MINUTES of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held at Swanspool House, Wellingborough on Tuesday, 20 February 2007 commencing at 7:00pm and concluded at 7:58pm.

Present: Councillor Old (Chairman), Councillor Callnon (Vice-Chairman), Councillors Dholakia, Harrington, G Lawman, Palmer, Prescod and Waters

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

RESOLVED to note that apologies were received from Councillors Ainge, May and Patel.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

RESOLVED to note that there were no declarations.

3 CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 16 January 2007 be confirmed and signed.

4 CALL INS

RESOLVED to note that there were no call ins.

5 EXTERNAL AUDIT ANNUAL REPORT 2005-06

A report from the Head of Financial Services was received which presented the Council’s external auditors’, KPMG, annual report for 2005-2006. It was noted that the Resources Committee had received reports on the Statement of Accounts for 2005-2006 and the external auditors’ report to Those Charged With Governance in September 2006.

David Brett from KPMG attended the meeting to respond to questions and provide additional information. He noted that previously the Audit Commission had issued a joint report in June - the annual external audit report and inspection letter - which in effect was 15 months after the events reported on. It had been decided to produce the external audit report at this time to accelerate the reporting process: the Audit Commission would issue its inspection letter later in the year, which would include an evaluation of the authority’s use of resources. It was noted that the examination of BVPIs (best value performance indicators) had changed in emphasis, and that now the external auditor was required to provide an analysis and audit of data quality.

The committee examined the executive summary and full external audit annual report which contained three recommendations. It was noted that the senior management team had considered the report and recommendations, and that the latter were to be
implemented. A summary of the recommendations and action plan was attached as appendix A to the report. Appendix B comprised a follow up of last year’s recommendations 2004-2005; and appendix C, the auditors’ statutory report on the Best Value Performance Plan 2006-2007.

The external auditor and Head of Financial Services responded to questions from the committee and provided further information, which included the following:

- It was noted that the follow up of last year’s recommendations was complete. Follow up consultations were currently being carried out; the Performance Management project group would monitor this process.
- The committee expressed concern over slippages in the capital programme, and it was noted that this could form the basis of a future agenda item.
- Additional information was provided about FOI (Freedom of Information) request recording and monitoring. It was noted that an effective recording co-ordination and monitoring process was in place; effective reporting mechanisms to senior management and members were under development.
- Additional information was provided about a new risk management system: it was explained that the existing database had been designed to enable individual managers to manage risk to specific services; a new system was to be installed which would enable an overview to be shared.
- It was noted that Councillor Bell, as Lead Adviser for Performance Management, would act as the appropriate member with overall responsibility for data quality.

Councillor G Lawman proposed an amendment to the report’s recommendation and suggested that the following be added:

.... and note the external auditors’ recommendations and support their implementation.

This was seconded by Councillor Callnon, put to the vote and carried.

RESOLVED that the committee receive the external auditors’ annual report and note the external auditors’ recommendations and support their implementation.

6 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS 2005-06 – QUARTILE ASSESSMENT

The committee received a report from the Policy and Democratic Services Manager which presented a review of the authority’s 2005-2006 indicator outturn compared to other English district councils’ average outturns. It was noted that at the end of each financial year the Audit Commission compiled best value performance indicators from all local authorities and published these results at the end of the calendar year, divided into four quartiles – the top quartile representing the best performance.

An assessment of the Council’s 2005-2006 performance indicator outturn, together with a commentary on the top and bottom quartile indicators, was attached as an appendix to the report. Audit Commission findings concluded that, as a national average, 58% of local authority performance indicators (PIs) had improved between 2004/05 and 2005/06. It was noted that 54% of Wellingborough’s PIs had improved during this time. It was further noted that 20% of the authority’s PIs were in the top quartile: the national average was just under 30%.

RESOLVED that the committee note the report.
UPDATE ON PROGRESS WITH SHORT TERM TASKS

The committee received a report from the Policy and Democratic Services Manager which provided a mid-year update on progress in delivery of the short term tasks agreed at the last Annual Policy Seminar. The seminar had considered and updated the Council’s medium term objectives and identified a range of tasks for 2006-2007 to be undertaken alongside the Best Value Performance Plan. A list of the short term tasks was attached as an appendix to the report, together with a statement of progress for most of the tasks.

The Policy and Democratic Services Manager, supported by other officers present, responded to the committee’s questions and provided additional information, which included the following:

- It was noted that there were some discrepancies between the ambitions of the task list and the progress statements, and suggested that perhaps more realistic tasks be set at the next policy seminar.
- It was further noted that some tasks did not have progress statements: specific details were provided, and it emerged that the tasks without statements had not been undertaken or had been bids which were successful.
- The committee requested clarification of specific tasks and their progress statements. It was agreed that in future clear “plain English” wording would be used to describe both task and its progress update.

RESOLVED that the committee note progress on the delivery of the short term tasks.