

ANGUS COUNCIL

SCRUTINY AND AUDIT COMMITTEE – 13 JUNE 2013

OUTCOME OF SCRUTINY REVIEW TOPIC CANVASS

REPORT BY SERVICE MANAGER - GOVERNANCE

ABSTRACT

This report informs the committee of the outcome of the first scrutiny review canvassing exercise and provides options for review areas and scrutiny panel composition.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Scrutiny & Audit Committee:

- (i) Determine whether they would wish any of the two process-type reviews (Planning Applications and Creditors/Payment Process) to be remitted to officers to review and to report back to this committee.
- (ii) Determine whether they would wish any of the smaller topics (Encouraging Civic Pride and Responding to the challenge of government initiatives) to be taken forward as a facilitated scrutiny workshop
- (iii) Agree that there be two scrutiny panels set up to take forward reviews with a chair for each identified at this meeting
- (iv) Agree the Convener and his lead officer allocate the remaining members of the panels
- (v) Agree the two highest scoring reviews be taken forward initially, with the other reviews to follow if time permits within the August to June timescale
- (vi) Note that review topics not addressed this year can be carried forward to the next tranche of reviews

2. BACKGROUND

Reference is made to report 294/13 to this committee which indicated that the canvassing exercise for scrutiny review topics has commenced. The exercise has now concluded and this report presents the outcomes for the committee's consideration and decision.

3. CANVASS OUTCOMES

Nineteen proposal forms were received from both members and officers, with some duplication in the areas suggested for review.

Appendix 1 summarises the proposals showing the review areas, the reasons for suggesting the topic, the suggested main questions, the potential improvements and the number of times the topic was referred. The appendix also shows the subjects excluded from review in the first filter exercise with exclusion reasons together with a broad scoring, conducted by the Convener and Lead Officer, in accordance with the handbook criteria. The final column shows the resultant ranking.

Two of the review areas presented (Processing of Planning Applications and Creditors/Payment Processes) would appear to be more of a process review than a scrutiny review and it is recommended that if members are minded to review these areas a more appropriate mechanism may be to remit to officers independent of the area (Internal Audit) to progress within the Transforming Angus agenda and report back to this committee.

At first review two other areas were considered to be smaller in nature (Encouraging Civic Pride and Responding to the Challenges of Government directives) and again, if committee are minded to conduct some review work in these areas it may be more appropriate to take these forward in the form of a facilitated scrutiny workshop where Scrutiny and Audit

Committee members, together with officers, could discuss matters to determine if any changes/recommendations were necessary and present a report to this committee.

The results of the above work left 10 areas for scoring consideration. The areas were broadly scored using the handbook methodology with the results as detailed in appendix 1. The results ranked in highest score order, for the top 4 reviews were:-

1. Roads network maintenance and repairs
2. Improving partnership working
3. Progress toward zero waste
4. Homelessness – Assessment Outcomes v Performance Targets

and it is suggested that members of this committee agree that, time permitting, these be the four reviews which could be taken forward in 2013-14, within the context of the model outlined in 4 below.

4. SCRUTINY PANEL COMPOSITION

The Scrutiny Handbook indicates that 3 or 4 reviews should be taken forward annually by Scrutiny Panels. However, given that there are only 12 members of this committee plus the Convener who is acting in a co-ordinating role, 3 or 4 reviews run concurrently will give a relatively small member panel for each review which may not be sustainable if member(s) were to be absent for any reason or not wish to participate in a panel.

There are likely to be a substantial number of meetings required for each panel to cover initial briefings/review scoping/evidence gathering meetings and interviews/evidence assessment meetings/recommendation and report meetings together with attendance at training.

On that basis, and taking into account members other commitments, it would seem that for the reviews to be sustainable, it would be prudent to start with two panels of six members. Each panel would have a chair to be appointed at this meeting and the Convener and his lead officer would allocate the remaining members of the panels and a review lead officer for each panel would be appointed.

The Panels would initially take forward the top 2 scoring reviews and, time permitting, move on to a second review once the first is completed.

The above arrangement would allow for a sustainable resource to be available to take forward what are likely to be substantial review areas.

5. ALLOCATION OF REVIEWS

On the basis of the two panels discussed above it is suggested that the reviews be allocated as follows:-

Panel	First Review	Second Review
Panel A	Improving Partnership Working	Progress toward Zero Waste
Panel B	Roads Network Maintenance and repair	Homelessness

The second reviews would follow on if time permitted within the agreed August to June timescale for conducting the scrutiny reviews. If the second reviews are not taken forward within 2013-14 they will be considered for inclusion within the 2014-15 tranche.

