



## EDUCATION COMMISSION 4 July 2005

Report of the Director of Corporate Services

### Overview and Scrutiny Objectives and Work Planning for 2005/06

#### RECOMMENDATION

1. Having regard to its scope and portfolio the Commission is invited to:
  - a) Agree the actions it will take in order to meet the objectives set out in the 2004/05 Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Commissions.
  - b) Develop a work plan for its topic and scrutiny review activities in the coming year.

#### SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 2.1 The 2004/05 Annual Report of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Commissions defined the following objectives for 2005/06:
  1. To improve the engagement between Cabinet and the Scrutiny Commissions.
  2. For the Commissions to increase their involvement in scrutiny.
  3. For the Commissions to review their work processes with a view to improving outcomes and the linkages to Council priorities.
  4. For the Commissions to identify the skills needed by Chairs and members to deliver effective scrutiny, and prepare training programmes designed to address any skill shortages they identify.
- 2.2 It is suggested that the Commission should agree the actions it will take in order to meet the Annual Report objectives. Appendix 3 of this report contains an extract from the Commissions' Annual Report which suggests some ways in which the objectives might be achieved.
- 2.3 The actions that the Commission can take will to some extent be constrained by the level of support that the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordination Team can provide to the Commission.

- 2.4 The Commission is advised that for the coming Municipal year the Co-ordination Team is able to offer each of the six Overview and Scrutiny Commissions up to 26 meetings of around two hours duration. Seven of these meetings will be taken up by the Commission's scheduled meetings. The remaining 19 meetings are therefore available to the Commission for extended scrutiny or policy development topic reviews, or for any other activities that the Commission considers would enable it to achieve its objectives for the coming year.
- 2.5 In order to make best use of the 19 meetings, it is suggested that the Commission develops a work plan for the coming Municipal year. The work plan should take into account any known demands on Commission time such as budget scrutiny, and should then allocate the remaining meetings to either topic or scrutiny review work according to Commission members' perception of needs and priorities. The actions that the Commission will take in order to meet the Annual Report objectives can where appropriate be incorporated in the work plan.
- 2.6 To facilitate development of the Commission's work plan it is suggested that prior to the next meeting of the Commission, members should inform the Co-ordination Officer of any issues or topics that they consider it would be of benefit for the Commission to scrutinise or review. The Co-ordination Officer will collate this information for circulation at the meeting.
- 2.7 The Scrutiny Management Commission considered a list of potential topics for scrutiny provided by lead Cabinet Members at their last meeting. The suggestions relating to the remit of this Commission were produced by the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Schools Education Services and are given in Appendix 4.
- 2.8 Integrated Children Services is a key priority for the Council. It has therefore been suggested by Chair, Councillor Jones to have a standing item on the Commission's agenda to receive updates on how this issue is being developed, particularly in the current year.
- 2.9 As in previous years, the Co-ordination Team is arranging to provide a training session for Overview and Scrutiny members. However, it is proposed for the first time to run a modular training programme that allows Members to pick and choose a module they wish to attend. The training will include the principles of Overview and Scrutiny, Performance Management and the use of Performance Eye. If members would like any other issues included in the training they should contact the Co-ordination Team.
- 2.10 It is also suggested that the June-July period of the coming Municipal year could be used to familiarise the Commissions with their new portfolios. This could be done in a variety of ways. For example, with the previous Education Commission it was arranged for members to

visit selected schools in order to see some of the condition issues that affect school buildings. On another occasion, Education Commission members visited a number of the schools PFI sites in the City. Both these visits gave members information that could not easily have been gained from reports and presentations. If there are issues or areas within the Commission's portfolio on which members would like more information, they should contact the Co-ordination Team.

<b>For more information contact:</b>	Mahroof Hussain 01332 255597 e-mail <a href="mailto:Mahroof.hussain@derby.gov.uk">Mahroof.hussain@derby.gov.uk</a>
<b>Background papers:</b>	Appendix 1 – Implications
<b>List of appendices:</b>	Appendix 2 – Commission Portfolio Appendix 3 – Extract from the 2004/05 Annual Report of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Commissions Appendix 4 – List of suggestions for scrutiny by the lead Cabinet member for Schools Education Services

<b>IMPLICATIONS</b>
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**Financial**

1. The costs of implementing the Commission's work plan must be met from the Commission's research budget.

**Legal**

2. None arising from this report.

**Personnel**

3. None arising from this report.

**Equalities impact**

4. Effective scrutiny is of benefit to all Derby people.

**Corporate Objectives, Values and Priorities**

5. This report links to the Council's Corporate Objectives of **stimulating and high quality learning environment** and Priorities that **no schools in 'causing concern' category** and **raising educational achievement**.

