✦EDINBVRGH✦

THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

Review of Scrutiny Business

City of Edinburgh Council

18 August 2005

1   Purpose of report

1.1   The aim of this report is to review scrutiny business.

2   Background

2.1   At the Council Away Day on 19 May 2005 and the Cross Party Working Group (CPWG) on 21 June 2005 members agreed not to make any major changes to the current political management arrangements. I agreed, however, to report on the role of scrutiny panels in performance monitoring and to share my analysis of scrutiny business.

3   Scrutiny and Performance Monitoring

3.1   Scrutiny panels can consider call-ins, commission reviews and monitor Council performance against targets. The most important of these is monitoring performance.

3.2   This is emphasised in COSLA's advice "Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 - Elected Member Leadership and Best Value" a copy of which was sent to each elected member earlier this year. The Act makes Best Value a duty and requires Council's to continually improve performance. Effective systems must be in place to *improve* performance by monitoring it *against targets.*

3.3   I think that, as a whole, the present arrangements do not enable Council's scrutiny panels to monitor performance effectively. When the Best Value Inspectors visit the Council early next year I think that they will highlight this matter as an area requiring improvement.

3.4   The figures in Appendix 1 support my view. Four panels considered no such items or hardly any. Two panels had 6 or 8 items whilst the Resource Management and Audit SP had 37, more than twice as much as all the rest.

3.5   To fix this, scrutiny panel lead officers will prepare work plans that will involve all panels in monitoring performance with a view to improving it. In particular, I will develop a system that will let panels use the data used by the Council

Management Team. It has departmental and STO performance reports set against specific targets.

3.6　The scrutiny panels and the scrutiny panel conveners will consider the work plans during August and the Council on 15 September 2005. This will allow a new system to prove itself in time for the Council's Best Value Audit early next year.

3.7　I will also offer training to elected members in Best Value reviews and performance management.

4　Analysis of Scrutiny Business

4.1　Appendices 1 and 2 show scrutiny panel business for the year 2004/05. 88 items were called in, around 15% of Executive business (compared to 18% in 2001). Only 4 call-ins were put back to the Executive (4.5% - this was 8% in 2001). None of them were called up to Council. In 32 call-ins (about 36%) a further recommendation was made. The Executive agreed almost all of these.

5　Implications for Scrutiny Panel Workloads

5.1　A more rigorous performance monitoring system may be difficult for the Environmental Quality Scrutiny Panel (EQSP) as it has a full workload of 29 call-ins, resulting in an average meeting length of 3 hours. The Panel has no control over call-ins.

5.2　I have analysed the reasons for call-in in 2004/05 and this shows that 11 call-ins (12.5%) were for information - 7 of them were for the EQSP, almost 25% of its total call-ins.

5.3　During the Away Day, Councillor Dawe explained that a lot of reports were called-in because opposition members were not confident that they had enough information to appreciate the need for a given recommendation. They were not involved in the more detailed discussions that the Executive member was party to. In addition, sometimes they wished to make a matter more public by having it discussed in a wider forum. Some members did feel, however, that in some cases a telephone call to the appropriate Director would have sufficed, rather than an item being called-in.

5.4　I understand the wish of opposition members to have full information before allowing an Executive decision to pass. To this end I will remind my colleagues to provide sufficient information in reports balanced with the need to keep reports succinct and business like.

5.5　However, I also want to emphasise that officer's briefings are readily available for all elected members. My experience tells me that there is scope for these to be carried out in a more structured and comprehensive way.

5.6　Therefore, I hope that the burden on the EQSP from call-ins will reduce over the coming year, allowing it more time to devote to performance monitoring. I suggest that the Panel monitor its workload and report any difficulties it is having to Council.

5.7 The workloads of the Children and Young People and the Community Services Scrutiny Panels result in average meeting lengths of 2 hours and 2 hours 20 minutes, respectively. However, they should be able to do performance monitoring as a larger part of their workload is under their control.

5.8 In the case of the Resource Management and Audit Scrutiny Panel I would expect that some of its performance workload would be shared amongst the other panels more equally.

5.9 The other panels should not find it difficult to accommodate this work. However, in order to help all panels I have held discussions on this matter with the lead officers. A general view has emerged that it would be helpful to categorise panel agendas into three areas, namely, performance monitoring, commissioned reviews and call-ins. This is intended to have the benefit of establishing a pattern of business allowing panels as much choice over their workload as possible.

6 Support for Scrutiny

6.1 Each Scrutiny Panel has a Lead Officer drawn from a Council department. Committee Services staff provide a clerking and administrative service. Some other officials help do reports and briefing papers for call-ins but there is no other staff support except for the Community Services Scrutiny Panel. It has a part time senior researcher from Corporate Services.

6.2 There is a case for additional support for scrutiny but this can only be provided by stopping other work or rephasing existing work programmes. It is my view that it should be looked at again as part of the Council Review 2007

7 Scrutiny and New Business at Council

7.1 At the Away Day Councillor Dawe asked for information about the amount of new business at Council. I have previously written to Councillor Gilchrist on this, his main concern being that reports are missing the scrutiny process by going direct to Council.