6. NEXT STEPS

Once the review areas are agreed and the panels appointed, initial training will be organised for members and review panel lead officers. It is intended that this training be delivered as soon after the recess as possible and an outline scope for the training day is shown at appendix 2.

Following on from this the panels will meet to consider background information and receive briefings from relevant officers which will inform the development of the specific terms of reference for the review. These will be agreed by the panel and the review will then commence.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications associated with the terms of this report at this time.

The expectation remains that support for scrutiny reviews will be managed from within existing resources, albeit it will consume staff time which will not be available for other purposes.

There may be a cost in securing external input (of a technical/specialist nature) to support reviews and this would be funded from within the existing Corporate Initiatives revenue budget when required.

In the event that resource issues to support scrutiny reviews arise these can be considered as part of the budget process for future years alongside the potential benefits which would be hoped to arise from review activity.

8. HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

There are no Human Rights implications arising directly from this report.

9. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

The issues contained in the report fall within an approved category that has been confirmed as exempt from an equalities perspective.

10. CONSULTATION

The Strategic Director-Communities, Strategic Director-People, Strategic Director-Resources, Head of Law and Administration and Head of Finance have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

JANINE WILSON
SERVICE MANAGER, GOVERNANCE

NOTE: No background papers, as defined by Sections 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information), were relied on to any material extent in preparing this report.

Gov/JW

List of Appendices

Scrutiny Review Canvass Exercise 2013-14
Outline of Training Day

Scrutiny Review Canvassing Exercise 2013-14

No	Area	Reason(s)	Questions	Potential Improvements	No of Referrals	First Filter	Score	Rank
1 12 15 17	Quality and best value in Roads Network maintenance and repairs	Criticisms from members of public, community councils and press about the standards of roads and efficiency of repairs. Evidence of poor workmanship, materials and methods with short – lasting repairs and patching.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 What are the processes and planning for maintenance? 2 Cost vs good value? – (cheapest is not necessarily best) 3 What options for repair do we have? 4 What is industry best practice? 5 Who monitors delivery and quality of work? 6 Can we think “out of the box”? 7 Can we get it right first time? 	<p>Reduce repeat repairs</p> <p>Radical in considering new ideas/options</p> <p>Pilots in certain areas</p> <p>Get it right first time</p> <p>A more efficient, structured and financially astute model being followed</p>	4	Ok	11	1
6	Improving partnership working	We have to find ways to avoid duplication and work together better with the public, third and private sector	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Is partnership working considered in all service reviews? 2 How can we utilise partnerships with the private sector? 	<p>Potential savings</p> <p>Reduction in duplication/ better synergies</p>	1	Ok – This is another strategically important area moving forward	8	2
3	Progress towards Zero Waste	The achievement of zero waste is a key strategic priority, but Angus recycling rates remain relatively low and progress with food recycling remains limited. We are also impeded by availability difficulties in the DERL plant in Dundee.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 What progress has been made in revising the council's strategy for waste management? 2 How much impact has been made on householder's management of their own waste habits? 3 How well placed is the council to fund any necessary investments to achieve zero 	Clarification of policy and operational delivery requirements	1	<p>Ok - a big strategic matter for the council. Incorporate review 18 as well</p> <p>There is an officer group to be set up to look at 2 feasibility studies around residual waste contract and anaerobic</p>	7	3

No	Area	Reason(s)	Questions	Potential Improvements	No of Referrals	First Filter	Score	Rank
			waste? 4 Are we doing work with citizens and businesses to change behaviours?			digestion plant		
5	Homelessness – Assessment Outcomes Vs Performance Targets	Performance in this area in relation to outcomes is positive but at the expense of delivering to Statutory Timescales	1 Is the focus on quality outcomes vs statutory timescales sustainable? 2 Can community planning partners do more to provide information quickly? 3 Is there a risk averse culture that prevents decisions being made against statutory timescales? 4 Are performance systems up to the task?	Assess the corporate appetite for shifting the balance of risk of outcomes v timescale of service delivery Assess whether there are synergies within the council that can be realised	1	ok	6	4
11	Community Sports Hubs – Access and Implementation of Best Practice.	Sport Scotland and the Scottish Government have pledged to develop Community Sports Hubs as the way forward to develop sportspeople and to improve participation in Sport.	1 Are we following best practice? 2 Are we improving in the number of participants and volunteers in sport? 3 Are we, as a Council, doing all we can to promote, assist and develop Community Sports Hubs?	The Scottish Government desire through SportScotland is to have a clear focus on developing and supporting a world class sporting system in Scotland. A review would ensure we catch up on other councils who are leading the way at present	2	ok	5	5
2	Customer Care	Concerns about complaints received about the way people are treated when making enquiries (not	1 Do departments adhere to the customer charter? 2 What training is given in	Identification of training needs	1	Ok There is a new complaints	4	6

