

**TO: ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 8<sup>TH</sup> JUNE  
2004**

**SUBJECT: SCRUTINY ROLE AND METHOD OF OPERATION**

**FROM: POLICY & PERFORMANCE**

---

## **1 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

Following the work carried out by the Scrutiny Chairmen with the Corporate Management Team at their away day, and the discussions at subsequent joint meetings (supported by the feedback from the CPA Peer Assessment Team). It is necessary to consider additional changes to the role and way of working to achieve improved Overview and Scrutiny.

## **2 BACKGROUND**

**2.1** The Council's Constitution sets out the five roles of Scrutiny. The following is an extract from Article 6 of the Constitution.

1 Review and/or scrutinise decisions made or actions taken in connection with the discharge of any of the Council's functions.

2 Make reports and/or recommendations to the Full Council and/or the Executive and/or any policy, joint or area committee in connection with the discharge of any functions.

3 Consider any matter affecting the area or its inhabitants and

4 Exercise the right to call in, for reconsideration, decisions made but not yet implemented by the Executive and/or any policy or area committees.

5 Agree the terms of reference of best value reviews.

**2.2** Since the "modernisation" of political structures, Councils across the country have struggled with establishing and developing robust processes to fulfil the role expected of Overview and Scrutiny. In addition, the value of scrutiny in modern and effective government has not always been recognised.

**2.3** During the last cycle of meetings your committee considered for themselves feedback from the survey of Councillors and other ways in which they might work.

**2.4** In their feedback, the Peer Assessment Team from West Midlands Local Government Association made some specific comment about the Council's approach to Overview and Scrutiny, the clarity of its role and purpose and the effectiveness of it to provide a real challenge.

- 2.5** In response research has been carried out amongst local authorities who were said to be good at Overview and Scrutiny although this revealed that they were not doing things very differently to Warwick District Council.
- 2.6** Warwickshire County Council has adopted a set of approaches to scrutiny which are attached at Appendix 1. At the joint meeting of Scrutiny Chairs and Corporate Management Team, it was considered that approaches 1 to 3 could be usefully applied by Overview and Scrutiny. It was further considered sensible to review the existing work plans in the light of;
- the revised committee timetable, ie a reduced number of committee meetings
  - the practicality of carrying out the volume of work effectively with the time and resources available.
- 2.7** It is suggested that the work plan should comprise a balance of scrutiny roles including decisions by the Executive yet to be made, having been made but not yet implemented and having been implemented; policy review and specific topics.
- 2.8** The nature of a particular topic may be more suitable to one type of approach of scrutiny to another and it is suggested that committees experiment with the range of approaches available and after a period of twelve months consider the effectiveness of each against the topic chosen. What is learnt from this exercise can then be used to further refine the process.
- 2.9** The reduction in frequency of meetings may well mean that members have to meet more frequently but probably in smaller work groups to scrutinise the chosen or nominated topic. Not forgetting though, the Executive may request certain work be carried out by the Overview and Scrutiny committees.
- 2.10** A copy of agreed Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee work plan, with suggested ways of under taking the scrutiny of each topic will be circulated at the meeting.

### **3 POLICY AND BUDGET FRAMEWORK**

The Council is committed to learning from its own actions and those of others. The use of effective Overview and Scrutiny will promote learning from which the Council can manage its services openly, effectively and efficiently.

### **4 OUTCOMES REQUIRED**

- 4.1** To agree to review the committee's work plan for the forthcoming year by;
- (a) deciding the appropriate approach to each of the scrutiny topics plan.
  - (b) including a balance of the scrutiny roles as in 2.6 above
- 4.2** Agreement that as part of the "end of term report" the review of the effectiveness and appropriateness of the approaches in relation to the topics scrutinised is carried out.

John McGowan  
Assistant Chief Executive - Policy and Performance

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 1 Peer Challenge final report – April 2004
- 2 Notes from joint Corporate Management Team/Scrutiny Chairmen meeting – 29 April 2004
- 3 Results of review of Overview & Scrutiny committees questionnaire
- 4 “Overview and Scrutiny” Guidance for District Councils from the Centre of Public Scrutiny 2004
- 5 Committee timetable 2004/2005
- 6 Scrutiny Committee work plans 2004/2005
- 7 Warwick District Council’s Constitution
- 8 “Making a difference” workshop notes (Training for Scrutiny Chairs 20<sup>th</sup> May)
- 9 Warwickshire County Council – Approaches to Scrutiny/Process models

**Areas in District Affected:** ALL

**Executive Portfolio Area and Holder:** Environment/Margaret Begg

For further information about this report please contact:

Contact Officer: John McGowan  
Assistant Chief Executive - Policy and Performance  
  
Tel: (01926) 456018 Direct Line  
  
Email: [john.mcgowan@warwickdc.gov.uk](mailto:john.mcgowan@warwickdc.gov.uk)