WORK PROGRAMME AND ENGAGEMENT WITH THE EXECUTIVE
(Report by the Head of Administration)

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This report addresses views recently articulated by Members concerning their work programme and engagement with the Executive.

2. FORWARD PLAN

2.1 At recent meeting Members have drawn attention to the fact that few items appearing on the Forward Plan fall within their remit with the majority of items being allocated to the Service Support Panel. As a result some basic data has been compiled on the Plans published in the current Municipal Year. This reveals that since June 2007, 64 items have been allocated to the Service Delivery Panel, 118 to the Service Support Panel and 29 to the Corporate and Strategic Framework Panel. The figures are crude and do not take account of the fact that items may appear up to four times before being considered by the Cabinet and others have, in the past, been included in the plan on a rolling basis in case a matter arises than needs to be dealt with. Furthermore, the position of Executive Councillor for Leisure was vacant for part of the year. The figures do, however, tend to support Members perceptions.

2.2 While it is in no way suggested that the number of items on the Forward Plan is indicative of activity levels, Members have expressed concern that this is an important mechanism through which they are able to hold the Executive to account and that, in the absence of matters to consider, they are not fulfilling one of their most important functions. This has implications when the Council's performance is formally assessed.

3. WORK PROGRAMME – EXECUTIVE INVOLVEMENT

3.1 At the meeting in February, Members gave preliminary consideration to a suggestion that each of the Executive Councillors whose areas of responsibility fall within the Panel's remit should be invited to a future meeting to discuss their work. The propose of this is briefly to review the previous year, but mainly to discuss Executive Councillors' plans for the forthcoming year and to identify areas where the Panel might contribute to these plans. The aim is to create a work programme in which the Scrutiny Panel can constructively contribute to the Cabinet's business. It is suggested that the discussion should taken place at the first meeting of the Municipal Year so that any changes to the composition of the Cabinet and the Panel following the election have been made and the Panel can plan its work for the whole year. Executive Councillors would then periodically attend Panel meetings to discuss progress.

3.2   The same process has been adopted by other local authorities, including Maidstone Borough Council.   A delegation of Huntingdonshire Scrutiny Members visited Maidstone in 2005, which is held up as a national example of scrutiny best practice.

3.3   Comments also have been made at meetings that the remits of the Panels might be reviewed in order to create a more evenly balanced workload. Two points can be made in this respect. Firstly, the current arrangements have only been in place for two years. Secondly, a wide range of services is allocated to the Service Delivery Panel. A list, which was submitted to the Panel's meeting in June 2007 is reproduced as an Appendix hereto to demonstrate this. While Panel meeting Agenda may appear to be light it is the case that much scrutiny work by the Service Delivery Panel is carried out by Working Groups. In fact, the Panel recently has completed studies into Promoting Better Health in Older People Through Physical Exercise, the Small Scale Environmental Improvements Scheme, the introduction of a Youth Forum and the State of the District Conference. It also has ongoing studies on Grant Aid, Adoption of Roads and Sewers, Town Centre Cleaning Regimes and Disability Access. In addition, another lesson from the Maidstone visit is that placing fewer items on the Agenda enables fuller discussion of items to take place at meetings. Given these facts it may be premature the review the Panels' remits at the present time.

4.   CONCLUSION

4.1   Owing to a perceived imbalance in items allocated to Service Delivery, the Panel has expressed concern at its ability to fulfil one of its most important roles. Having held preliminary discussions on a proposal designed to rectify this situation, it is suggested that consideration is given to adopting formally the principle of inviting Executive Councillors to the first meeting of the new Municipal Year with a view to implementing the proposal.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

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COUNCIL SERVICES WITHIN THE PANEL'S REMIT

ENVIRONMENT & TRANSPORT: COUNCILLOR P L E BUCKNELL

Technical Services (Richard Preston)
Sustainability
Environmental improvements
Project/Contractual management
Architectural/design work
Land drainage
Residual highway responsibilities/public utilities/
Street naming and property numbering
Building Control/dangerous structures/disabled access
Home Energy Conservation

LEISURE: COUNCILLOR D B DEW

Leisure Centres (Roy Reeves)
Huntingdon, Ramsey, Sawtry, St Ivo & St Neots

Parks, Open Spaces, Countryside Services (Robert Ward)
Hinchingbrooke
Paxton Pits
Riverside, Huntingdon
Riverside, St Neots
Spring Common

HOUSING & PUBLIC HEALTH: COUNCILLOR MRS D C REYNOLDS

Environmental & Community Health (Susan Lammin)
Air quality/noise/pollution
Private sector housing
Caravan sites
Animal welfare/pest control
Commercial: health & safety promotion/food safety/
infectious diseases
Community Safety
Emergency Planning/CCTV
Community Initiatives/development/grants, etc
Arts
Leisure Development

Housing (Steve Plant)
Housing strategies/policies
Relations with housing providers/associations
Maintenance of housing register/nominations
Homelessness
Housing grants, including disabled facilities grants
Home Improvement Agency
Private sector housing

OPERATIONS: COUNCILLOR C HYAMS

Operations (Robert Ward)
Waste/refuse collection

Recycling
Streetscene/cleansing
Car parks, public conveniences
Grounds maintenance, grass cutting
Vehicle fleet management
Abandoned vehicles
Waste Stream policy