Education Commission Portfolio 2005/06

- Schools
- Centrally Funded School Services, including Special Needs
- Youth Service
- Adult Education
- Mandatory and Discretionary Awards
- Access Support including Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant

**Extract from the 2005/06 Annual Report of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Commissions (the comments in italics are extracted from the relevant section of the Scrutiny Management Commission's report on its Review of the Council's Scrutiny function)**

## **2005/06 Objectives**

### **1. To improve the engagement between Cabinet and the Scrutiny Commissions**

It was considered that this could be achieved by:

- Regular informal meetings between Scrutiny Chairs, Vice Chairs and Commission members and the relevant Cabinet members
- Cabinet members explaining to the Commissions why recommendations had not been adopted or had been amended
- Cabinet members spending more time with the Commissions, answering questions and explaining Cabinet policy
- Relevant Cabinet members attending the first Commission meeting of the Municipal Year to inform members of Cabinet priorities, provide performance summaries and details of inspections, etc
- Reinforcing the need for mutual respect between the Cabinet and Commissions and mutual recognition of the value of their roles in ensuring effective decision making

*It was felt that that better engagement between the Cabinet and the Commissions would:*

- *Reduce conflict*
- *Improve the focus of the Commissions*
- *Assist Commissions in prioritising their work*
- *Add value to the Council's decision making processes*

### **2. For the Commissions to increase their involvement in scrutiny**

It was considered that this might be done by reducing the emphasis currently placed on topic reviews and giving more attention to scrutiny. Methods of achieving this include using performance management information more effectively and conducting scrutiny reviews on the outcomes of previous decisions.

*It was considered that increasing the level of scrutiny would:*

- *Improve the Commissions' effectiveness in holding the Cabinet to account*
- *Improve the response of the Commissions to issues affecting Derby people*
- *Enable Commission members to develop new skills*

- *Raise the profile of scrutiny by enabling the Commissions to engage in issues that were seen by the public as locally topical and important*
- *Improve the quality of service delivery*

### **3. For the Commissions to review their work processes with a view to improving outcomes and the linkages to Council priorities**

This might be done by:

- Selecting agenda items and topics for review on the basis of their overall importance and the value that the Commissions will gain or add by considering them
- Giving higher priority to the consideration of matters that relate to the Council's priorities
- Holding informal all-Commission pre-meetings before business meetings in order to exchange information and explore options relating to agenda items
- Routinely requesting update and feedback reports from Cabinet and Chief Officers on the items considered by the Commissions

*The time that Commission members can devote to the Overview and Scrutiny process is a scarce resource. In order to use that time effectively the Commissions must concentrate on those issues that are important to Derby people and the Council as a whole. Commissions must avoid being sidetracked into spending time on 'rubber stamping' exercises or on issues where they cannot add or gain significant value, even though such activities might be suggested by Cabinet or Chief Officers.*

### **4. For the Commissions to identify the skills needed by Chairs and members to deliver effective scrutiny, and prepare training programmes designed to address any skill shortages they identify**

*Effective scrutiny requires a particular range of member skills. By providing training in those skills it should be possible to improve the standard of scrutiny delivered by the Commissions.*

## Appendix 4

Scrutiny areas suggested by the Cabinet Member with the responsibility for Schools Education Services:

1. The Integration of Children's Services
2. Extended Schools/Children's Centres
3. Partnership relationships in schools
4. Excellence in Cities
5. The Adult Learning Service
6. Managed Moves for pupils at risk of exclusion
7. Partnerships and the Pupil Referral Unit
8. External partnerships: Learning and Skills Council, Connexions Service, Youth Offending Service, Health Service etc.
9. Compare the merits of selling services to schools as opposed to core services e.g. Property Services, Special Educational Needs Support Service.
10. Relationship between the Local Education Authority and Governing Bodies of schools (Clear responsibility of clouded picture e.g. Silverhill School)
11. Monitoring the exercise of delegated authority to schools (e.g. Silverhill)
12. Issues around the ability of schools to federate, merge, collaborate (e.g. Cherry Tree Hill Primary at Chaddesden and Castle Nursery are consulting on federating, and Peartree Junior and Peartree Infants and Harrington Nursery considered the merits of merging, federation or collaboration).