

SCRUTINY BOARD (CORPORATE AND CENTRAL FUNCTIONS)

INQUIRY INTO CONSULTANT ENGAGEMENT

TERMS OF REFERENCE

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 At its meeting on 8th June 2009 Scrutiny Board (Corporate and Central Functions) resolved to undertake an Inquiry into Consultant Engagement within the Council. This had initially been decided in 2008 however the Board's work programme could not accommodate the work.
- 1.2 Members wished to review the process by which consultants are engaged and how they are evaluated. Members are concerned that engaging consultants provides a cost effective method of producing the required outcomes to a sufficiently high standard.
- 1.3 The Board is also interested in whether use of consultants reflects a perceived skills gap within the Council, or whether there is a necessary focus on core business which requires ad hoc engagement of consultants.
- 1.4 Members do not wish to begin the inquiry by assuming the use of consultants is either right or wrong. Clearly, there will be a case for buying in the necessary skills at different times. However, Members do wish to establish whether there is a consistent approach to the use of consultants and whether there is regular evaluation of the Council's required skills base.

2.0 Scope of the inquiry

- 2.1 The purpose of the Inquiry is to make an assessment of and, where appropriate, make recommendations on the following areas:
 - A definition of Consultants
 - The extent to which consultants are used (in the widest sense) in the Council and how this compares with other authorities
 - The reasons for the use of consultants
 - The methods of monitoring and evaluating the outcomes and the value for money provided by consultants
 - The differences in practice between departments and whether there is consistent information sharing across the council
 - Whether the use of consultants results in the depletion of skills within the authority

- The alternatives to the use of consultants and the associated risks of different approaches

3.0 Comments of the relevant Director and Executive Member

- 3.1 In line with Scrutiny Board Procedure Rule 12.4 the views of the relevant Director and Executive Member have been sought. Councillor Brett has stated that he is supportive of the Inquiry and added the following comment;

“Consultants’ covers in reality a wide range of circumstances. At one extreme we are buying in expert knowledge to a technical job we can’t do. At the other there is the wide ranging ‘tell us where we are and how to proceed’. The latter is not as common. Be very wary of treating all consultants as the same”.

4.0 Timetable for the inquiry

- 4.1 The Inquiry will take place over three sessions with a view to issuing a final report in February 2010.
- 4.2 The length of the Inquiry is subject to change.

5.0 Submission of evidence

5.1 Session one – (7th September 2009)

- A definition of Consultants
- The extent to which consultants are used (in the widest sense) in the Council and how this compares with other authorities
- The reasons for the use of consultants

5.2 Session two - (2nd November 2009)

- The methods of monitoring and evaluating the outcomes and the value for money provided by consultants
- The differences in practice between departments and whether there is consistent information sharing across the council

5.3 Session three - (4th January 2010)

- Whether the use of consultants results in the depletion of skills within the authority
- The alternatives to the use of consultants and the associated risks of different approaches

5.4 **Session four - (February 2010)**

- To agree final report

6.0 **Witnesses**

6.1 The following witnesses have been identified as possible contributors to the Inquiry:

- Procurement
- High spending service
- HR
- Resources

7.0 **Post inquiry report monitoring arrangements**

7.1 Following the completion of the Scrutiny inquiry and the publication of the final inquiry report and recommendations, the implementation of the agreed recommendations will be monitored.

7.2 The final inquiry report will include information on the detailed arrangements for how the implementation of recommendations will be monitored.

8.0 **Measures of success**

8.1 It is important to consider how the Scrutiny Board will deem if their inquiry has been successful in making a difference to local people. Some measures of success may be obvious at the initial stages of an inquiry and can be included in these terms of reference. Other measures of success may become apparent as the inquiry progresses and discussions take place.