MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COORDINATING GROUP HELD ON 11 JANUARY 2005

Present:

Members of the Group:

Councillors: Martin Heatley (Chair)
                David Booth
                Ian Bottrill
                John Burton
                Ron Cockings
                Anne Forwood
                Richard Hobbs
                Jerry Roodhouse
                Izzi Seccombe
                Sid Tooth

Other Members in attendance:

Councillor Dot Webster (for Councillor John Wells)

Officers: Ian Caulfield – Chief Executive
                David Carter – County Solicitor & Assistant Chief Executive
                Janet Purcell- Member Services Manager

1. General

(1)   Apologies for absence
          Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor
          John Wells.

(2)   Members' Disclosures of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

          None

(3)   Minutes of the meeting held on 12 October 2004

          The minutes of the meeting held on 12 October 2004 were
          agreed as a correct record subject to the addition of Councillor
          Richard Hobbs to the list of apologies for absence.

2.   Draft Corporate Review Programme 2005/6

The Group considered the joint report of the Chief Executive and the County Solicitor and Assistant Chief Executive.

The Chair invited Members to consider whether the workload for their particular committee was manageable, particularly in view of the number of major service reviews. Members drew attention to the fact that the programme did not include the other areas of work chosen by the committees. For example Crime and Safety Overview and Scrutiny Committee had added road safety to it's programme and Health Overview and Scrutiny had a number of items, such as drug and substance issues, PCTs plans and needed to be able to react to other potential variations in services.

The Group were generally of the opinion that the work programmes were appropriate, although there may be a need to prioritise in some cases.

During the discussion, Members considered the balance of the agendas and the treatment of 'information items'. It was agreed that there needed to be an adequate method of satisfying Members' needs for information but to also give enough room on agendas to enable committees to focus on the issues they had chosen to scrutinise. It was recognised that committees often requested reports back on issues that had not been answered in a report, and this tended to result in regular reporting back on an item.

It was suggested that one option would be to send reports back by e-mail to the interested member or to all as necessary, but there would continue to be occasions when the committee considered it significant enough to have a report before them. (For example, on Health Overview and Scrutiny often made recommendations and would want to know plans and progress on these). In such instances thought should be given to when there was a higher enough level of satisfaction with an issue that repeat reports were no longer necessary.

It was suggested that one way around the flow of information items (often to more than one committee) would be to have a website based notice board for each committee area that could be updated with information as this became available.

The Member Services Manager would investigate this suggestion (including looking at the web based system used by Blackburn) but that any system would retain the ability of committees to have reports back but these would go on yellow paper (and no longer reported when the Committee were satisfied with progress).

3. **Structure of Overview and Scrutiny**

The Group considered a report that set out a structure for overview and scrutiny based on a single committee model. The report had been requested by the Group at its last meeting.

Members expressed varying views on how this might work and whether they considered it an appropriate model for Warwickshire.

It was agreed that any further consideration of this model should only take place after the County Elections.

4. **Developing Advanced Skills for Members- Evaluation of Programme.**

The Member Services Manager reported an evaluation of the programme of member developed delivered by the Office for Public Management. This evaluation was based on the feedback from Members through evaluation forms and on an analysis of how far the aims and objectives set out in the proposal agreed with OPM had been met.

The conclusion had been that most of the sessions had been welcomed by Members and that the style of presentation (particularly by Helen Dawson) had been well received. The problems lay in the timekeeping and pace of sessions, which meant that the planned content of the programmes were not covered and there was little time devoted to skills development. This was exacerbated by OPM not providing individual Members with the promised feedback (based on the questionnaires completed by Members and OPM's observation of committees in the Summer). The receipt of the feedback before the training sessions would have provided Members with an opportunity to identify any areas they wished to work on during the sessions. It was also suggested that it would have been helpful to have had a feedback session at the end of the one day scrutiny simulation exercise, to discuss what had worked well and what had not. The sessions would have also benefited from a higher level of attendance.

It was suggested that, in future, there be a mentoring system by group and that some of the sessions be offered to individual political groups rather than in mixed groups. It was also suggested that these sessions should not be run at Shire Hall where it was too easy to be pulled into other meetings or work and that it may also be appropriate to do some training jointly with other authorities.

The Group was invited to consider whether a similar programme should be offered to Members following the County elections. It was suggested that the first priority should be provide some basic training on the Warwickshire structure and how it operates and to allow new

Members some time to experience overview and scrutiny before offering more intensive training.

The Group supported the re-running of a similar programme at the appropriate time following the County elections, and with improvements required to remove some of the problems identified in the report.

5.   Date of Next Meeting

The Group noted that the next scheduled meeting was 5 April 2005.

....
Chair