



**South
Derbyshire**
District Council

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2014/2015

South Derbyshire Changing for the better



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District Council**

1. Background

1.1 Purpose of the Report

Overview and scrutiny plays an important and active part in local government's decision making process. It acts as a critical friend to Council by challenging decisions where appropriate, and helping to improve services through policy development, service reviews and working in alignment with the Council's performance management structure. The scrutiny function has helped the Council to continue to improve services for the local population, and continues do to so through these more challenging times.

This is the Annual Report to Council from Overview and Scrutiny, as required by Article 6 of the Council's Constitution.

The report outlines how the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has discharged its functions during the municipal year 2014/15 and details the current position and outcomes of its activities.

1.2 Composition of Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Committee consists of eight Members, being four Members of the Conservative Group and four Members of the Labour Group in accordance with the political balance of the Council. For 2014/15, the following Members were appointed to the Committee:-

Conservative Group

Councillor Mrs. Plenderleith (Chair), Councillor Atkin (Vice-Chair) Councillor Mrs. Hood and Councillor Mrs. Patten.

Labour Group

Councillor Bambrick, Councillor Mrs. Heath, Councillor Mrs. Mead and Councillor Pearson.

1.3 Main Purposes of Committee

The main purposes of the Committee are as follows:-

- (a) Write reports and/or make recommendations to Full Council, Policy Committees or Area Forums in connection with the formulation of Policy and the discharge of any functions.
- (b) Consider any matter affecting the District or its inhabitants.
- (c) Review and/or scrutinise decisions made or actions taken in connection with the discharge of any of the Council's functions.
- (d) Exercise the Call-In procedure in respect of decisions made, but not yet implemented, by any Policy Committee or Area Forum.
- (e) Oversee the Best Value process and report findings to the relevant Policy Committee.

1.4 Officer Support

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is supported by four Heads of Service and two Democratic Services Officers. Other Officers attend meetings to contribute to specific reviews.

1.5 Meetings

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee usually meets every six weeks, on Wednesday evenings at the Council's Civic Offices. Meetings are held in Open session, unless there are Exempt items for consideration. Additional task groups have taken place for certain review areas.

1.6 Call-In of Policy Committee Decisions

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has the power to determine 'call-in' requests of any policy committee decision made but not implemented. During the year 2014/2015, the Committee was not required to deal with any 'called in' decisions or requests from Policy Committees for specific investigations. This meant that the Committee was able to focus on the coordination of work across the overview and scrutiny function within the Council and the wider community.

2. Specific Areas of Activity and Achievements

2.1 The Annual Report

In March 2015 the Committee considered the draft Annual Report for the 2014/15 Local Government Year which looks at each of the priorities in turn and provides an overview of some of the outcomes achieved by the Committee and how it has discharged its function

2.2 Setting the Committee Work Programme

The Committee received a report in May 2014 outlining suggestions on how the Committee might identify and agree possible issues to form the basis of its Work Programme during the new Local Government Year. Members considered a range of possible topics for the Committee to consider, the Councillors responsible for each initial scoping exercise and in particular what lines of enquiry they would like to cover. The key issues that the Committee looked at were:

- Co-operating with Other Scrutiny Bodies
- Individual Electoral Registration
- NHS Dental Service Provision
- Customer Services & Payment Facilities
- Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) 2000
- Review on Leisure Services
- Housing Revenue Account Budget
- Cemetery Provision

A short summary of the Committee's work during the year is set out below

2.3 Co-operating with Other Scrutiny Bodies

The Committee met with an officer from the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) who helped to set out the role of different agencies in holding to account various public service providers. It was discussed how joint projects could be organised that would be mutually beneficial to various scrutiny bodies.

2.4 Individual Electoral Registration

The Committee looked into the new IER system (Individual Electoral Registration), and what work had been undertaken in the district. The key change with IER is that Electors were now able to register online, which is a straight forward procedure that has been proven successful, and over 1,300,000 applications nationally had so far been made this way. South Derbyshire had achieved a match rate of 91% (IER records matching the information held by DWP and the Council) and were hoping that with the use of the IER online option numbers would increase.

