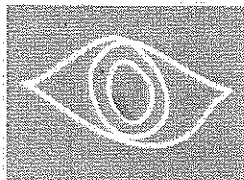


South Derbyshire District Council



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

Annual Report 2006 / 2007

1. Background

1.1 Purpose of the report

This is the sixth annual report to Council from Overview & Scrutiny, as required to be produced by Article 6 of the Council's Constitution.

The report outlines how the Overview and two Scrutiny Committees have discharged their functions during the period 2006 to 2007 and details the current position and outcomes of its activities.

1.2 Composition of Overview and Scrutiny (O&S)

The O&S function comprises the following: -

- Overview Committee
- Community Scrutiny Committee
- Corporate Scrutiny Committee

Each of the two Scrutiny Committees has seven members, chosen to reflect the political balance of the Council. The Chair and Vice-Chair and one other member of each of these Scrutiny Committees are 'dedicated scrutineers' and as such do not sit on any of the three Policy Committees. These six dedicated scrutineers form the Overview Committee membership.

1.3 Specific functions

The specific functions of each of the three Committees are set out in Article 6 of the Constitution, however in general they: -

- 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.



1.4 Meetings

O&S Committees normally meet every six weeks. Occasionally, special meetings are held, usually to deal with specific issues, such as the budget proposals.

Meetings are held in public, unless there are 'exempt' items.

1.5 Development and 'away days'

O&S Members are looking to procure a training and support package that will help them develop and improve their skills and knowledge, in undertaking a successful scrutiny project. This training package will also be of benefit to all Members and Officers who are involved in reviewing projects.

1.6 Partnership links

O&S has progressed partnership working with Derbyshire County Council, exploring good practice and methodology. In particular, where joint / shared reviews and working arrangements can be maximised for the benefit of both organisations.

In addition, the Community Scrutiny Committee have developed partnership links with a number of Parish Councils and Post Offices.

2. Overview Committee

2.1 Remit and focus

Overview Committee has a role in setting the O&S work programmes and ensure that the activities carried out and delivered are effective.

Where matters fall within the remit of more than one Scrutiny Committee, or are of a cross-cutting issue, Overview determines which of the Scrutiny Committees take responsibilities for particular issues to be addressed. This also minimises the potential for duplicated effort by the Scrutiny Committees.

Overview also addresses relevant issues in relation to the Council's Constitution.



2.2 'Call-in' of Policy Committee decisions

Overview Committee has the power to 'call in' decisions of any Policy Committee made but not implemented, as set out in the Local Authorities (Alternative Arrangements) (England) Regulations 2001.

During the year 2006 / 2007, no Policy Committee decisions were 'called in'.

2.3 Specific areas of activity and achievements

Police & Justices Act 2006 / Implications of the Local Government & Public Health Bill

Members were informed of the new challenges for scrutiny, in particular the implications of the Police & Justices Act 2006 (the 'Act'), and the Local Government & Public Health Bill (the 'Bill')

The 'Act' brings new powers for scrutiny committees to look at crime and disorder issues. In addition, the 'Bill' also introduces what it describes as a 'Community Call for Action' (CCfA) where members of the public or community groups can raise persistent problems of anti-social behaviour with their Ward Councillor. If the issue cannot be resolved satisfactorily to the complainant's satisfaction, the matter can be referred to a scrutiny committee to investigate, report and require a response from the relevant agencies concerned.

The 'Bill' also proposes changes two major extensions of scrutiny powers: A duty is placed on a list of named public agencies to cooperate with the development of Local Area Agreements and CCfA

Members were advised that the 'Act' was now law, and regulations and guidance will be provided in 2007. The commencement of scrutiny powers is likely to be 2008.

With regards to the 'Bill,' the likely timetable for legislation, regulations, guidance and implementation is through 2007 – 2009.

The Committee also considered an information paper produced by the Local Government Information Unit which provided information on what council's could be doing now to strengthen the scrutiny role which include:



- o Neighbourhood scrutiny
- o Scrutiny and community engagement
- o Scrutiny of the LAA
- o Sustainable Community Strategies
- o Other ideas for scrutiny reviews

It was suggested that some of the issues raised, could be included in next years work programme

Promotion of the Scrutiny function

During the autumn a series of presentations outlining the function, and work of Scrutiny Committees were made at the six Area Meetings, which are held throughout the district. Details on achievements and the projects yet to be undertaken were also provided. Members of the public at the meetings were also given the opportunity to become involved in the future work of the Community Scrutiny Committee

In addition, these details were also posted on the Council's website, and information leaflets were distributed to all Libraries

Member training

Overview progressed with reviewing member training by working closely with the member training champions.

3. Community Scrutiny Committee

3.1 Remit and focus

The activities of this Committee relate to the areas of responsibility of both the Environmental and Development Services Committee and the Housing and Community Services Committee, in particular housing, leisure, recreation, regeneration, waste and cleansing, crime and disorder and the protection of the environment.

The Committee has been active in a number of other areas as detailed.



3.2 Specific areas of activity and achievements

Audit Commission Inspection of the Council's Housing Repairs & Maintenance Service

The Committee has continually monitored progress made by the Housing Services Division in completing the recommendations made by the Audit Commission, following their inspection of the Council's housing repairs and maintenance service in June 2005.

The Best Value Inspection determined the service as 'fair,' (1 star) with promising prospects for improvement.

