



AGENDA ITEM: 6

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

12 January 2010

REVIEW OF EXECUTIVE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. To provide a review of the Executive Forward Work Programme and to update the Overview and Scrutiny Board on revised target dates.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. In February 2008, the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel submitted a report to the Executive on the Executive Scheme of Delegation. One element of the report focused on the Executive Forward Work programme, further details of which are referred to later in this report.
3. At the November 2009 meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board, the Executive Office Manager was asked to review the Forward Work Programme and provide an update in respect of revised target dates.

THE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME (FWP)

4. The Executive Forward Work Programme (FWP) is a legislative requirement that must amongst other things contain all key decisions to be taken by the Executive (both full and single member) over a rolling period of four months.
5. The FWP is a public document which can be accessed via Lotus Notes and through the Council's website. Monthly updated copies of the FWP are also placed in the Town Hall reception and libraries.
6. As part of the Overview and Scrutiny Board's remit of holding the Executive to account, Members also consider a report of the Executive Office Manager every eight weeks. The report identifies forthcoming issues to be considered by the Executive and the Board decide whether value can be added by Scrutiny considering any such matters in advance of a decision being made.

TARGET DATES

7. Target dates within the FWP are those dates on which it is proposed for an Executive decision to be taken on the identified issue. It is acknowledged however that some target dates can slip for a range of reasons. Those reasons can include, for example, capacity issues within individual departments; changes in policy which results in the need to review the issue under consideration; extended consultation exercises; and over optimistic timetables.
8. Removal of an item from the FWP will occur once the item has been considered by the appropriate Executive decision making body.

AD HOC SCRUTINY PANEL - THE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

9. Whilst the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel acknowledged that the FWP was much improved, one of its recommendations was that it be brought up-to-date as soon as possible. This resulted in a series of subsequent actions which included:
 - monthly reminders being sent to Senior Managers and Personal Assistants, asking them to update and add items to the FWP as soon as they were known;
 - copies of Environment's, Regeneration's, Social Care's and Children, Families and Learning's forward planning schedules (the majority of which are updated weekly), that detail reports going through the Executive decision making processes, being sent to the Executive Office. This allowed for appropriate checks to be made to ensure that the schedules reflected information contained within the FWP. Where there were discrepancies, the FWP was updated accordingly;
 - a revised guide detailing the Executive decision making processes was produced and circulated to all departments. As part of its promotion, the Executive Office Manager offered to provide a presentation on the document. The document was placed on Lotus Notes and copies were also made available to all Members; and
 - a revision to the standard report submitted to the Board on the FWP with the inclusion of further background information on the key decisions contained therein.

REVIEW OF THE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME IN 2009

10. In March 2009, the Executive Office also undertook a further internal review of the FWP.
11. The review took place after it was recognised that some key decisions were being added to the FWP at a late stage and the need to ensure that the planning schedules produced by the departments were being kept up to date.
12. Arising from that review the following actions were taken:
 - the FWP is now assessed daily to check that target dates are accurate which can result in further actions being taken when felt necessary;

- the Executive Officer provided six presentations on Executive decision-making process to personal assistants and secretaries across the Council. The sessions covered all aspects of the decision-making process, including a focus on the importance of keeping the FWP up to date;
- personal assistants and secretaries have been asked to ensure that their respective service areas are aware of the importance of the FWP and that all key decisions are added as soon as they are known; and
- when Executive meetings are convened, the relevant departmental officers are asked to ensure items which are considered to be key decisions, are reflected fully on the FWP.

FURTHER PLANNED ACTIONS

13. Following the request from the Overview and Scrutiny Board to review the FWP, the following further actions have also been taken:

- the Executive Manual tile on Lotus Notes has been updated in respect of the Executive decision making processes. All departments have been made aware of this update;
- the need to ensure that Executive key decisions are included on the forward planning schedules as soon as possible and that subsequent amendments are made as soon as they are known, has been reiterated to departments;
- departments are to be approached on whether managers would also wish to receive the presentation referred to in paragraph 12 above.
- the report of the Ad-Hoc Scrutiny Panel also recommended that a forward planning schedule for Central Services be introduced. Whilst a schedule was initially produced, there is a need to review the position. Further work will therefore be undertaken to address this issue in the New Year; and
- the Head of Scrutiny will also be discussing the role of scrutiny within the Council at the next PA Networking briefing in January 2010. The Executive Office will also be in attendance and the importance of updating the Forward Work programme will be covered.

14. The implementation of the various actions detailed above has resulted in the monitoring arrangements of the FWP becoming more robust and timely. The links with departments has also been much improved and with the identification of further planned actions as detailed above, it is anticipated that additional improvements can be made. It is acknowledged however that it is very much a continual process which the Executive Office does monitor on a regular basis. As part of this process, it is therefore proposed to submit a further progress report to the Board in six months time.

RECOMMENDATION

15. It is recommended that the Overview and Scrutiny Board note the contents of the report and that a further progress report be submitted to the Board in six months time.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS – Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel Final Report- Executive Scheme of Delegation