**Report of the Chief Democratic Services Officer**

**Executive Board**

**Date: 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2009**

**Subject:  KPMG  Scrutiny Review  - May 2009**

| Electoral Wards Affected: | Specific Implications For: |
|---|---|
| ☐ Ward Members consulted (referred to in report) | Equality and Diversity ☐<br>Community Cohesion ☐<br>Narrowing the Gap ☐ |

Eligible for Call In  [ X ]

Not Eligible for Call In  [  ]
 (Details contained in the report)

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

1.      This report summarises the key findings from KPMG's recent audit of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny arrangements.  The report also details management's formal response to the recommendations.

2.      The findings have been discussed by all Scrutiny Boards and the Corporate Governance and Audit Committee.

3.      The key learning points will be progressed by officers through the Scrutiny Chairs Advisory Group

**1.0    Purpose Of This Report**

1.1    This report summarises the key findings from KPMG's recent audit of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny arrangements.  (Attached as Appendix 1).  The report also details management's formal response to the recommendations.

**2.0    Background Information**

2.1    As part of their 2008/09 Audit and Inspection Plan, it was agreed that KPMG would carry out a review of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny function.  The audit objective was to provide the Council with assurance around the progress made in the improvement areas identified by the Corporate Assessment, specifically:

- The extent to which the Council has a clear vision for the contribution of   scrutiny and the resources to deliver that vision;
- The extent to which the skills of the Members on the Scrutiny Boards are matched to and are appropriate for the fulfillment of their role;
- How scrutiny enquiries and public challenge feed into the work programme of Scrutiny Boards;
-  The extent to which the information available to Members enables them to reach appropriate conclusions;
- The design of the Call-In arrangements in response to the Council's recent 'Corporate Assessment' report;
-  The extent to which the recommendations of the Scrutiny Boards have resulted in changes in service delivery and service improvements;
- The extent to which the seven Scrutiny Boards challenge policy development and the consistency of actions taken by these Boards;
-  The extent to which the Scrutiny function fits within the wider performance management arrangements of the Council; and
- The extent to which Scrutiny provides effective challenge and adds value to the Council.

**3.0    Main Issues**

3.1    The key findings of the review are set out below:

The recognition that in light of the recent Corporate Assessment the Council has been in the process of continuing to strengthen its Scrutiny function and that a number of aspects of good practice were identified, such as:

- Professional relationships have been developed between the Scrutiny Board Chairs and the Principal Scrutiny Advisors;
- A wide range of training tools are used in providing training resources for Scrutiny Board Members;
- Personal development plans are available for all Members which assist in the identification of individual training needs; and
-  Inquiry selection criteria forms are used to determine whether full scrutiny Inquiries items will be added to the work programme of the Scrutiny Boards.

3.2    The key learning points were as follows:

That whilst the Council continues to develop its Scrutiny function it should ensure that the following areas are strengthened:

- An overall vision for the Scrutiny function should be developed, documented and published;
- The trust between Scrutiny Members, Executive Members and Officers needs to be maintained and developed in order to reinforce the importance of joint working;
- The relationship between Scrutiny Members, Executive Members and Officers needs to continue to develop and political views need to be kept separate from the Scrutiny function;
- There is a continuing need for Executive Members, Scrutiny Board Chairs and Officers to work together to identify areas where the Scrutiny Boards can add value to policy development work streams. Where Scrutiny Boards decide to not undertake work areas suggested by Executive Members a brief rationale should be provided so as to prevent any misunderstandings arising;
- The Scrutiny Boards Procedure Rules Guidance Notes should be strengthened to incorporate that the Scrutiny Boards strive for enhanced lines of internal communication; add value to the Council through the Scrutiny reviews undertaken and incorporate innovation into the approach for challenging the way the Council operates;
- The process of selecting Scrutiny Chairs should be reviewed and a 'job specification' introduced;
- Scrutiny Boards should review whether co-opted Members should be invited to join in their Board;
- All Scrutiny Boards should have 'real time monitoring' as a standing agenda item so that Scrutiny Boards can scan the horizon to identify any emerging issues;
- The efficiency of Scrutiny Board meetings needs to be improved. To achieve this timed or single item agendas should be encouraged where appropriate and pre-meetings used more effectively;
- Scrutiny Members should continue to be encouraged to access web based Scrutiny forums so that they have an additional network of resource to draw upon;
- Reports of Members attendance at Scrutiny meetings should be made to each of the political groups. Where attendance rates fall below an acceptable level then it should be the responsibility of each political party to take appropriate action to address this;
- Scrutiny Board Members should be reminded of the need to assess the performance of key indicators throughout the year and highlight if they feel this should direct any area of their annual work programme;
- Where there are key performance indicators with historical poor performance the Council should report to Scrutiny Boards the actual impact of this poor performance on service delivery; and
- The Scrutiny annual report should be strengthened to clearly outline the service benefits of the recommendations made. In addition its format should be standardised to clearly categorise the work using a consistent series of headings and to clearly display the outcomes of the previous years recommendations recording them as implemented; partially implemented; work in progress; not accepted; and no longer applicable.


**4.0     Implications For Council Policy And Governance**

4.1     KPMG's report provides the Executive Board with independent assurance on the Council's Overview and Scrutiny arrangements.

**5.0     Legal And Resource Implications**

5.1     There are no specific legal or resource issues associated with this report.

**6.0     Conclusions**

6.1     KPMG has noted the progress made in developing the Scrutiny function and the existence of areas of good practice scrutiny and areas for further development.

**7.0     Recommendations**

7.1     That the Executive Board considers the assurances provided with regards to the Council's Overview and Scrutiny arrangements and note that the key learning points will be progressed by officers through the Scrutiny Chairs Advisory Group.


Background Documents

None.