

**Council – 25 June 2009**

**ANNUAL REPORT OF SCRUTINY AND THE POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUPS**

**Report of the Member Support Services Manager**

**Statutory Powers:** Local Government Act 2000

**Financial Implications:** None

**Purpose:**

1. To report to Members on the working of Scrutiny and the Policy Development Groups during the 2008/2009 municipal year and to make recommendations for future work programmes and amend working methods where appropriate.

**RECOMMENDATION**

**That the Council RESOLVES to note the work programmes of Scrutiny and the Policy Development Groups.**

**Background**

2. Council Procedure Rule 6.7 states that:-

“Scrutiny and the Policy Development Groups must report annually to full Council on their workings and make recommendations for future programmes and amended working methods if appropriate”

3. Set out at Appendix A is an outline of the issues considered by Scrutiny and each Policy Development Group (PDG) during the 2008/2009 municipal year.

**Scrutiny**

4. As part of its remit, Scrutiny may:
  - (a) review and scrutinise the decisions made by and performance of the Executive and/or council officers both in relation to individual decisions and decisions made over time and may question members of the executive and/or officers whether generally or in relation to specific decisions, initiatives or projects;
  - (b) review and scrutinise the performance of the Council in relation to its policy objectives, performance targets and/or particular service areas;
  - (c) make recommendations to the Executive and/or Council arising from the outcome of the scrutiny process;

- (d) review the effectiveness of the Council's risk management process on a regular basis and gain assurance that appropriate action is being taken to ensure that corporate risks are being managed, including a report to Council annually;
  - (e) review and scrutinise the performance of other public bodies in the area and invite reports from them by requesting them to address Scrutiny and local people about their activities and performance; and
  - (f) question and gather evidence from any person with a relevant knowledge, expertise or responsibility (with their consent).
5. During the 2008/2009 municipal year, Scrutiny invited nine external organisations (including TADPOOL and Tor Homes) to attend meetings to provide Members with the opportunity to review and comment on the services they provide. A number of organisations were particularly well received by the Group and have led to a number of resultant actions being carried out (e.g. the change in name of the South Dartmoor Leisure Centre to Ivybridge Leisure Centre and progression with the Concessionary Bus Fares Scheme for young people (aged between 14 and 19 years of age and in full-time education)).
  6. The working of Scrutiny has also been enhanced through its shadowing of Executive Members. This has enabled a closer working partnership and improved understanding of the Executive and its roles and responsibilities. Scrutiny Members have commented that the process has been working well with good communication links between the Executive and their Scrutiny counterparts and no major issues have arisen in the working relations.
  7. Scrutiny has also considered a review of internal services including Grass Cutting and regular monitoring of the Leisure Centres, Sport and Healthy Lifestyles contract with Tone Leisure.
  8. At its meeting of 19 March 2009, Scrutiny carried a motion in relation to the establishment of a 'Treasury Management Strategy Task and Finish Group to consider in-depth the strategy.' In accordance with the Constitution, this proposal to appoint such a Group requires the approval of the Programming Panel. The Panel subsequently considered this request at its meeting of 26 March 2009, where it concluded after a lengthy debate that such was the importance of this matter, that it again merited full consideration at a public meeting of the Scrutiny Group. Therefore, the Panel requested that a new (and up to date) report should be produced for the consideration of Scrutiny at its meeting on 2 July 2009.
  9. During the 2008/2009 municipal year, the Scrutiny Call-in procedure was not invoked. This would appear to be in-keeping with the Constitution, which states that the procedure should only be used "in exceptional circumstances". Nonetheless, the call-in procedure has not been reviewed since December 2005 and therefore Scrutiny has considered it to be pertinent to undertake a review of the process at its next meeting on 2 July 2009.

## Policy Development Groups

10. As part of their remit, the PDG's may:
  - (a) assist the Council and the Executive in the development of its budget and policy framework by in-depth analysis of current provision, performance and policy issues;
  - (b) instigate research, community and other consultation in the analysis of policy issues, possible options and the development of policy;
  - (c) regularly involve members of the Executive and occasionally members of other bodies of the Council and officers to find out their views on issues, proposals and policy affecting the area;
  - (d) review and scrutinise the performance of other public bodies in the area and invite reports from them by requesting them to address Scrutiny and local people about their activities and performance;
  - (e) question and gather evidence from any person with a relevant knowledge, expertise or responsibility (with their consent);
  - (f) consider reports from any individual councillor on matters relevant to the terms of reference of the group to enable the views of constituents and other organisations to be taken into account; and
  - (g) liaise with other external organisations operating in the area, whether national, regional or local, to ensure that the interests of local people are enhanced by collaborative working.
11. The Prosperity PDG has provided a forum for early debate on fees and charges for outdoor recreation, waste services, car park and pannier markets and the Dartmouth Lower Ferry.
12. The Member Champion for Children and Young People has proved very successful in his work and provided regular updates to the Community PDG.
13. A number of items for consideration by the Environment PDG have yet to be forthcoming, due to the dates of reviews for many policies and strategies within the Groups remit not having been scheduled for review during the 2008/2009 municipal year.
14. Scrutiny and the PDG's also had a valuable input into the 2009/10 Budget Setting Process. Each Group had a meeting solely to consider the Budget process. Wherever possible, their recommendations were incorporated into the Executive's final recommendations, which were subsequently adopted by Council at its meeting on 5 February 2009.

15. During the budget setting process, Scrutiny and the PDG's felt that in order to ascertain an understanding of the individual services within the Council, it was important for each Policy Development Group and Scrutiny to receive detailed service and budget reports on those services within their remit from the appropriate Head of Service and the lead Executive Member. Whilst still in its infancy, this process is being progressed and it is hoped will successfully provide Members with a detailed analysis of each service area and provide an opportunity to make relevant observations.

### **Role of the Programming Panel**

16. The Programming Panel (which comprises of the Chairmen or Vice Chairmen of Scrutiny and each Policy Development Group and the Leader of the Council or Deputy Leader of the Council) meet on a regular basis to oversee the workloads of the five bodies to ensure efficiency of the scrutiny and policy development process.
17. Attached at Appendix B is the current future work programmes for Scrutiny and the PDG's. This is a 'rolling' programme which has evolved from the policy development review programme and Member and officer requests for items to be considered.

### **Risk Assessment**

Risk	Mitigation
Impact on corporate priorities, targets and commitments	Co-ordination of the work of the PDGs by the Programming Panel ensures that the Council retains a focus on its corporate priorities, an important component of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment framework.

### **Conclusion**

18. Whilst full Council has no authority to amend the work programmes of either Scrutiny or the PDGs, the annual report does provide an opportunity to inform Council of issues which are coming forward for consideration. Similarly, it also enables discussion to take place on current working methods.

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Council  
25 June 2009

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**Background Documents:**  
The Council's Constitution