

Report to: **Scrutiny Committee for Children's Services**
Date: **21 September 2009**
By: **Director of Law & Personnel**
Title of report: **Topics for future scrutiny reviews**
Purpose of report: **For the committee to highlight those topics it wishes to include on the work programme as future scrutiny reviews and decide which topic to take forward next as a scrutiny review.**

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is recommended to:

1. **prioritise the topics listed in appendix 1 and decide which are included in the future work programme;**
 2. **decide which review it wishes to start this autumn; and**
 3. **decide the membership of that review board**
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1. **Financial Appraisal**

1.1 Any costs associated with carrying out scrutiny reviews are met from within the scrutiny budget.

2. **Background and supporting information**

2.1 Scrutiny reviews are invaluable in enabling members to gain in-depth knowledge on a particular service/matter, draw out key issues and then put forward recommendations on ways in which improvements can be made.

2.2 Scrutiny reviews can be carried out in two different ways:

a) In-depth reviews

The committee normally carries out one or two in-depth reviews during the course of a year. The review usually involves three to five scrutiny members and lasts approximately six to nine months. The review board usually looks at a particular County Council service or a complex issue affecting service users. It involves in-depth research and the gathering of evidence from witnesses, usually through questionnaires or focus groups.

The report outlining the board's findings and recommendations is presented to the committee for agreement and then to the Cabinet and Full Council for comment and endorsement. Update reports on the implementation of these recommendations are brought back to the committee at a six and twelve month point so that members can scrutinise progress.

b) Table top reviews

These are much shorter reviews carried out over the course of just one or two meetings. There are several advantages to working in this way; such as being able to focus on a specific issue that would not warrant an in-depth review, using the process to enable scrutiny members to carry out a 'critical friend' role in relation to policy development at an early stage in the process or carrying out a preliminary review of a topic before a decision is made to carry out an in-depth review.

The report outlining the findings and recommendations of the review is usually only presented to its scrutiny committee or, in the case of reviewing policy development, the recommendations are forwarded directly to the department to help them in their work.

3. Developing the work programme

3.1 At the Away Day on 1 September members highlighted several areas that they felt would warrant either a tabletop or in-depth scrutiny review. These topics are listed in appendix 1, alongside suggestions put forward by the previous Children's Services Committee, officers and East Sussex's Standing Advisory Council for RE (SACRE).

3.2 Members are asked to prioritise the topics listed in appendix 1 and agree which ones should be included in the future work programme. In some instances members may feel that a topic should be brought as a report to a meeting of the full committee before a decision is made as to whether a review is carried out.

3.3 Members are also asked to decide which topic it wants to focus on as its first scrutiny review during the autumn and decide the membership of the review board.

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Local Members: All

Background Documents: None

Appendix 1 – topics suggested for future scrutiny reviews

Topics suggested for future scrutiny reviews

Topic	Comments	Type of review suggested
Access to services	<p>Away Day – members highlighted access to services as an area that the committee should focus on during the forthcoming year. Of particular interest was the accessibility of health services and the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).</p> <p>Review – An in-depth review would allow members to scrutinise the current policies and processes in place to help direct families to relevant services and assess how these policies and processes work in practice.</p>	In-depth review
Education and Attainment – Key Stage 2 (KS2)	<p>Highlighted by officers as an area that would benefit from some scrutiny. KS2 tests take place at age 11. Provisional data for 2008/09 for National Indicator 73 (achievement at level 4 or above in both English and maths at KS2) shows that East Sussex has dropped to 69% (from 71% in 2007/08). This is below the national average of 72%.</p> <p>Review – An in-depth review could scrutinise the work being done to raise attainment at KS2, consider best practice from comparison local authorities who score higher for this indicator and highlight areas where further work is necessary.</p>	In-depth review
Looked After Children	<p>Away Day – members highlighted two areas that they felt might warrant further scrutiny: matching foster carers' capacity to the number of children who need fostering and processes in place to support a child to move on from a foster placement to adoption.</p> <p>Review – An initial tabletop review would allow members to explore these issues further with officers prior to deciding if an in-depth review is necessary</p>	Tabletop review
Not in education, employment or training (NEET)	<p>The previous CS Committee highlighted current performance against National Indicator 117 (number of 16 to 18 year olds who are Not in Education, Employment or Training) as an area of concern (quarter 3 performance against the target was 7.2%, against the 08/09 target of 5.2%)</p> <p>Review – An in-depth scrutiny review could scrutinise the current work being done across the county to reduce the number of young people who are NEET and how effective this is in practice, the impact that the recession is having on employment and training opportunities for young people and how changes to education (14-19 reform programme and raising the participation age) will impact on young people at risk of becoming NEET.</p>	In-depth review

Topic	Comments	Type of review suggested
Religious education in schools	<p>The East Sussex Standing Advisory Council for RE (SACRE) has highlighted to the Chairman of the CS Committee two areas that it has concerns about: number of students in East Sussex studying and entering GCSEs for RE and the level of training that RE teachers in the County receive.</p> <p>Review – An initial tabletop review would allow members to explore these issues further with officers prior to deciding if an in-depth review is necessary</p>	Tabletop review
Supporting young carers	<p>Away Day – members highlighted that they found it hard to get a handle on the number of young people who were caring for their parents, how this impacted on their lives and what support the County Council was able to provide.</p> <p>Review - An initial tabletop review would allow members to explore this area further with officers prior to deciding if an in-depth review is necessary</p>	Tabletop review

Topic for inclusion in the 2010/11 programme

Topic	Comments	Type of review suggested
Children's Centres	<p>Away Day – Members highlighted that they wanted to analyse who is actually making use of the Centres and assess the impact that Centres are having on the families that they are primarily aimed at.</p> <p>Review – an in-depth review would allow members to scrutinise these issues further. However, it is too soon to scrutinise the long term impacts of the centres and a review would need to wait until autumn 2010 or spring 2011.</p>	In-depth review - to take place autumn 2010 or spring 2011