

Subject: Pre-decision Scrutiny

Report by: Stewart Agland, Local Democracy Manager

Report to: Scrutiny Management Panel

Date: 4 November 2010

1. Purpose of report

To provide information to the Scrutiny Management Panel (SMP) in relation to how SMP can be more effective engagement with the pre-decision scrutiny process.

2. Background:

At the last Scrutiny Management Panel (SMP) meeting on 15 September 2010, Members expressed their keenness to ensure their timely involvement in the Cabinet decision making process. The Forward Plan was highlighted as a way of identifying forthcoming issues that could benefit from pre-decision scrutiny, as part of the policy development and holding the Cabinet to account roles of scrutiny.

3. Current arrangements

Whilst the SMP acknowledged that the current Forward Plan is legally compliant with the provisions of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements)(Access to Information) Regulations 2000, they felt that the limited level of detail inhibits SMP from intervening in an informed and timely manner to scrutinise decisions that are coming up.

The SMP recognised that certain annually recurring documents go through the Forward Plan and feel that items such as the Corporate Plan should be looked at prior to being finalised.

The Panel consequently requested the Local Democracy Manager to report to the next formal meeting, highlighting suggested areas for improvement within the current system.

4. Way Forward

Having reflected on this matter, in the short term, seeking improvements to the Forward Plan may not be the best way forward for securing such

information as the timescales for achieving this may not meet the SMP's needs .

Also, bearing in mind that the statutory plan only covers a four month rolling period, with the greatest emphasis placed on ensuring the accuracy of the first month each time, it does not provide the length of lead in period the Panel rightly requires.

5. Conclusion

Senior Managers are well placed to highlight at an early stage topics which the Scrutiny Management Panel might find useful in offering pre-decision support and this could be a more effective way forward. If the panel support this approach, arrangements could be made to invite relevant Senior Managers (to be determined) along to the next Panel meeting to provide this information.

In addition to this approach, we will, in time for the Panel's next scheduled meeting, produce a composite of all published forward plan items over the last 12 months, so that members can identify the types of items they would like to have seen more of – eg the Corporate Plan. The Officers could then develop a list of areas the SMP is interested in and could alert officers to engage with the Panel as soon as it is known that a certain topic is likely to be coming forward for decision. This should be reasonably straight forward especially in respect of the annually recurring items.

Finally, the Officers will ensure that at the very least all forward plan items contain a heading which indicates the gist of the subject matter coming up for later decision.

It is hoped that the foregoing will go some way to help enable the Scrutiny Management Panel to more easily undertake its pre-decision scrutiny function.