

TO: COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 17 JUNE 2003

SUBJECT: THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY FUNCTION – A CASE STUDY

FROM: THE STRATEGIC DIRECTORS

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

Following the joint presentation to all Scrutiny members immediately prior to the last meetings of the committees by the Council's external auditors KPMG on the role of overview and scrutiny, to provide an opportunity for Members to consider a case study as a practical example of how to develop the role in a practical way.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 At the meeting of this committee during the January cycle, members received a presentation from Andrew Jones, Benefits Manager which set out the proposals for the reform of the Housing Benefits Scheme.

2.2 A copy of the accompanying paper is attached at Appendix 1 for members' attention.

2.3 A copy of the presentation given by KPMG is also attached at Appendix 2 and it include a list of questions designed to stimulate debate on the form that effective scrutiny might take to assist in the delivery of a comprehensive, influential and proactive contribution to policy review and development, external scrutiny, performance management and review and robust decision-making.

2.4 Finally, annexed at Appendix 3 is a copy of the *Smart Guide to Overview and Scrutiny* prepared by the West Midlands Local Government Association. It presents in bullet-point format some initial thoughts on the principle of effective scrutiny, around which a debate on the issues might be framed.

2.5 The work of Housing Benefits clearly falls within the remit of this committee and its work will be of interest to it in delivering effective scrutiny of an important area of the Council's work. Considering the issues in the light of KPMG's presentation, possibly involving "role play", will give members the opportunity to consider how they wish to develop the scrutiny role in generic terms for use across a range of committee activity.

3. POLICY AND BUDGET FRAMEWORK

3.1 There are no budgetary implications arising from this report, but the development of an influential and robust contribution to policy development and sound decision-making will clearly strengthen the Council's corporate governance.

4. **OUTCOME(S) REQUIRED**

For Members to use the annexed papers as a case study to put into practical effect the development of a proactive and effective approach to overview and scrutiny.

Chris Elliott, Nigel Roberts and Mary Hawkins
Strategic Directors

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Areas in District Affected: All.

Executive Portfolio Area and Holder: Housing Services (Councillor Boad).

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