

WIRRAL BOROUGH COUNCIL

SCRUTINY PROGRAMME BOARD – 3rd JUNE 2010

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF LAW, HR AND ASSET MANAGEMENT

THE 2009 ANNUAL SURVEY OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT CONDUCTED BY THE CENTRE FOR PUBLIC SCRUTINY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an update on the outcomes of the 2009 annual scrutiny survey conducted by the Centre for Public Scrutiny (cfps).

1. Background

- 1.1 The Centre for Public Scrutiny conducts an annual survey of attitudes towards overview and scrutiny in local government. The survey, which has now taken place for seven years, invites participation from those involved in the delivery of scrutiny; both at an officer and a member level.
- 1.2 The 2009 survey was conducted towards the end of last year. In Wirral, the Democratic Services Manager produced an officer response. In addition, the six Chairs of Scrutiny Committees were invited to complete the survey form.
- 1.3 The Centre for Public Scrutiny (cfps) has recently produced a report which details the findings of the 2009 survey. The cfps report, which is attached as Appendix 1, identifies areas which may be considered best practice. Members may like to consider whether there are any examples of good practice in the report which they would like to recommend for use in Wirral.

2. Major findings in the report

- 2.1 Having received at least one response from 75% of all local authorities in England and Wales this year's annual survey of overview and scrutiny is the most representative yet.
- 2.2 The Centre for Public Scrutiny comments that "Given the tough economic climate in local government the headline resource statistics from the survey are likely to be of particular interest to the reader. The picture is very much a mixed one with good news for districts and unitary authorities - who have seen significant rises in discretionary budgets and officer provision – and a concerning if not unanticipated decline in resourcing for other top tier authority types".
- 2.3 The survey asked respondents for views about the perceptions with regard to scrutiny in their local authority. Most scrutineers firmly believe that the scrutiny function adds value in their authority although there is a consensus around the need to build a higher profile with the public. Respondents feel that scrutiny should be free from whipping and receive a ring-fenced budget. There was also agreement that there ought to be a minimum level of training for new scrutiny chairs with the need for more training being a strong theme generally in this year's survey. There has also been a decisive shift towards scrutinising partnerships compared to the previous year.

- 3 Financial implications**
None
- 4 Staffing implications**
None
- 5 Equal Opportunities implications**
None
- 6 Community Safety implications**
None
- 7 Local Agenda 21 implications**
None
- 8 Planning implications**
None
- 9 Anti-poverty implications**
None
- 10 Human Rights implications**
None
- 11 Social Inclusion implications**
None
- 12 Local Member Support implications**
None
- 13 Background Papers**
None

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) That the Scrutiny Programme Board note the report