A final report acknowledging that significant progress has been made in achieving the recommendations made by the Audit Commission has been considered by the Housing & Community Services Committee,

Achieving Targets – 2006 / 2009

Following a request from the Environmental & Development Services Committee, the Committee were asked to examine the issues around the achievement of the Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI's) targets, for the processing of planning applications and waste management services, in particular,

- a) BVPI's 109a-c (time taken to determine planning applications) which are expected to be in the second quartile by March 2009; and,
- b) BVPI 82a (proportion of waste recycled), which is expected to be in the second quartile by March 2009; and BVPI 84a (waste collected per household), which is likely to move into the bottom quartile by March 2009.

The Committee has worked closely with the Heads of Planning Services and Environmental Services

The Environmental & Development Services Committee has now considered the final reports, and steps have been taken by the Head of Planning Services in order to make the necessary changes to improve performance with regard to the determination of planning applications in the context of a sustainable departmental structure.



With regards to the achievement of waste management targets a number of short, medium and long-term recommendations were made and feedback on the progress made on the recommendations, will soon be made available to this Committee.

Arrangements for Improving Homelessness Services -

The Committee contributed to the approach adopted by the Council in respect of homelessness issues, in particular arrangements for improving services, in respect of BVPI 183 (a) [~~Length of stay in temporary accommodation (bed & breakfast)~~] and BVPI 183 (b) — [~~Length of stay in temporary accommodation (hostel)~~]

The Housing & Community Services Committee has considered the recommendations, and will shortly be responding.

Delivery of Council services via the Post Office network

The Committee considered the issues facing the sustainability of the rural Post Office network, including possible proposals for the withdrawal of funding for the Post Office Card Account (POCA)

Following an extensive consultation and engagement process with local residents, Parish Councils, Post Masters, the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters and the local Member of Parliament, a report outlining a number of recommendations were made to Full Council in January 2007, and these were duly ratified.

A working group has recently been established in order to progress this item.

Clean Neighbourhoods & Environment Act 2005

Members were informed on the new powers introduced under this legislation. Most of the provisions came into force on the 1st April 2006. The main provisions for local authorities include the ability to serve fixed penalty notices for environmental offences, and making significant changes to the Fixed Penalty Notice regime.



Low Frequency Noise

At the beginning of the year, the Committee considered the issues surrounding low frequency noise, and how the Council deals with such complaints.

Members were advised that low frequency noise complaints were often difficult to resolve, because the source of the noise was not readily identifiable, because it could travel long distances and it's effects could be masked by other noises. Consequently, low frequency noise could cause severe distress to a relatively small number of people who were susceptible to low frequency noise.

A progress report outlining the current situation has now been considered by Members. During the year three incidences of low frequency noise have been successfully resolved. There are two households in the district, which are currently experiencing low frequency noise from an unidentifiable external environmental source. The Environmental Services Division has undertaken extensive investigations, but no evidence of the low frequency noise can be found.

Street-Scene review

The Committee has worked closely with Derbyshire County Council in progressing this review, which offers the possibility of a more co-ordinated approach to 'street scene' provision by both the County Council and the District Councils.

The "street scene" is generally accepted as being anything that pertains to the state and condition of the physical environment in any local community,

A final report has been considered by the Environmental & Development Services Committee, which is now progressing the identified actions via a 'partner' working group.

Primary Care Trust / Health issues

The Committee has commenced discussions regarding the delivery of health care services in the district with the new County-wide Primary Care Trust.



4. Corporate Scrutiny Committee

4.1 Remit and focus

The activities of Corporate Scrutiny relate to the areas of responsibility of the Finance and Management Committee, in particular assisting with the development of the annual budget, corporate plans, strategies and frameworks, management of Council's assets and revenue functions.

This year the key focus has been a comprehensive review of Strategic Planning in the Council.

4.2 Specific areas of activity and achievements

Review of the 2007/ 2010 Budget proposals

As required by its duties under the Constitution, Scrutiny was engaged in the preparation and development of the 2006/9 Budget proposals.

It selected 5 key lines of enquiry these being:-

- Priorities
- Challenge
- Performance
- Risk analysis
- Revenue and capital spending

This year, the Committee again chose to focus on arrangements for the development of the budget rather than on the contents of the budget 'per se' because Members considered it to be an area, which underpins many areas of the Council's work.

Scrutiny made seven individual recommendations intended to assist Members to ensure that financial resources are aligned to corporate and service priorities; to successfully implement the 'shifting resources' project; to ensure that 'value for money' is obtained in everything we do; and, to ensure that performance is actively managed and reported to all stakeholders.

5. Work planned for 2007/2008

In the new municipal year a comprehensive work programme will be developed.



6. Concluding comments and acknowledgements

This report has aimed to demonstrate the tangible effect O&S can make towards improving and delivering quality services to the people of South Derbyshire.

O&S recognises and appreciates immensely the valuable contribution the elected members, officers and representatives from partner organisations make towards its work and the reviews it undertakes. Without this, its work could not take place effectively.

We express our grateful thanks to all who have helped us deliver this year's work and activity.

Chairs, Vice-Chairs and Members
Overview and Scrutiny Committees

Memberships: -

Overview:	Councillors Bell (Chair) and Bladen (Vice-Chair) Atkin, Bambrick, (one vacancy)
Community:	Councillors Lane (Chair) and Bambrick (Vice-Chair) Atkin, Bladen, Lauro, Lemmon and Mrs Mead.
Corporate:	Councillors Bell (Chair) and Mulgrew (Vice-Chair) Atkin, Bale, Bladen, Jones and Tilley