An IER campaign had been launched with articles in Burton Mail, Swadlincote Times and Swadlincote Post , leaflets and posters sent to local businesses such as Toyota, Colleges, Doctor's Surgeries and Housing Associations. There is also a link on the two computers in the reception area at the Civic Offices for the public to use.

2.5 NHS Dental Service Provision

The Committee had been made aware how people in the district had been forced to travel some distance to reach a dentist as they were unable to register with a local dentist. The Committee resolved that they would send a formal letter to Derbyshire County Council, passing on the findings asking for a response on why there had been no commissioning since 2006.

2.6 Customer Services & Payment Facilities

The Committee had been asked to undertake a review of payment facilities in the Civic Offices, together with a review of the Customer Services operation to enable people to pay bills and money owing to the Council. A task and finish group was set up to visit Derby City Council where this service is being offered, and also spent time with the Customer Service team at South Derbyshire District Council, speaking with team members and customers alike to gauge their impressions of the current facilities. The Committee suggested that the Council should consider the need to provide a better experience for people contacting the Council and visiting the offices with queries and looking for information.

2.7 Regulation Of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA)

The Committee had been asked to review, and approved the report regarding the Council's Inspection by the Office of Surveillance Commissioners and the Council's Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 Policy and Guidance document.

2.8 Review of Leisure Services

The Committee reviewed Leisure Services Provision in the District on current facility provision. There were commercially driven programmes with local objectives built on a Needs Surveys and a good level of Outreach Provision with items such as, 'Get Active In The Forest', 'Village Games', 'Playschemes', 'Sport and Health' and 'Active Nation', however the Council would make efforts to try and involve elderly people more in the future. A Survey will be conducted with both elderly and young people that will drive the new 2015 Leisure Provision Programme.

2.9 Housing Revenue Account Budget

The Committee had a specific role to assist the Finance and Management Committee with the Business Plan for the HRA (Housing Revenue Account budget) and subjected it to a detailed review. This was to consider the resources available for 'New Build Housing' and to update the financial projection following the first 2 years of "self-financing" together with the impact of changes to the national rent setting guidelines, which are to be implemented in April 2015.

2.10 Cemetery Service and Provision of Cemetery Space

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee initially became interested in cemetery provision due to the reduction in cemetery space in the urban core and Gresley cemetery in particular. Initial exploration was done into the availability of Council owned land but problems were encountered with size, access, legal issues, cost and alternative uses that meant nothing suitable could be found. After the initial work and on the back of local intelligence from outside the urban core, the Committee decided additional work was required to ascertain the scale of the issue across the whole of the district. The Council do not have a statutory duty to make provision for burials, but it became apparent that this was a service that was expected.

2.11 Budget Proposals 2014/15 and Financial Plan to 2020

The Committee had a specific role to assist the Finance and Management Committee to develop the budget proposals. The Committee considered the budget at two of its meetings, in January and February 2015, looking at the General Fund, Capital, the proposals for Council Tax and the Housing Revenue Account. Members

of Overview and Scrutiny were also invited to attend the policy committee meetings and Area Forums, where detailed presentations were provided on each aspect of the budget. The Committee was satisfied with all recommendations made as part of the budget response and that the level of Council Rent be increased by 2.2% and Council Tax be frozen for 2015/16.

3. Concluding Comments and Acknowledgements

This report had aimed to demonstrate the tangible effect that Overview and Scrutiny can make towards improving and delivering quality services to the residents of South Derbyshire. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee recognised and appreciated immensely the valuable contribution that elected Members, Officers and representatives from partner organisations make towards its work and acknowledges that without this support and co-operation, it could not fulfil its aim to improve services for the benefit of South Derbyshire residents.

Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Members
of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee
March 2015

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