



## **SCRUTINY COMMISSION – 1<sup>ST</sup> SEPTEMBER 2009**

### **REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

### **OPERATION OF THE NEW OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ARRANGEMENTS**

#### **Purpose**

1. The purpose of this report is to set out the outcome of discussions with the three Scrutiny Commissioners concerning the operation of the new scrutiny arrangements.

#### **Background**

2. The County Council at its meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> July approved changes to the structure of overview and scrutiny bodies. Details of the new structure agreed are set out in Appendix A. It was recognised at the time that the agreed structure was an outline and the detailed working arrangements would be a matter for the Scrutiny Commissioners to determine.

#### **Outcome of meetings of the Scrutiny Commissioners**

3. The Commissioners met on 14<sup>th</sup> July and again on 24<sup>th</sup> August. The key outcomes are outlined below.

- a) **Job Descriptions**

Attached are the job descriptions for Scrutiny Commissioners and Deputy Commissioners (Appendix B) and Chairmen and Deputy Chairmen of Overview and Scrutiny Committees (Appendix C). These have been amended to reflect the comments received from members. Copies of these have been forwarded on to the Chairman of the Independent Remuneration Panel to assist in their deliberations on any changes to the Members' Allowances Scheme.

- b) **Budget and Performance Monitoring Panel**

The outline structure agreed by the County Council included proposals for a standing panel. The Commissioners were of the view that as performance monitoring was a key scrutiny activity and an issue identified in previous inspections as an area for development, the size of the Panel should be such as to involve members of both opposition groups. The size of the Panel was agreed as 8 members and the following members were subsequently appointed by their respective Groups to serve on the panel:-

Dr Feltham  
Mr Osborne  
Mr Pain  
Mrs Posnett  
Mr Slater

Mr Boulter  
Mr Lynch

Mr Hunt

c) Conduct of Review Panels

In the previous Council, Scrutiny Review Panels met in private though their final report was publicly available. The Commissioners have been asked to review this practice and consider the possibility of holding panel meetings in public.

The Commissioners noted that meetings in private allowed for witnesses to be more forthcoming in their responses and allowed members to explore options which may be 'unthinkable' in the public domain. The Commissioners also recognised the need for greater openness and transparency in the review process. To that end the Commissioners have sought to balance these competing demands and have suggested a move towards holding panel meetings in public but allowing Panels the option of moving into private session. Appendix D sets out in brief the different stages in the review process and the specific stages in the review process when a Panel may wish to consider meeting in private. The process will be kept under review and amended in the light of experience.

d) Scrutiny Work Programme

The draft meetings and work programme for the Commission is set out in Appendix E. At this stage this is an indicative work programme and will be reviewed and updated at the meetings of the Commissioners. The Commissioners also recognised the need to be robust in challenging the rationale for items on the agenda so as to avoid the risk of large agendas leaving little time in meetings for effective scrutiny of issues.

With regard to the potential issues for investigation by Panels the Commissioners will, at their meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> August (after the papers for the Commission have been circulated), consider further the list of potential issues identified by members with a view to identifying how best the issues raised can be dealt with including determining priorities. The Commission will be advised of the outcome of those discussions.

## **Recommendations**

4. The Commission is asked to:-
  - a) consider and approve the draft job descriptions for Commissioners, Deputy Commissioners and Chairmen and Deputy Chairmen of Scrutiny Committees;
  - b) note the arrangements proposed for the Budget and Performance Monitoring Scrutiny Panel;
  - c) note the changes proposed for conducting scrutiny reviews;
  - d) agree the proposed scrutiny work programme.

## **Circulation under the Local Issues Alerts procedure**

None

## **Officer to contact**

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## **Impact Analysis**

None specifically for this report but in developing the work programme consideration will be given to addressing a range of issues including equalities, environmental impacts etc

## **Background Papers**

Report of the Constitution Committee to the County Council on 8<sup>th</sup> July

Various papers considered at meetings of the Scrutiny Commissioners held on 14<sup>th</sup> July and 24<sup>th</sup> August

## **Appendices**

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| <b>Appendix A</b> | Structure of overview and scrutiny bodies approved by the County Council              |
| <b>Appendix B</b> | Job descriptions for Scrutiny Commissioners and Deputy Commissioners                  |
| <b>Appendix C</b> | Job descriptions for Chairmen and Deputy Chairmen of Overview and Scrutiny Committees |
| <b>Appendix D</b> | Stages in the review process  |
| <b>Appendix E</b> | Draft meetings and work programme for the Commission                                  |