

# ANNUAL REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

5  
ANNEXE A

## Introduction

This is the fourth annual report of South Derbyshire District Council's Overview & Scrutiny Committees. The report is produced in accordance with Article 6 of the Constitution.

## Composition

Each Scrutiny Committee has 7 Members, chosen to reflect the 'political balance' of the Council. The 6 Members of the Overview Committee are drawn from the Scrutiny Committees and in accordance with statutory guidance; do not sit on any of the Council's Policy Committees.

## Functions

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee's have three main functions, which are to:

- contribute to policy development and review;
- scrutinise the decisions made or actions taken in connection with the discharge of the Council's functions; and,
- review performance and 'oversee' the Best Value process

## Terms of Reference

The Overview Scrutiny Committee can undertake any functions of the Scrutiny Committees with the agreement of the relevant Chair and is responsible for:

- the management and co-ordination of the overview and scrutiny work programme;
- receiving and allocating requests for special investigations from Policy Committees;
- exercising the 'call-in' procedures, in respect of decisions made by Policy Committees; and,
- reporting to Council on matters relating to the Constitution.

The Corporate Scrutiny Committee is responsible for the scrutiny of activities that support the efficient and effective use of resources and the management of the Council.

The Community Scrutiny Committee is responsible for the scrutiny of activities that focus on community and environmental services.

## Meetings

Scrutiny meetings are held in public (except when there are 'exempt' items) every 6 weeks. Occasionally, special and informal meetings are held to deal with specific issues or for the undertaking of special projects.

## Working arrangements

The Committee's operate in manner, which challenges both Members and Officers in an open and constructive way, with contributors receiving prior notice of the information required.

Scrutiny Members conduct their own research, draft reports and make presentations to Policy Committees and Full Council.

Scrutiny Members are involved in setting their own agendas and Committee's have operated 'rolling work programmes' that are reviewed at every meeting. This enables resources to be managed effectively and for new items to be included as appropriate.

Scrutiny Members follow a number of 'guiding principles' when undertaking their work. These are:

- treat all people fairly and with respect.
- be open, transparent and inclusive.
- carry out the Committee's work objectively, with genuine cross-party working.
- foster a positive constructive and effective relationship with the Policy Committee's and others.
- put things right - the aim is to critically appraise, not unfairly criticise or look for blame.
- reach conclusions and make recommendations based on sound evidence.

## Achievements

### Overview Committee

- Working Arrangements

The Overview Committee have adopted:

- a Job Description for Scrutiny Members
- Scrutiny Contributors Charter; and
- Guidance on commissioning a Scrutiny review

Recommendations strengthening the role of the Scrutiny Committees were made to Full Council, in particular to agree to amend the Constitution (Overview and Scrutiny Procedure) Rules as follows:

- Policy Committees or Full Council must respond to any recommendations from Overview and Scrutiny committees within 3 months of the receipt of a report

- Overview and Scrutiny Committees to report their findings to a Policy Committee or Full council within 3 months of receiving a request for a review of a particular policy / service area.

- Constitution Action Plan

Work to review the working practices of all Policy Committees has been completed. As a result, the Council has approved amendments to the Policy Committee's Terms of Reference and Schemes of Delegation. This will streamline decision-making, thus enabling Policy Committees to perform a more strategic, policy orientated role. Draft annual work programmes for adoption by Policy Committees at the start of the new municipal year are being formulated.

Work will now be undertaken to review the workings of Full Council.

- Roles undertaken by the Chair and Vice Chair of the Council

Roles and the civic budgets were considered in detail. Recommendations were made to the Finance & Management Committee and subsequently adopted.

## **Community Scrutiny Committee**

- Best Value reviews

### Sheltered Housing Services

The Committee has undertaken further site visits as part of the reality checks to monitor what progress had been made on the improvements to the service following their initial site visits and the Audit Commission's second inspection. This involved visits to three Sheltered Housing Schemes, and discussions with tenants, Community Wardens and service managers.

The Committee noted that there had been significant improvements in the service since their first visit but observed that there were a number of issues at each of the three schemes visited which needed progressing as a matter of urgency. The Housing & Community Services Committee were advised to ascertain what improvements needed to be completed to the remaining sheltered accommodation, and recommended that the Housing & Community Services Committee should undertake its own periodic visits to see at first hand how the service operated.

### Housing Stock Investment and Asset Management

This is an important component of the Council's CPA Improvement Plan. The reality checks were carried out to assist the Housing & Community Services Committee, prepare and make improvements to the service prior to its formal inspection by the Audit Commission. Contributions were received from key Officers and the Chair of Housing & Community Services Committee.

It was concluded that

- an action plan should be prepared in parallel with the Annual Review
- the process of staff consultation should be strengthened.
- a more proactive approach to the management of voids in the Sheltered Housing Service should be developed.

These conclusions and recommendations were presented to the Housing and Community Services Committee.

- Special Projects

The Committee has continued to work on various special projects. Details are set out below:

- Car Parking

The Committee concluded its study into car parking having received contributions from neighbouring local authorities and Derbyshire County Council.

