

**TO: ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE –
30TH MARCH 2004**

**SUBJECT: REVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE WORK OF THE OVERVIEW
& SCRUTINY COMMITTEES**

**FROM: CORPORATE MANAGEMENT TEAM AND THE CHAIRMEN OF THE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES**

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To consider ways of improving the effectiveness of improving the effectiveness of the work of the Councils four Overview & Scrutiny Committees

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 As set out in the Constitution the specific functions of the Overview & Scrutiny Committees are:

A. Policy Development and Review

- i. Assist the Council and the Executive in the development of its budget and policy framework by in-depth analysis of policy issues;
- ii. Conduct research, community or other consultation in the analysis of policy issues and possible options;
- iii. Consider and implement mechanisms to encourage and enhance community participation in the development of policy options;
- iv. Question members of the Executive and/or committees and chief officers about their views on issues and proposals affecting the area; and
- v. Liaise with other external organisations operating in the area, whether national, regional or local, to ensure that the interests of local people are enhanced by collaborative working.

B. Scrutiny

- i. Review and scrutinise the decisions made by, and the performance of, the Executive and/or committees and the Council officers both in relation to individual decisions and over time;
- ii. Review and scrutinise the performance of the Council in relation to its policy objectives, performance targets and/or particular service areas;
- iii. Question members of the Executive and/or committees and chief officers about their decisions and the performance of their services;

- iv. Make recommendations to the Executive and/or appropriate committees and/or the Council arising from the outcome of the scrutiny process;
- v. To carry out fundamental review of the Council's services in conjunction with the Executive (the Scrutiny Committees have allocated the detail of this function to the Change Board);
- vi. To review and scrutinise the performance of other public bodies in the area;
- vii. To question and gather evidence from any person.

There is a requirement to produce an annual report on the workings of the committees.

2.2. Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees have expressed concern about the effectiveness of how scrutiny operates within the Council. This is despite having some notable successes and some good investigative and policy work. In order to corroborate these views a survey is currently being undertaken and the results of this will be reported at the meeting. However, some of the concerns include:

- the amount of time spent dealing with the Executive agenda limits the ability of the committees to undertake other work;
- Executive reports could be considered on an exception basis where the Committee wish further information or disagree with or want to put a different recommendation to the Executive;
- there is not enough opportunity to scrutinise decisions already taken;
- Councillors are not making use of their right to put items on agendas;
- the Portfolio Holders are not subject to a robust system of being held to account for performance;
- the ability of the committees to influence the Executive is debatable;
- participation and involvement in the work of the committees is variable.

2.3 On a separate note advice has been received from our internal audit section that there are security issues at the Town Hall in holding three Committees on one evening and a suggestion has been made that either the Environment or Economic Overview and Scrutiny Committee change its dates so that one of them meets on the same night as the Audit & Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee. (Social and Audit cannot meet on the same evening as they are supported by the same Director).

3. OUTCOME REQUIRED

31. The Committee's views are requested.

John McGowan
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BACKGROUND PAPERS

The Constitution

Executive Portfolio Area and Holder: All

For further information about this report please contact:

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