No	Area	Reason(s)	Questions	Potential Improvements	No of Referrals	First Filter	Score	Rank
		ACCESS)	dealing with difficult members of the public?			procedure from 1-4-13.		
4	Rent Collection/ Income Management	There has been a challenging environment for rent collection for over a decade and with welfare reform challenges may expand. Rental income supports work across the Council so ensuring the Council is doing all it can is essential.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Are the proper financial controls and policy/practice levers in place? 2 Is all being done to treat this issue as a corporate issue? 3 What improvements can be made to dealing with this as a key corporate priority? 4 Is the law being used to its full potential to prevent, and manage arrears? Are the key messages to customers strong enough? 	<p>Promote corporate ownership</p> <p>Potential single system for income collection</p>	1	Excluded – There is work in this area in terms of the whole income management system and some related work within the Transforming Angus Welfare reform work. Welfare reform report to go to committee which proposes changes in the responsibilities which, if agreed, will generate a review of arrangements	n/a	n/a
7	Processing Planning Applications	We are regularly approached by applicants suggesting Angus Council is not processing applications fast enough although stats may indicate otherwise	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Are applications dealt with timeously? 2 Is assistance and advice given to applicants bearing in mind some may only apply once in a lifetime? 3 Is there a way to more efficiently process applications? 	<p>Better customer experience</p> <p>Streamlined systems generating efficiencies</p>	1	Ok – but this is largely a process review and could potentially be taken forward another way e.g. a lean review	n/a	n/a

No	Area	Reason(s)	Questions	Potential Improvements	No of Referrals	First Filter	Score	Rank
8	Responding to the challenges of government directives	Many directives are coming from Scottish government and Westminster with no extra budget attached	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 If it is not a high Angus priority is there a way to challenge the directives? 2 Where are the funds coming from? 	Reduction in unnecessary spends	1	Ok – however this is a smaller area and could be taken forward as a scrutiny workshop	n/a	n/a
9	Encouraging Civic Pride	In times of cuts many Civic Pride initiatives by the Council are being dropped	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 How can we get citizens to engage with civic pride? 2 Would a small spend pay significant dividends if done the right way? e.g. BRAVO Brechin group 	Improved environment	1	Ok - however this is a smaller area and could be taken forward as a scrutiny workshop	n/a	n/a
10 14	Are procurement estimates, quotations, and invoices the best value for money within Angus Council?	It appears that there are estimates, quotations, invoices for supplies and services for Angus Council from outside agencies which are higher than those which a private company would be asked to pay.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Various figures have been quoted at Council meetings. What are the true costs for major projects like Arbroath Schools? 2 What is the cost of a biomass heating system for a primary school? Online figures suggest c£180k, Angus Council have been quoted £650k. 3 Are we stringent in our contractual obligations in that we ensure that we do not permit additional elements to be added without very good cause and that we are not obliged to pay more than the quoted price for supplies and services? 	<p>A full review of procurement process which may be a later review following the MOG.</p> <p>Savings through time</p> <p>More effective monitoring leading to savings</p>	2	<p>Excluded: The current MOG on procurement which would give the opportunity to explore some of these issues</p> <p>Concept of estimate to tender amount to actual payment could be something that internal audit could look at within a capital programme audit</p>	n/a	n/a
13	Is Best Practice Being Followed in Education and	Secondary School HMIE reports in Angus are below the national average and	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Are we following best practice? 	The Scottish Government desire is to implement the	2	Excluded –Per Chief Executive/ Strategic Director	n/a	n/a

No	Area	Reason(s)	Questions	Potential Improvements	No of Referrals	First Filter	Score	Rank
	Wider Learning Community?	recent comparative reports between Carnoustie HS and Grove Academy showed shortcomings here especially within the wider CLD Partnerships and Community Planning remit.	<p>2 Are we improving in our assessments annually?</p> <p>3 Is there “joined up thinking” with regards to Local Community Planning, Town Planning, involvement of local community groups and developers/ landowners?</p>	Community Empowerment and Renewal Bill in the near future and we need to make step changes in attitude if we wish to endorse this bill		of People, There are major organisational changes coming in through the wider management restructure which are likely to fundamentally alter the approach to schools improvement – therefore a review at this point would only be of short term use		
16	Creditors Payment Performance / Arrangements	The speed at which the Council pays its supplier invoices has been of concern/interest to elected members for several years and although we have significantly improved we’re still not a top quartile performer. We’re being encouraged to move to 10 day payment in line with Scottish Government arrangements which means that even our existing performance on 30 days won’t be good enough in the longer term	<p>1 Is the fact we don’t record an invoice received date a significant factor in accurately determining our performance?</p> <p>2 Is the Council’s payment performance a problem for our suppliers – is it a matter of regular complaint?</p> <p>3 What is it that the better performing areas of the Council do to achieve higher performance – is volume of invoices to be processed a significant factor in those areas doing less well?</p> <p>4 How well prepared are we to meet a 10 day target in the future?</p>	Identify good and bad practice, resourcing issues, system issues and in doing so may identify ways in which to get Angus into the top quartile of performers	1	Ok – but again this is more of a process review which could be dealt with another way	n/a	n/a
18	Waste Collection	There is uncertainty over the	1 Are current arrangements the	Being confident that	1	Ok – but could	n/a	n/a

