
Report of the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development

Scrutiny Board: Children's Services

Date: 26th June 2008

Subject: Input to the Work Programme 2008/09 - Sources of Work and
Establishing the Board's Priorities

Electoral Wards Affected:



Ward Members consulted
(referred to in report)

Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

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Community Cohesion

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Narrowing the Gap

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1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report provides information and guidance to assist the Board in developing a work programme for 2008/09 that is focused on strategic issues.

2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 Members will be aware that the most recent Corporate Assessment report for the Council identified the following area for improvement.

"While scrutiny has improved with the introduction of seven new Scrutiny Committees these still remain inconsistent in their approach to challenging policy development. As a consequence effective challenge to the Council through overview and Scrutiny remains inconsistent. Further development is required to ensure a robust approach for all Scrutiny Boards."

- 2.2 It is important for Scrutiny Boards to have regard to these concerns in developing their work programmes in 2008/09, and focus more on the Council's corporate strategic priorities.

3.0 Background Information

- 3.1 A copy of the Board's terms of reference is attached for reference purposes.
(Appendix 1)

3.2 A range of core information relevant to this Board's responsibilities is attached to this paper, to assist Members in the process of identifying priorities for the coming year's work programme:

- Draft Leeds Strategic Plan
- Local Area Agreement – draft indicators and targets
- Children and Young People's Plan Review 2008
- Quarter 4 2007/08 Performance Management Information
- Corporate Assessment Report
- Corporate Assessment Actions
- Joint Area Review report
- Details of forthcoming external audit reviews
- Corporate Governance and Audit Committee work programme
- Internal Audit Plan 2008/09
- Forward plan of key decisions
- Minutes of Executive Board
- Outstanding issues from 2007/08

3.3 Other sources of work will continue to be 'requests for scrutiny' and corporate referrals.

4.0 Guidance

4.1 Over the last few years of Scrutiny Board work, experience has shown that the process is more effective if the Board seeks to minimise the number of substantial inquiries running at one time.

4.2 The Board is advised to consider the benefits of single item agendas (excluding miscellaneous information and minutes) in order to focus on all the relevant evidence and complete inquiries in a shorter period of time. There are various mechanisms available to assist the Board in concluding inquiries quickly whilst the issues are pertinent, such as working groups and site visits.

4.3 The agreed Memorandum of Understanding between Executive Board and Overview and Scrutiny which now sits within the Council's Constitution states;

"The responsibility of those setting scrutiny work programmes is, therefore, to ensure that items of work come from a strategic approach as well as a need to challenge service performance and respond to issues of high public interest.

It is recognised that Scrutiny Boards have a 'watching brief' role. In addition information is required for members' own development process, particularly as membership of the Boards is changed annually.

However, it is also recognised that agendas are often filled up with reports for this purpose, which takes up time for both officers and Members. Where Scrutiny Boards wish to ask questions at a general or more strategic level and/or be updated on issues already considered in detail, the facility of Members' Questions – where a verbal exchange replaces written reports - should be used.

It is expected that wherever possible prior notification is given of the likely questions to be asked".

- 4.4 For the past couple of years the Children's Services Board in particular has developed the approach of devoting one meeting per quarter to overview and performance management. This includes receiving reports and scrutinising executive members and officers on relevant issues.

5.0 Work programming

- 5.1 The Children's Services Executive Members and the Director of Children's Services have been invited to attend this meeting of the Board to contribute to discussions about potential items for the Board's work programme.

6.0 Recommendation

- 6.1 Members are requested to use the attached information and the discussion with Executive Members and the Director of Children's Services to inform the development and approval of its work programme under the next agenda item.