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## Scrutiny Management Committee

16 June 2008

### Report of The Head of Civic, Democratic and Legal Services

### Supporting the Current Scrutiny Function in York

#### Background

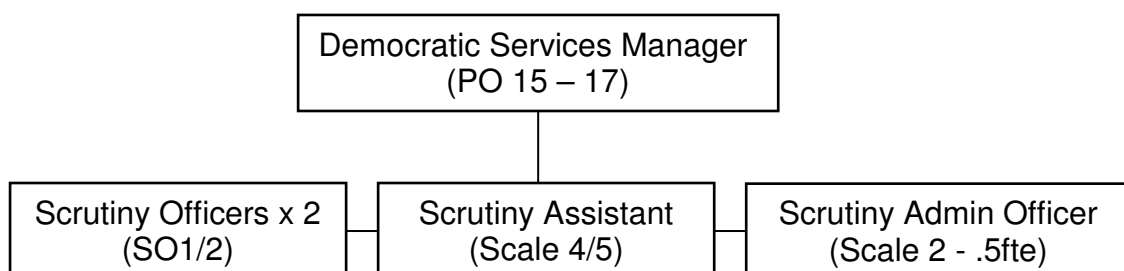
1. At the last meeting of Scrutiny Management Committee (SMC) in April 2008, Members requested a report setting out the current resources available to support scrutiny in York and addressing the likely impact of the new Local Government & Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 upon those resources.
2. In January 2008, the Council underwent a CPA inspection across all service areas. The scrutiny function was assessed as part of that programme and the CPA Inspectors concluded that there is more work to be done to make scrutiny effective in York, particularly with regard to post decision scrutiny and policy development. A review of the scrutiny function is currently underway, partly in response to the anticipated CPA findings and partly in response to concerns raised by officers and Members regarding the structure of the overview and scrutiny apparatus. Members will be consulted upon that review and emerging report during July/August 2008.

#### Consultation

3. Although no consultation has been necessary on the preparation of this report, as referred to above, there will be a full consultation programme in relation to the review report currently underway. SMC will be fully consulted on the contents of that report and the options for the future of scrutiny in York.

#### Analysis

4. Currently, the staffing structure in the Scrutiny team is as follows:



5. Members will be aware one of the two Scrutiny Officers has recently been seconded to City Strategy for 2 years. That post has now been filled initially for 6 months with the successful person starting on 9 June 2008. The existing workloads including supporting ongoing Standing and Ad-hoc Sub-Committees (eg. Health/Education, Barbican, Traffic Congestion) and newly agreed reviews (eg Cultural Quarter) will be absorbed by both Scrutiny Officers.
6. The only work which has not been covered for the last 6 weeks whilst the vacancy has been carried, is SMC's role in relation to monitoring the implementation of scrutiny recommendations agreed by the Executive. It is anticipated that this work will recommence during the next 2/3 months, when the new Scrutiny Officer has settled into the post.
7. The part-time Scrutiny Administrator post will be vacant as from 9 June 2008, due to the current postholder successfully obtaining another position within the Directorate. Discussions are currently taking place about whether there is a need to fill this post or not. Alternative structural possibilities are being considered, given that, in reality, the current postholder has largely been utilised by the Democratic Services Manager in other administrative areas. In view of the pressing need for resources to support Human Resources administration and the fact that its re-deployment would have no adverse consequence for the function of Overview & Scrutiny, it is considered that this resource would be better deployed in this way.
8. In addition, there is a frozen Scrutiny Assistant post on the staffing structure. Under the current grading scheme, this is a Scale 4/5 post. Members will recall that the Executive made funding available for this post in June 2006 when the former Scrutiny Manager post was deleted as part of the then Chief Executive's restructure. It was made available, however, with a proviso that the funding would not be released until a satisfactory case for filling this post was made to the Executive. The Democratic Services Manager has consistently been of the opinion, given the work volumes in Scrutiny Services, that there has not been a need to fill this post. Currently, it is still considered that the staffing resources in the Scrutiny Team are sufficient to meet existing demand.
9. Whilst it would be possible to consider building a case to recruit to this post Members of the SMC are reminded of the fact that we are currently in the midst of a review of the Overview and Scrutiny function at CYC and any decision on recruiting to this post would be premature at this point. We are also fast approaching the annual budget round where it is expected that savings will be required to be found. Budgets have, over several years, been stripped back to the bone with the result that salary costs are the only area that provides much scope for savings. This is another factor which would tend towards delaying any decision to recruit to this post until we are clear as to resources pressures particularly in view of the fact that there is insufficient work to occupy such a postholder.

## **10. Local Government & Public Health Act 2007**

This legislation impacts on the scrutiny function in 2 ways:

- (i) it introduces the councillor or community call for action. This means that Ward Councillors may get matters referred to them which they have the power to refer to scrutiny for potential review. This will apply in cases where there are ongoing issues raised at a local level which have otherwise proved unresolvable. A scrutiny review would ordinarily be the last resort under these circumstances. Any referrals by Councillors of this nature, will still be subject to feasibility and assessment procedures, which, may mean, that SMC Members will not always choose to proceed with a review, depending upon available resources or relevance of the issue(s). It is not anticipated that 'call for action' will result in significantly higher numbers of scrutiny reviews and it is expected that any additional workload will be readily manageable within existing staff levels.
- (ii) Extended scrutiny involving partners. This may have a greater impact given that the Council is entitled to invoke the participation in scrutiny reviews of a far greater number of 'partner' organisations. Once awareness is raised about this possibility, Members may feel encouraged to register a greater number of topics or to invite wider partner participation in agreed reviews. Alternative structures being looked at in the scrutiny review will endeavour to make provision for dealing with this prospect.

### **Options**

11. This report is for information only at this stage at the earlier request of Members.

### **Implications**

12. There are no known Legal, Equalities, financial, human resource (HR) or other implications associated with the recommendations within this report at this time. Although there are clearly HR implications associated with the information contained within and further financial implications associated with relevant staffing costs.

### **Corporate Strategy**

13. This report being for information does not specifically accord with any objectives in the Corporate Strategy, although the correct resourcing of the scrutiny function should aim to achieve improvement in everything we do.

### **Risk Management**

14. There are no known direct implications associated with this report.

### **Recommendation**

15. Members are asked to note the information on current and future resources contained within this report.

Reason: To ensure Members are fully informed as requested about the level of resources to support the scrutiny function in York

### **Contact Details**

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**Report Approved**

**Date**

10 June 2008

**Wards Affected:**

**All**

**For further information please contact the author of the report**

**Background Papers:** None