forums/Committees will need to establish a Task and Finish Group made up of Non-Executive Members that then reports into the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and then ultimately to Cabinet.

2. Membership of Committees

2.1 There should be a stronger and more pro-active role for Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chairmen. The role should focus not only on the effective management of meetings, but should also encompass greater activity outside of Committee meetings, including:

- Following up on issues raised during meetings,
- Following up on requests for information,
- Liaising with service officers and Portfolio Holder to identify issues to be included on the Committee's work programme' and
- Liaising with service officers and Portfolio Holder to ensure reports are provided to the Committee in timely manner and incorporate information required by the Committee.

Job Descriptions for Chairmen should be developed.

2.2 The role of Vice-Chairmen should be reconsidered. Currently Vice-Chairmen appear to have limited involvement in preparing and managing Committee meetings. We are not opposed to the role of Vice-Chairmen per se, but feel that the role in its current format does not add value. We recommend that consideration is given to replacing the role of Vice-Chairmen with 'Lead Member' roles. This would entail Lead Members from each political group nominated for each Committee to support the Chairmen in managing the Committee's work programme. This engages a small number of members in a more proactive role and has proven to work effectively in other Local Authorities.

2.3 The number of members on each Committee should be reduced from 15 to the minimum number required to achieve political proportionality.

The current size of the Committees proves challenging for Chairmen to ensure each member is able to contribute, whilst also ensuring that the Committee 'delves in deep' into the issue. Smaller Committees would aid greater engagement from those members involved.

Developing a focus on Task and Finish Groups, as outlined above, would ensure that all members have a role within Overview and Scrutiny and would mitigate against the concern that reducing the membership of the Committees would disengage a number of members. Task and Finish Group membership should be based on skills and interest and not political proportionality.

2.4 The Work Planning Group that we have recommended be established should consist of the Chairmen of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees and depending on the decision taken in relation to Vice-Chairmen, should also consist of Vice-Chairmen if they exist.

3. Scrutiny Studies

3.1 We recommend that Members and Officers become more outward looking and take opportunities to visit other Local Authorities to learn from the experiences of others.

There are numerous resources available to guide Newcastle-under-Lyme in developing and supporting an effective Overview and Scrutiny function. The Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) provides a wealth of guidance that is extremely beneficial. We recommend that these are explored and adapted for the local context, there is no need to reinvent the wheel. In addition to this, we have left some materials from our own authorities that might be useful.

We also suggest that Members and Officers participate in any local Overview and Scrutiny networks that exist, if such networks do not exist locally we recommend that consideration is given to developing one. Colleagues in surrounding local authorities will inevitably welcome the opportunity to share experiences and best practice. There are examples of effective outcomes from your Overview and Scrutiny work, which will be of interest to other local authorities.

4. Indicative Work Programme

- 4.1 Scrutiny should develop a work programme for at least twelve months in advance. It should be developed through broad engagement with members, officers and partners.

We would suggest that members could attend a special forum event to discuss and evolve the programme.

In preparing the programme a number of factors need to be taken into account:

- scrutiny should consider items from a wide range of sources including the corporate plan, performance information, the council's major areas of expenditure, consultation, evidence of need etc.
- scrutiny of the corporate plan and the budget is essential
- pre-decision scrutiny of decisions to be made by Cabinet can be very useful. However, care is needed to make sure the work is complete in time for it to be of assistance to the Cabinet/Portfolio Holder but not so early as to be out of date when the decision is to be taken.
- the planning horizon should look ahead at least 12 months; longer if there is a medium-term priority set out in the corporate plan. It will require Cabinet to publish a Forward Plan with the same planning horizon to give advance notice of relevant issues. It is expected that the detail in both the forward plan and the work programme will be less specific later in the period.
- Cabinet should become more aware of scrutiny and the benefits available through close examination with the non-political, evidence-based approach of scrutiny.

The work programme will need to be able to be flexible, proactive and responsive to changing circumstances. A good scrutiny work programme will address the making of key decisions as well as being sufficiently fleet of foot in responding to issues of significance that arise during the period of the plan.

5. Training and Support

- 5.1 The council should invest in member training across the council, bringing in external experience and expertise to ensure that scrutiny is understood consistently with a common ambition and expectation.

External training would enable the exchange of best practice and improve the effectiveness of scrutiny work.

- 5.2 The council should invest in specific training for all those appointed as chairmen or vice-chairmen

Chairing scrutiny committees and task and finish groups requires a different skill set to the chairing of other committees..

- 5.3 The council should invest in officer training

Officers at different levels across the council should be involved in supporting the scrutiny committees relevant to their work/functions. To support scrutiny effectively officers need to understand the process and how they can provide effective support.

It is not necessary to incur large expenditure on training. Opportunities for training from recognised expert bodies (e.g. Centre for Public Scrutiny and University of Birmingham) or sharing experience with other councils can be explored.

6. Resourcing

- 6.1 The council should appoint at least one dedicated scrutiny officer but to a more closely defined role than in the past.

The scrutiny officer(s) should support members to develop work programmes, to monitor progress, to support the chair, ensure that evidence from appropriate sources is available and facilitate effective scrutiny, developing an identity for scrutiny in Newcastle-under-Lyme.

- 6.2 Support for scrutiny should be drawn from the whole officer structure.

The officers should give advice and evidence at an appropriate level. The ethos across the council should be one of being part of scrutiny – the “Critical Friend”.

- 6.3 A senior officer should be nominated to champion each scrutiny committee.

This will raise the awareness and profile of the scrutiny committees across the council. The council should consider whether this senior officer should be one which is scrutinised under the terms of reference of the committee or a ‘critical friend’ who solely acts as champion and advisor to the committee avoiding any apparent conflict between advising the committee and providing evidence to the scrutiny. Other relevant officers should advise and attend meetings when required by the agenda.

Scrutiny Top Tips

- Tackle the issues that make a real difference to local people. That’s likely to mean that the most effective scrutiny reviews are those where you are engaging with people outside the council.
- Make sure that scrutiny reviews are properly scoped at the outset – identify the issue, links with council priorities, timelines, witnesses and lines of enquiry. Use the “one page strategy”.
- Make sure that the terms of reference are realistic and not too wide. Good scrutiny reviews are narrow and deep not broad and shallow.
- Task and finish groups should be set up for a specific purpose and have an end point. On-going monitoring should be done elsewhere.
- Limit the number of task and finish groups that are set up at any one time.
- Set up monitoring arrangements to check on progress against recommendations after 6, 12 and 18 months.
- Make time to reflect, evaluate and share your learning

