

Enabling Councillors to be Effective Joint In-Depth Scrutiny Project 2021/22

Proposed Work Programme September 2021

Overview:

At the July 2021 cycle of meetings, the three Scrutiny Committees agreed that a joint In-Depth Scrutiny Project be undertaken for 2021/22, around the theme of 'Enabling Councillors to be Effective.'

At the meeting of the Council on 15 July 2021, a Project Team of 9 members was agreed to undertake the project. The Project Team was tasked with reviewing relevant issues and to report back to the Cabinet with appropriate findings and recommendations.

The Project Team elected Councillor J Moyies as Chair at its initial meeting on 19 August 2021.

The scope of the review is:

- (a) To identify and review current arrangements for the provision of support that councillors need to carry out their elected role, focusing on the "Councillor role" rather than the specific requirements of members of the Cabinet, the Shadow Cabinet or the chairs of committees.
- (b) To identify any 'quick wins' in terms of aspects of the main areas of focus of the project and to understand other ongoing activity that relates to the aims of the project to ensure joined-up arrangements.
- (c) Where relevant, to feed into the separate review to be undertaken of the Council's Constitution by the General Purposes Committee, to which all members of the Council will have a separate opportunity to contribute.
- (d) To complement the work of the design group currently looking at councillor development as part of the leadership programme.

Members of the Project Team:

Councillors: B Beggs, K Buck, T Cowdrey, K Evans, A Line, J Moyies (Chair), D Nelson, I Shead and A Thompson.

Timescale:

Preparation of full report and recommendations by the end of the municipal year (April 2022).

Work Programme:

(1) September 2021

- (a) Agree project framework/scope and draft work programme.

(2) October 2021 – First Contact

- (a) Investigate perceived increase in the number of resident queries being dealt with by councillors.
- (b) Understand the experience of residents when contacting the Council.
- (c) Review progress against relevant recommendations arising from the associated In-Depth Scrutiny project for 2020/21, including:
 - The development of a new engagement portal.
 - ‘My Southend’ and the ‘progress of cases’ element.
 - Call handling efficiency.
 - The customer experience email/phone/website/letter.
 - Data sharing between departments
 - The current website experience
- (d) Witness Session/Workshop:
 - Presentation by relevant officers, including current plans for ‘My Southend’ and the Council’s website.
 - Visit/listen to the call centre/mystery call the whole process through various means.
 - Identify areas of concern/requiring improvement.

(3) November 2021 – Councillor Queries

- (a) Review of the service post recent improvements:
 - Urgent matters.
 - Day-to-day issues.
 - Requests for information.
 - Policy support.
 - Emergency contact number/people.
 - Preparation for meetings
- (b) Witness Session/Workshop:
 - Project Team to brainstorm all situations.
 - Feedback from the ‘Councillor Queries’ officer team on their view on possible improvements.
 - Opportunity for all councillors to present their issues and suggestions.
 - Councillors to offer specific examples of issues where things had not gone well.

(4) December 2021 - Officer/Councillor Engagement

- (a) Arranging meetings.
- (b) Direct approaches to officers
- (c) Initial/ongoing training/information for councillors
- (d) Joint knowledge and understanding.
- (e) Witness Session/Workshop:
 - Review the recent Councillor/Officer protocol and how it is working/identify areas of improvement.

- Receive overview of current councillor development activity as part of the leadership programme to complement the scrutiny project.

(5) January 2022 – Councillor Casework

- Consider the benefits of a casework system to improve the management of resident issues.
 - Find out what other Councils use.
 - Find out what is available.
 - Does the LGA have an opinion?
- (e) Witness Session/Workshop:
- Presentation on an appropriate system from another local authority or site visit to a relevant local authority.

(6) February 2022 - Cross Service, External Partners and Outsourced Services

- Consider current arrangements for ensuring that queries concerning services provided by external organisations/agencies are passed on seamlessly rather than bouncing a query back as “not our problem.”
- Witness Session/Workshop:
 - External organisations/agencies and service providers.

(7) Ongoing Work Programme Activity

Enabling Non-Aligned Councillors

To be achieved through individual aspects of the Work Programme on an ongoing basis, complemented by the review to be undertaken of the Constitution.

- Ensure that non-aligned councillors have the ability to be effective.
 - Examine barriers to knowledge and influence and identify anything that restricts the ability to represent residents effectively.
- (f) Witness Session/Workshop:
- Discussion with non-aligned councillors.

(8) April 2022

- Agree final report and recommendations to be made to the Cabinet.