No	Area	Reason(s)	Questions	Potential Improvements	No of Referrals	First Filter	Score	Rank
	activity	<p>deployment of the waste workforce during the winter on green waste collection when very few bins require collection.</p> <p>Although arrangements for waste collection are about to be significantly changed to comply with the zero waste agenda and there is a possibility that waste collection could transfer to Tayside Contracts there would seem to be merit in determining whether our current approach is giving value for money.</p>	<p>best method of deploying resources?</p> <p>2 Are the workforce fully utilised during the winter months particularly on green waste collection – are annualised hours used or if not would this give better value?</p> <p>3 How will the deployment of the workforce under the new collection arrangements ensure best value?</p>	our approach to managing and deploying the waste management workforce is as efficient as can be		this be incorporated in zero waste review	see review 3	
19	Review of Support Services / back office functions	<p>With diminishing resources we need to ensure that our support service/back office overhead is as low as possible. We also need to make sure that it is adequate to do the job to avoid front line staff having to spend time on non-core admin type tasks.</p> <p>Some very high level information is available on the cost of support services but we don't know in enough detail how the amount we spend and the amount of people we employ in support services compares to other</p>	<p>1 How does the cost of support service/back office functions in Angus compare with other comparable organisations?</p> <p>2 Are some support services over or under resourced relative to the work they are asked to undertake?</p> <p>3 Is there significant scope to reduce the cost of our support services?</p> <p>4 Is there evidence to suggest value for money benefits from a more centralised approach to support services as compared to a devolved approach across services?</p>	To confirm whether our support services overhead is reasonable and delivering value for money thus ensuring the maximum amount of money is being devoted to front line spend	1	Excluded: Per Strategic Director Resources it is his intention to conduct a very similar review as part of the restructuring exercise	n/a	n/a

No	Area	Reason(s)	Questions	Potential Improvements	No of Referrals	First Filter	Score	Rank
		<p>organisations.</p> <p>The scope of such a review would need to consider whether to focus only on staff in the traditional support services such as finance, legal, HR, IT, etc. or whether to widen this to pick up support / back office staff employed in larger departments and including e.g. schools. A full review of all support / back office staff would give a more complete picture but would be a significant undertaking. The extent of support required by front line services from central support services will be a product of how those front line services have been set up and the amount of support staff they employ directly.</p>						

Angus Council

Workshop: Scrutiny Investigations and Questioning

Facilitator: Dr Andrew Coulson,
INLOGOV, University of Birmingham

This workshop is about how you can gain the most from scrutiny investigations. Oral questioning is a fundamental skill needed for good scrutiny, both for carrying out investigations and reviews and in regular questioning sessions with senior members, officers or leaders from outside the council. This workshop will explore the skills required to support good questioning and why it makes new demands on members.

Programme

- 9.00 Coffee and registration
- 9.30 Welcome, Introductions – what we want to achieve good scrutiny
- 9.45 Making a success of scrutiny investigations
This session will discuss the ingredients of success in scrutiny investigations and how to make the most of them.
- 10.15 Discussion
- 10.45 Refreshment break
- 11.00 Topic scoping
How to choose topics that can make a real difference and give councillors a real sense of achievement.
- 11.30 Scoping exercise in small working groups
- 12.15 Reporting back
- 12.45 Lunch
- 1.30 Developing lines of questioning to get the information you want
How you can make sure that questioning gets to the heart of the issues
- 2.00 Questioning exercise
- 2.30 Discussion
- 2.45 Managing the scrutiny process
Engaging with local communities, involving the public, monitoring the process, writing effective reports, and ensuring that action follows.
- 3.15 External Scrutiny
The scrutiny of relevant agencies, companies, etc outside the Council.
- 3.45 Key points from the day
- 4.00 Seminar concludes

Andrew Coulson is the Lead Consultant on scrutiny at INLOGOV, the Institute of Local Government Studies, based at the University of Birmingham. He has been a councillor, and, earlier, a council officer, and written about partnership working, trust in local government, scrutiny, and the recent changes in local government. He developed post-graduate modules on scrutiny, and edited the first book to be published on the subject.