The Committee's findings and recommendations in respect of a safety audit of Swadlincote's main town centre's car parks were presented to the Environmental & Development Services Committee

- South Derbyshire Community Strategy

The Committee received monitoring reports on the development of the South Derbyshire Community Strategy by the South Derbyshire Local Strategic Partnership (SDLSP). It was specifically responsible for co-ordinating the Council's formal response to the SDLSP on the draft Community Strategy. A full report and some 20 recommendations were made to a special meeting of the Council in December.

- Neighbourhood Warden Scheme

The Committee explored detailed plans to set up a Neighbourhood Warden Scheme and recommended that the current feasibility study should be completed as soon as possible and that the resulting service is provided equitably across the District.

- Play Areas

Three key areas were explored in detail with Officers, were:

- the quality and responsibility for improving and maintaining the District's play areas;
- consideration of Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) 17 – "study of recreation, sport and open space" which would ensure resources are targeted on priorities; and,
- the clarification of responsibilities for play areas

The Committee's findings and recommendations were made to the Housing & Community Services Committee

## Corporate Scrutiny Committee

- Budget / Financial Issues

This Committee has a specific responsibility to assist the Finance & Management Committee to develop the council's budget.

A number of key issues have emerged from the Committee's work, these are as follows:

- the consultation with internal and external stakeholders on the budget proposals;
- the robustness of assumptions underlying the budget proposals;
- the alignment of resources to corporate and service priorities;
- the delivery of the "Gershon" efficiency savings and the 'shifting resources' review;
- the role of Policy and Scrutiny Committees in budget development;
- the budget timetable and arrangements for consulting local residents and other stakeholders on spending priorities and proposals; and,
- the future arrangements for the development of the budget and the management of the Council finances.
- Member training.

The Committee's conclusions and recommendations were presented to the Finance & Management Committee

- Special Projects

The Committee has continued to work on a special project and has initiated work on a second. Details are set out below:

### Council's Best Value Review process

Four key areas were explored in detail, these being 'people issues'; 'process issues'; 'delivery issues' and member involvement (including performance management). Comparisons were made to other Best Value Reviews undertaken by other Local Authorities, the Police and the Fire Service. Contributions were received from 'key' Members and Officers. The results of an internal survey were benchmarked against a research summary document entitled "*An evaluation of the long term impact of the Best Value regime*" published by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM)

The findings and recommendations of this project were reported to Finance & Management Committee and subsequently adopted.

### Strategic Planning Review

Consideration is being given for the Council to set its sights further ahead and agree a longer-term vision, which would link into the three-year corporate and financial planning framework. Contributions have already been received from the Leader of the Council, Chief Executive and the Deputy Chief Executive. Arrangements are currently being made to seek contributions from other local authorities. At this stage, an interim report will be submitted to the Improvement Panel.

## **Member Training & Development**

A Training and Development Event for all Scrutiny Members was held at Sharpe's Pottery & Heritage Museum. The main purpose of the event was to discuss future working arrangements and determine training and development requirements

Arrangements were made for the provision of in-house training sessions on the 4 main subject areas identified; performance management; change management; risk management; and effective meetings. In order to provide more in depth training where necessary, the Modern Members Development Programme would be used.

Other training and development requirements would be identified from the Individual Learning Needs interviews.

## **Communications**

It is recognised that improved communication with local people and other stakeholders is central to the council's plans for developing the role of the scrutiny function. As a result, steps have been taken to ensure more flexibility over the arrangement of meetings, and more constructive feedback from reports to Policy Committees has been implemented.

## **THE YEAR AHEAD**

### **Working arrangements**

It is expected that present working arrangements will continue. However, the Committee acknowledges that there will also be a need to:

- develop a more outward-looking focus. This will involve looking at best practice from outside of the organisation (such as Beacon Councils) and inviting external stakeholders to assist in the scrutiny of decisions and the development of policy.
- strengthen arrangements for performance management. A key area of work will consist of monitoring Service Plans and the Corporate Plan and challenging managers and Committee Chairs about their respective performance. The Committees will also provide more feedback to Policy Committees on the matters arising.
- conduct (or initiate) 'reality checks' on Best Value Reviews to ensure that there are 'no surprises' when services are inspected. This may involve, for example, site visits, discussions with service users or the commissioning of studies by external organisations.
- find ways of sharing the workload amongst members of the Committee, for instance, by working in small teams to collect information
- generate more public interest in, and awareness of, the scrutiny agenda.

## **Future priorities**

The main priorities for Scrutiny Committee's in the year ahead comprise:

- to continue its work on special projects and undertaking 'reality' checks
- helping the Council to prepare for the Government's plans to review funding levels (the "Lyons Report") and the requirement to achieve 2½% efficiency savings (the "Gershon Review")
- scrutinising performance at a service and corporate level
- ensuring sound financial management and the active involvement of internal and external stakeholders in the development of the Council's budget proposals

## **Acknowledgements**

The Committees would like to thank all members, officers and representatives of external organisations who have contributed to meetings or who have provided assistance and support.

Councillor Ken Harrington  
Chair - Overview Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Frank Hood  
Vice Chair - Overview Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Stuart Murphy  
Chair - Corporate Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Ron Lane  
Vice Chair - Corporate Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Ken Harrington  
Chair - Community Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Sean Bambrick  
Vice Chair - Community Scrutiny  
Committee