7.2 In the calendar year 2003 there was an average of 9.4 items an agenda and in 2004 it was 9.9. The number of items of new business at Council as a percentage of the total of new Council business and Executive business in 2003 was 13.8% and in 2004 was 14.6%.

7.3 There is a variety of reasons for reports being submitted direct to Council:

- Under Standing Orders they need decisions which only the Council can take:
- There is an urgent deadline to meet. If these go to the Executive, they will be ruled for action ahead of scrutiny, effectively eliminating any timely contribution from opposition members; and

- There are reports with a lot of strategic or ceremonial content, usually reports identified by or with the Chief Executive.

7.4   Given the amount of change in the Council I think it is reasonable to expect this level of new business. However, the Council Management Team has a planning system for Council and Executive agendas and I will use this to remind members of the Management Team to keep new business at Council to a minimum.

8   Recommendations

8.1   It is recommended that the Council;

(i)   requests Scrutiny Panels to bring forward work plans to it's meeting on 15 September 2005 detailing proposals for improving Council performance by monitoring it against specific targets;

(ii)   notes that Scrutiny Panels may have to adjust to this new workload and therefore, to help them, reminds all members that they can contact the relevant officers for a briefing where further information is required;

(iii)   requests Scrutiny Panels to report their progress with performance monitoring to the Council in January next year;

(iv)   notes that the question of support for Scrutiny Panels will be considered as part of the Council Review 2007;

(v)   notes that I will offer training to elected members in Best Value and performance monitoring; and

(vi)   requests the Council Management Team to endeavour to keep new business at Council to a minimum.

Jim Inch
Director of Corporate Services

Appendices	Analysis of Scrutiny Panel Business 2004/05
Contact/tel	Stan Cunningham ☎ 529 4500
Wards affected	None
Background Papers	Minutes of Council Away Day 19 May 2005 and Cross Party Working Group 21 June 2005

ANALYSIS OF SCRUTINY PANEL BUSINESS 2004/05   **APENDIX 1**

	No. of meetings	Ave Length	Call-ins	Commissioned Reviews	Performance Monitoring Items	Other reports*
Children and Young People SP	9	2hrs	5	3	1	11
Community Services SP	13	2hrs 20 mins	16	1	0	6
Development of the City SP	8	1hr 33 mins	15	0	6	5
Environmental Quality SP	10	3hrs	29	0	0	0
Leisure and Cultural Development SP	6	1hr 30 mins	6	0	2	0
Resource Management and Audit SP	10	1hr 34 mins	10	0	37	0
Social Justice and Older People SP	12	1hr 30 mins	6	0	8	20

* Usually consultation documents and referrals from the Executive (also the Planning Committee, in the case of Development of the City SP) work programmes, services plans etc.

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ANALYSIS 2004-2005 (4 May 2004 to 15 March 2005)

TOTAL NUMBER OF MEETINGS   20
TOTAL NUMBER OF ITEMS WHICH COULD BE CALLED IN   610
TOTAL CALL- INS   89*
CALL-INS AS PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL NUMBER OF ITEMS   14.59%

CALL INS TO SCRUTINY PANELS

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE	5
COMMUNITY SERVICES	16
DEVELOPMENT OF THE CITY	15
ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY	29
LEISURE AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT	6
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND AUDIT	10
SOCIAL JUSTICE AND OLDER PEOPLE	6
CALLED IN TO COUNCIL	2
TOTAL	89

Joint Meetings	1

SCRUTINY PANEL DECISION

AGREED AT SP WITH NO FURTHER RECOMMENDATION	44
AGREED AT SP WITH FURTHER RECOMMENDATION	32
NOT AGREED BY SCRUTINY PANEL - ALTERNATIVE RECOMMENDATIONS MADE	3
AGREED IN PART BY SCRUTINY PANEL - ALTERNATIVE RECOMMENDATION MADE ON ONE ITEM	1
ACTIONED AHEAD OF SCRUTINY AND CALLED IN	3
NOTED BY SCRUTINY PANEL	2
CALLED UP TO COUNCIL BY SCRUTINY PANEL	1
CONTINUED BY SCRUTINY PANEL	2
CALLED UP TO COUNCIL WHERE EXEC DISAGREED WITH SP	0
TOTAL	88

RESULT OF FURTHER RECOMMENDATIONS CONSIDERED BY THE EXECUTIVE

EXEC AGREES FURTHER RECOMMENDATIONS	31
EXECUTIVE AGREES ALTERNATIVE RECOMMENDATIONS (ONE PART OF ONE SP RECOMMENDATION CONTINUED)	4
EXECUTIVE REFERS FURTHER RECOMMENDATIONS TO ANOTHER CTTEE/SUB CTTEE	1

* One item was called in to two panels and dealt with at a joint meeting