

Workplan sources and ways of working (adapted from “How to be an Effective Scrutiny Member” training 2011)

Sources of Panel activities/work plan suggestions

» **People**

- Whole Panel
- Cabinet member suggestions,
- SDG/officer suggestions,
- members of public
- community/voluntary groups
- Non-panel Councillors

They don't all have to be sat in the room, but seek their views and input

» **Wide range of issues and subjects**

Seek suggestions/ideas from

- The Cabinet's Forward Plan,
- corporate plan/priorities,
- range of corporate and service policies, strategies and plans – when are they due to be reviewed/refreshed?
- sustainable community strategy (if something is to be achieved in 20years – ask how? where could OS be involved?)
- new ways of working (eg: multi-organisation projects) – have they worked, are they successful? What can be learned?
- Service plans and performance information
- New government legislation, consultation or guidance
- Suggestions from public, media issues, neighbourhood, voluntary and community sector organisations
- Issues from audit or inspection reports

Ways of Working

» Types of Workplan/Agenda items

- » Formal report
- » Presentation
- » Verbal briefing/update
- » Q&A session/interview
- » In-depth investigation

» By who?

- Cabinet members,
- Member champions,
- Council officers,
- “partner” organisations, such as NHS, Police, and local organisations,
- residents/community groups ,
- young people (DAFBY, Youth Parliament)
- and others?

Planning

» **Medium to longer term**

- Medium to longer term: 12 – 24 months
- later stages can be more about “sketching in” regular items, outcomes of planned reviews/following up items etc

» **Flexibility – room for planned and reactive work**

- Planning = good; don't forget to add the regular work, such as budget/service plans
- but also leave space and flexibility for issues arising

Setting Boundaries

» **Self discipline: time, energy, capacity**

Be self-disciplined – don't say yes to everything suggested !!

- As a Panel, do you have the time, energy, capacity? This is where planning over a longer timescale can help
- Not all Panel members can be at all meetings, involved in reviews, sitting on a policy development group – need to share and schedule who's involved and when
- Identify the timescale (even if roughly) for when something is to be examined/ reviewed - Members can identify in advance where and when they can best be individually involved
- Check: is officer support available? For example: an investigation that needs lots of financial info during March may not be easy to support.

» **Challenge yourselves**

Be a “critical friend” to your own plans.....

- Is this the best use of our time?
- What could we influence or change? Is it the right time to do it?
- Could we be duplicating work already underway (eg: through the audit or change programme)?

» **Avoid “for information” or “to note” as much as possible**

Could this be done another way -

- E-mailed document or link to the intranet (CIS) (save paper and server capacity?)
- A separate dedicated briefing from officers?
- Could 1 or 2 Councillors be commissioned to look into something report back to the Panel at the next work planning session?

» **Key question: does OS “add value”? Can it make a difference?**

- Are you going to influence change/improvement?
- Can you have a tangible effect via your observations, comments, recommendations.....and subsequent changes?

Making a difference can also be through holding public discussions -

- clarifying reasons – the what, why and how,
- enabling community views to be heard,
- bringing together a range of involved organisations that may not have met before in the right forum,
- exploding myths and misunderstandings?

In-depth Investigations

Methods:

Review/projects

- structured projects that take place over several months, with a sub-section of the Panel forming a Steering Group;
- use a range of processes and tools to gather evidence about the subject
- produce a final report about the project culminating in the strongly evidenced conclusions and recommendations
- Cabinet response to agree/defer/reject recommendations then brought to Panel

Scrutiny Inquiry Days

- Recent development in B&NES, although used in other Councils.
- A participative, consultative way of working
- Range of organisations interested in a certain issue (eg: Trade Waste collections) invited to meet informally with the Panel
- main part is a type of “workshop” or facilitated sessions
- develop shared “Action Plan” that all organisations sign up to
- report of day taken to formal Panel meeting, to agree any recommendations that are to be made to Cabinet.

These types of investigation are supported by high standard established project management processes provided by the Policy Development & Scrutiny Team

Service-led policy review & development

This is a potential new way of working, based on the Councillor involvement model recently used in work on the Local Development Framework. Details are still to be discussed and finalised, but based on previous practice, this could involve ;

- A sub-group of Panel members meet and work with service officers on a review or development of policy
- Members provide comments and suggestions at regular intervals during the process
- Different to a project/review (as above) as its an on-going overview of the development of the policy, rather than a more objective Panel-led and directed investigation,
- Needs to be included in workplan to ensure Panel capacity
- It has not yet been identified how the Members report back to Panel on how they've "added value" by their involvement in the policy development process.