REPORT TO:	**Overview and Scrutiny Committee**	**AGENDA ITEM:**
DATE OF MEETING:	**25th June 2008**	**CATEGORY: DELEGATED**
REPORT FROM:	**Chief Executive**	**OPEN**
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	**Paul Spencer (Ext 5722)**	**DOC:**
SUBJECT:	**Self-Scrutiny Review**	**REF:**
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	**All**	**TERMS OF REFERENCE:**

1.0 Recommendations

1.1 That following the scrutiny focus session, the Committee concludes this review and retains the current working arrangements for the 2008/09 Municipal Year, other than the adoption of a scoping document.

1.2 That Members give initial thought to the self-evaluation framework, produced by the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) and provide feedback to the Democratic Services Section, in order that a baseline can be established.

2.0 Purpose of Report

2.1 To provide feedback following the self-scrutiny exercise, to complete this review and to confirm retention of the arrangements for 2008/09.

3.0 Detail

3.1 In the latter part of the 2007/08 Municipal Year, the Committee agreed to undertake a self-scrutiny review. From this, a focus session was organised and held on 29th May 2008. In addition to the self-scrutiny review, this session provided the opportunity to give early consideration to the work programme for 2008/09.

3.2 Information was circulated prior to the session, comprising the Overview and Scrutiny extracts of the Constitution, the Committee's Annual Report for the previous year and a number of other guidance documents and examples of best practice.

3.3 The Self-Scrutiny exercise provided the opportunity to:-

- Look at the Officer support arrangements and how the Committee operates;
- Inform Members of the new legislation and new areas for Scrutiny;
- Provide comparative information on how scrutiny is undertaken by other councils;
- Give initial consideration to a self-evaluation framework, which will be completed later in the municipal year.

Officer Support and how the Committee operates

3.4 Information was provided on the revised arrangements introduced in November 2007. This included the enhanced role of Democratic Services, the role of the Corporate Management Team and the appointment of Heads of Service or other Officers to support each review.

3.5 At the session, it was noted that there had been a period of transition. The benefits of a flexible approach were recognised, together with the need for specialist support on occasions and the potential burden for Officers given their other responsibilities. There might be the need for external support occasionally, which could have budget implications. A contrary view was expressed on the benefits of having a dedicated Officer for Scrutiny. On balance, there was a consensus to retain the current support arrangements for Scrutiny, introduced in November 2007.

Capacity

3.6 Members were asked to consider whether the current arrangements were sufficient to meet existing commitments, new scrutiny areas and further potential reviews. Specifically, it was questioned whether task and finish groups should be used for some projects if there was insufficient capacity. It was also noted that Members might have specific interest areas and could take the lead on a those reviews. This could include more flexible working methods, to progress projects between Meetings, subject to formal approval being sought at the appropriate Committee Meeting.

3.7 In considering this topic it was recognised that the Corporate Plan provided a guide for both Policy Committees and Scrutiny. With regard to the external scrutiny focus, the Corporate Plan theme of "Strong in the Region" was particularly relevant. Governance was raised with reference made to the Code of Corporate Governance. Further topics discussed were the scoping of reviews, new scrutiny areas and specifically health scrutiny.

New legislation and new roles for Scrutiny

3.8 The Committee was informed of the new responsibilities under the Local Government and Public and Involvement in Health Act 2007. These included a role for scrutiny of the Local Area Agreement and the Councillor/Community Call for Action. Detailed guidance on this area was still awaited.

3.9 At the session, it was recognised there was a general lack of data relating to the new National Indicators. However some baselines were already available and an example of CO^2 emissions was used. It was expected that the County Council would want districts to contribute to this process, but there might be some resistance over a district council scrutinising County Council functions. Providing adequate time for research was another issue raised.

Scrutiny elsewhere

3.10 Research had taken place through circulating a questionnaire to other Derbyshire local authorities and a sample of fourth option councils. This sought feedback on how scrutiny was delivered elsewhere in terms of selecting, scoping and undertaking reviews, together with the Officer support available, budgetary provision and the monitoring arrangements in place. To provide a comparison, a copy of the Centre for

Public Scrutiny (CfPS) 2007 survey of Overview and Scrutiny in Local Government was also circulated. Key findings from the consultation and survey document were discussed.

3.11 It was recognised that Scrutiny under the executive model was radically different to that in fourth option councils. Co-option was discussed as a means of providing specialist input and there was some discussion about voting rights. The Council's Constitution provides for co-option to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, but without any voting rights. There was discussion about Health Scrutiny including the respective responsibilities of the PCT and Derbyshire County Council. Publicity was discussed, with reference made to the Council's review of communication, holding meetings at venues other than at the Civic Offices and the use of area meetings to publicise scrutiny. The use of focus groups was also discussed.

Scoping Reviews

3.12 An issue that had been highlighted from the research was the benefit of scoping reviews. Before commencing a review, many authorities use a scoping document to assess the proposed scrutiny area, to ensure it is focussed, realistic and the work will add value. A copy of the Council's previous scoping document had been circulated, together with examples from two other authorities and a proposed hybrid document, comprising the best features of those used elsewhere.

3.13 At the focus session, there was broad approval of the proposed scoping document, shown at Annexe 'A'. This would be tested when scoping reviews and, if necessary, adjusted. Related issues raised were follow up arrangements and securing community feedback through area meetings, parish councils and providing arrangements for the urban core.

Self-evaluation Framework

3.14 A self-evaluation framework, produced by the CfPS had been circulated. This gave a toolkit to focus on the key aspects of scrutiny posing a series of questions, with prompts, to help complete an evaluation of the four scrutiny roles:

- Provide "critical friend" challenge;
- Reflect the voice and concerns of the public and its communities;
- Take the lead and own the scrutiny process;
- Make an impact on service delivery;

3.15 It was agreed that Members would give initial thought to this document and email feedback to the Democratic Services Section. Any feedback received will be circulated for consideration at the Meeting on 25th June 2008.

3.16 The Committee also considered its work programme for 2008/09 and this is reported later on the Agenda.

4.0 Financial Implications

4.1 None arising directly from this report.

5.0 Corporate/Community Implications

5.1 None arising directly from this report.

6.0 Conclusion

6.1 The self-scrutiny exercise has proved useful, confirming the arrangements at South Derbyshire are in accordance with best practice and arrangements at other fourth option councils. It is not proposed at this time to make any changes to the way in which Overview and Scrutiny operates at South Derbyshire, other than to introduce a scoping document. There is a need to keep under review the implications of new legislation, as guidance becomes available. It is proposed to give initial thought to the self-evaluation framework, and to complete this formally, possibly at a further focus session in six months time.

7.0 Background Papers

7.1 Support documents for Scrutiny Focus Session.