

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
INQUIRY INTO SUPPORT TO GROUP OFFICES
TERMS OF REFERENCE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Underpinning much of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill is an enhanced recognition of the role that frontline councillors play in engaging local citizens, advocating for them, brokering effective service delivery and holding local public services to account. This is proposed through 'Community Calls for Action', 'area scrutiny' and increased partnership working. This raises the question of the level of day-to-day support members will require and where that support is located.
- 1.2 At its meeting on 2nd July 2007, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee resolved to undertake an Inquiry into the officer support given to elected members through the Group Offices. The driving force behind the need for an Inquiry was the afore mentioned increase of demands placed on elected Members but also a view that there did not exist an agreed formula for the allocation of staff which was transparent and robust enough to respond to changes of numbers between Groups.

2.0 SCOPE OF THE INQUIRY

- 2.1 The purpose of the Inquiry is to make an assessment of and, where appropriate, make recommendations on the following areas:

The allocation of staffing to Groups and Independent Members.

- Historical basis of allocation and rationale
- What factors affect the allocation of staff
- Weaknesses (if any) in the way staff are allocated – e.g. is the allocation process 'future proof'.
- Management controls and processes, personnel issues

The links between Group office staff and departmental officers providing support to elected Members

- Understanding respective roles
- Identification of any efficiencies

Location of Group Support Staff

- Do current arrangements meet the changes and challenges identified in the Local Government Bill

Future formula for the allocation of staff

- An assessment of options for the future allocation of staff

3.0 TIMETABLE FOR THE INQUIRY

3.1 To be determined by the Committee.

4.0 SUBMISSION OF EVIDENCE

4.1 The following evidence will be considered by the Committee

- A statement on the legal position of support to Groups, including an analysis of the different types of officer appointment that can be made within Group Support Offices and, in particular, the appointment of “assistants for political groups” as defined within the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.
- An analysis of arrangements in the Core Cities and West Yorkshire Metropolitan Councils
- The current allocation of resources across the Groups including revenue budget, accommodation.
- A Statement on the historical basis and rationale behind the current allocation of resources
- A statement on what factors which might change the allocation of staff to Groups
- A statement on the perceived weaknesses of the current process of allocation
- A statement on the respective roles of Group Support Officers and departmental officers

- A discussion paper on current management arrangements and the location of support to elected Members.
- Options for the future allocation of officer support to political Groups

5.0 WITNESSES

5.1 The Committee is likely to seek evidence and views from a number of sources. These will include:

- The Chief Democratic Services Officer
- Chair of the Member Management Committee
- A political spokesperson from the political Groups

6.0 POST INQUIRY REPORT MONITORING ARRANGEMENTS

6.1 Following the completion of the Scrutiny inquiry and the publication of the final inquiry report and recommendations, the implementation of the agreed recommendations will be monitored. The Committee will determine those arrangements at the end of the Inquiry.

6.2 The final inquiry report will include information on the detailed arrangements for how the implementation of recommendations will be monitored.

7.0 MEASURES OF SUCCESS

7.1 It is important to consider how the Committee will deem if its inquiry has been successful in making a difference to local people. Some measures of success may be obvious at the initial stages of an inquiry and can be included in these terms of reference. Other measures of success may become apparent as the inquiry progresses and discussions take place.

7.2 The Committee will look to publish practical recommendations.