

SCRUTINY – LESSONS LEARNED

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The objective of the report is to provide the Audit and Scrutiny Committee with a summary of the lessons learned from scrutiny activity since the roll out of the new scrutiny approach which commenced in the summer of 2018.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 The Audit and Scrutiny Committee is asked to:
- 2.1.1 Endorse this report.
 - 2.1.2 Discuss and provide feedback on the 'process' learning points set out in paragraph 3.4
 - 2.1.3 Note the administrative learning points in paragraph 3.5
 - 2.1.4 Consider any further feedback they wish to provide on the scrutiny process.
 - 2.1.5 Note that the Chief Internal Auditor (CIA) will amend the Scrutiny Framework and Scrutiny Manual to reflect the changes set out in this report and bring it back to a future meeting of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee for approval.

3 DETAIL

- 3.1 On 20 March 2018 the Audit and Scrutiny Committee (the Committee) approved the Council's new scrutiny framework designed to complement our Performance Improvement Framework and the scrutiny already taking place at service and area committees.
- 3.2 Scrutiny is a key component of good governance which, if carried out well, will help improve our decision making, policy development & implementation and service delivery.
- 3.3 As the process is new and there is only a finite amount of resource available to perform scrutiny it is important that the process is subject to continuous improvement. As the reviews have been carried out, members, officers and panel attendees have identified areas for improvement or change and these have been recorded as lessons learned. These learning points have categorised as either 'Process' points for discussion with the Committee and 'Administrative' points which are more for the scrutiny officers to reflect on.

Process Learning Points

- 3.4 Points about the process are summarised in the bullet points below for

discussion.

1. Scrutiny panel engagement with scrutiny officers is essential, in particular responding to queries about the objectives of panel meetings, availability for panels and agreement with panel minutes.
2. After a panel has determined the review scope and objectives they should be shared with all Committee members for consideration. This will be done by e-mail as waiting for the next meeting of the Committee might result in too much time passing.
3. Current practice is to provide panel attendees with the full list of questions to be covered. Recent experience has been that this results in attendees having prepared answers which can make it harder to fully explore the subject area. It is still important that attendees are properly briefed prior to a panel however providing them with key themes rather than the specific questions may provide for fuller discussion of the topic under review.
4. Initially the scrutiny manual stated that *“At the end of a review a draft report should be produced which provides a full picture of the issues under consideration and contains conclusions (key findings) and clear recommendations.”* After a review of other authority scrutiny reports and discussions between the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee and the CIA it was agreed that reports would not include recommendations but rather findings and learning points.
5. The scrutiny manual also stated that *“All recommendations and any agreed action will be entered into the internal audit follow up database and followed up on using the established process for following up internal audit action points”*. As recommendations will not be raised in scrutiny reports, this step is no longer required.
6. There has been discussions between the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee and the CIA regarding the report clearance process. There is recognition that the process may be slightly different for each review. Reports will be checked for factual accuracy with appropriate officers however there is recognition of the Committee’s independence and it is not for officers to challenge the scrutiny panel’s judgements.
7. So far all scrutiny panels have been made up of three members of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee. The Committee may wish to consider whether this practice should be maintained going forward or whether they wish to consider inviting other elected members to sit on panels where appropriate. As a practice it might be advisable to ensure that there are always two members of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee on any panel of three.
8. To date all scrutiny activity has involved the ‘full panel’ approach which is appropriate for large scale reviews however may be less

appropriate if the Committee want to review an emerging issue which is not part of the annual scrutiny plan and/or which doesn't necessarily require a full panel approach. The Committee may want to consider, when appropriate, a 'scrutiny light' approach for specific topics which emerge. This may involve inviting officers to prepare a report on a particular topic for Committee to consider or attending a development session for a more informal discussion.

3.5 *Administrative Learning Points*

Administrative learning points are summarised in the bullet points below:

- When agreeing potential timescales for panels, be realistic especially when dealing with external parties. Doodle poll is a free scheduling tool available on the internet and has proved useful.
- After initial briefing meeting create a provisional plan of key stages with indicative timescales for panels and when documents will be distributed to stakeholders.
- Do not have scrutiny panels too close together. There needs to be time to write up and agree minutes and follow up on any action points before the next panel meeting.
- It is important that scrutiny officers know when a minute of a panel has been agreed as this forms the evidence base and allows them to progress a review. Going forward, when issuing minutes, officers will add text indicating that if no response is received by a defined date there will be assumption of agreement.
- When the scrutiny plan involves scrutiny of service areas that fall within the remit of Social Work we must ensure the IJB are notified.
- Revise terminology in scrutiny framework regarding 'SLA' with HSCP. "The Council does not have an SLA with the A&B HSCP. Instead there is an Integration Scheme between the Council and NHS Highland through which the Council has delegated certain functions to the IJB.
- There have been occasions when minutes of panel meetings have not been issued promptly following meetings. This is often due to resource pressures for scrutiny officers. To help address this issue, and provide support with the administrative activity involved in the scrutiny process, it has been decided to trial the use of a secretarial assistant who is an experienced minute taker and meeting organiser to assist with the ongoing Economic Strategy review. If this proves successful it will be rolled out for all scrutiny reviews. This will have the additional benefit of allowing scrutiny officers to be more involved in the panel meetings rather than focusing on taking notes.

3.6 Some of the learning points detailed at paragraphs 3.4 and 3.5 will require

amendments to the Scrutiny Framework and Scrutiny Manual. These will be processed and both documents brought back for Committee approval at a future meeting.

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 The scrutiny process is new and evolving as each review is progressed. Members and officers continue to identify areas for improvement and these will be addressed as they are raised.

5 IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 **Policy - None**
- 5.2 Financial -None
- 5.3 Legal -None
- 5.4 HR - None
- 5.5 Fairer Scotland Duty - None
- 5.5.1 Equalities – None
- 5.5.2 Socio-Economic Duty – None
- 5.5.3 Islands Duty - None
- 5.6 Risk – None
- 5.7 Customer Service - None

Laurence Slavin
Chief Internal Auditor
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For further information contact:
Laurence Slavin, Chief Internal Auditor (01436 657694)