

WIRRAL COUNCIL

AUDIT AND RISK MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE - 1st December 2008

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF LAW, HR AND ASSET MANAGEMENT

AUDIT COMMISSION REPORT ON DEMOCRATIC ARRANGEMENTS

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The Audit Commission report on the Council's democratic arrangements was considered by the Committee at its meeting on 30 June 2008. The agreed action plan is attached at Appendix 1. The Committee considered progress at its meeting on 30th September 2008 (minute 26 refers) and Members requested a further report.

1.2 This report provides an update on progress since the last meeting of the Committee.

2. PROGRESS ON ACTION POINTS

2.1 Recommendation 1

Assess and review the amount of senior officer time spent on serving the current democratic arrangements and whether that currently provides value for money.

2.2 It was not possible to complete this recommendation within the last cycle – this information will be collated during the present cycle up to Council on 15th December 2008.

2.3 Recommendation 2

Continue to support and develop the training for the scrutiny function. Including the on going provision of training for new scrutiny members and the development of more tailored training such as performance management.

2.4 The provision of additional scrutiny training was considered by the Member Training Steering Group at its meeting on 6th October 2008 and it was agreed that this would be incorporated into the Member Training Programme for 2009/10. Training on performance management was provided for Members on 29th January 2008. The scrutiny toolkit for Members was approved by the Council at its meeting on 3rd November 2008 and is available in the electronic Members Library to assist all Members in carrying out their scrutiny role. In addition, Scrutiny Chairs are visiting another local authority in January to observe the scrutiny function.

2.5 Recommendation 3

Review the current scrutiny committee structure and clearly identify the remit of each committee in order to reduce duplication of activity and review. Including:

- **ensure that performance information is reported to the most relevant committee; and**
- **that all committee have put in place work programme for the coming municipal year.**

2.6 At its meeting on 9th July 2008 the Cabinet resolved that

“...In the light of the adoption of the new Corporate Plan, Cabinet is minded therefore to consider recommending to Council a system where five Overview and Scrutiny Committees mirror instead the five agreed Corporate Objectives in order to allow those committees to play a real part in delivering the Council’s agreed agenda.

However, Cabinet realises that this is an issue that will need substantial consultation and debate with all those concerned and therefore agrees to review the position with the object of taking new proposals, with detailed terms of reference, to the appropriate Council to take effect from the next Council AGM.”

2.7 It is therefore anticipated that any changes to the current scrutiny committee structure will be brought forward for consideration prior to implementation in May 2009, subject to the consultation and debate referred to above.

Performance information is reported to the relevant overview and scrutiny committee. Once the final future structure for overview and scrutiny committees is agreed, Officers will put in place arrangements to ensure that performance information is reported to the relevant committee.

2.8 All scrutiny committees have agreed work programmes for 2008/9.

2.9 Recommendation 4

Continue to review the arrangements for cabinet in order to further reduce the number of items considered. Including:

- **review the effectiveness of the virtual committee in reducing items taken to cabinet; and**
- **monitor the impact of the new scheme of delegation in reducing the cabinets work load and explore the opportunity to extend the scheme further.**

2.10 A new Committee Management system was introduced on 12th September 2008 which improves the range of information available to Members on the Council’s intranet. One aspect of this is an improved library facility where items of general interest to Members are filed. All Members are notified when new items are posted. This aims to reduce the number of committee reports for information that are considered by enabling information to be disseminated to Members electronically.

2.11 At its meeting on 14th July 2008 the Council agreed a revised scheme of delegation to Cabinet Portfolio Holders and this was complemented by a revised protocol which was agreed by Cabinet on 4th September 2008. This extends the level of delegation to Portfolio Holders and should therefore reduce the number of items considered by the Cabinet. Monitoring of both the use of the electronic library and the scheme of delegation is on-going.

2.12 Recommendation 5

Review current performance indicators to ensure they enable members to understand the impact and value for money of the Council activities.

2.13 Corporate indicators have been reviewed for 2008/9 and will be reviewed again on an annual basis.

3 FINANCIAL AND STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

3.1 There are no financial and staffing implications.

4. LOCAL MEMBER SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no local Member support implications.

5. LOCAL AGENDA 21 STATEMENT

5.1 There are no Local Agenda 21 implications.

6. PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no planning implications.

7. EQUAL OPPORTUNITY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no equal opportunity implications.

8. COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no community safety implications.

9 HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

9.1. There are no human rights implications.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 There are no background papers under the Access to Information Act.

11. RECOMMENDATION

11.1 That this report be noted.

Appendix 1 – Action plan

Page No	Recommendation	Priority 1 = Low 2 = Med 3 = High	Responsibility	Agreed	Comments	Comment	Date
6	R1 Assess and review the amount of senior officer time spent on serving the current democratic arrangements and whether that currently provides value for money.	2	Chief Officers	Yes	Average figures for the current democratic arrangements to be collated and assessed.	In progress	3/12/08
6	R2 Continue to support and develop the training for the scrutiny function. Including the on going provision of training for new scrutiny members and the development of more tailored training such as performance management.	3	Matthew Hebden	Yes	Additional scrutiny training sessions to be arranged for Chairs and new scrutiny members following the elections. Performance management training has been carried out since the production of this report.	In progress Completed	30/03/09 29/01/08
6	R3 Review the current scrutiny committee structure and clearly identify the remit of each committee in order to reduce duplication of activity and review. Including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure that performance information is reported to the most relevant committee; and that all committee have put in place work programme for the coming municipal year. 	2	Simon Goacher Chief Officers Andrea Grant	Yes	To be carried out as part of the Annual Review of the Constitution Review the provision of performance information to ensure the relevance to specific OSCs. Guidance is being produced by corporate performance on how / when scrutiny committees should receive performance reports. Development of work programmes to be considered as the first item of business at each OSC in the new Municipal Year.	Completed Completed Completed	14/07/08 30/09/08 14/07/08

Page No	Recommendation	Priority 1 = Low 2 = Med 3 = High	Responsibility	Agreed	Comments	Comment	Date
6	R4 Continue to review the arrangements for cabinet in order to further reduce the number of items considered. Including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • review the effectiveness of the virtual committee in reducing items taken to cabinet; and • monitor the impact of the new scheme of delegation in reducing the cabinets work load and explore the opportunity to extend the scheme further. 	2	Simon Goacher	Yes	The scheme of delegation to be reviewed as part of the Annual Review of the Constitution.	Completed and monitoring on-going	14/07/08
6	R5 Review current performance indicators to ensure they enable members to understand the impact and value for money of the Council activities.	2	Russ Glennon	Yes	Corporate indicators have been reviewed for 2008/9 and will be reviewed again annually. Finance Department is exploring unit / service cost indicators.	Completed	30/09/08