



South Derbyshire District Council

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Annual Report 2008/09

1. **Background**

1.1 **Purpose of the Report**

This is the eighth 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 2008/09 and details the current position and outcomes of its activities.

1.2 **Composition of Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

The Committee has eight Members, being five Members of the Conservative Group and three Members of the Labour Group in accordance with the political balance of the Council. For 2008/09, the following Members were appointed to the Committee:-

Conservative Group

Councillor Jones (Chairman), Councillor Mrs. Farrington (Vice-Chairman) and Councillors Atkin, Mrs. Hood and Mrs. Plenderleith.

Labour Group

Councillors Bambrick, Lane and Mrs. Mead.

1.3 **Main Purposes of Committee**

The main purposes of the Committee are as follows:-

- (a) Make reports and/or recommendations to Full Council, Policy Committee or Area Meeting 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 Meeting.
- (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 two Directors from the Management Team, the Principal Democratic Services Officer and Democratic Services Assistant. Other Officers attend meetings to contribute to specific reviews.

1.5 Meetings

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee meets every six weeks, usually on Wednesday evenings at the Council's Civic Offices. In the last year, two Meetings were held at other venues, at Rosliston Forestry Centre and the new Health Clinic in Swadlincote for the related scrutiny reviews. Meetings are held in Open session, unless there are Exempt items for consideration.

1.6 Call-In of Policy Committee Decisions

The Overview and Scrutiny 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 2008/09, no Policy Committee decisions were 'called-in'.

2. Specific Areas of Activity and Achievements

2.1 Self Scrutiny

The Committee held a scrutiny focus session prior to the start of the municipal year. It provided the opportunity to review the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's operation and to consider the work programme for 2008/09. The focus session:-

- Looked at the Officer support arrangements and how the Committee operated;
- Provided comparative information on how scrutiny was undertaken by other councils;
- Gave initial consideration to a self-evaluation framework, which would be completed later in the municipal year.

Information, guidance documents and examples of best practice were circulated. The self-scrutiny exercise proved useful and confirmed that the arrangements at South Derbyshire were in accordance with best practice and arrangements at other 'fourth option' councils. The Committee agreed to adopt a scoping document for its reviews.

This work was followed in the autumn, with the completion and approval of a baseline assessment document, to provide evidence of what the Committee did well and the ways in which scrutiny could improve. This document was subsequently submitted to the Full Council. The Committee also agreed to undertake an external peer review of the Overview and Scrutiny arrangements at South Derbyshire in the spring of 2009.

2.2 Broadband Provision

This was the continuation of the review from 2007/08. The Committee considered the quality of service and delivery of broadband provision in the District. Contributors to the review included the BT Regional Manager for the East Midlands and the

Head of IT and Customer Services. Press releases stimulated a significant public response on the problems experienced by South Derbyshire residents, and this was acknowledged by BT. The review report was submitted to the Environmental and Development Services Committee. There is the potential for further scrutiny review areas stemming from this work.

2.3 Funding for Rosliston Forestry Centre

This was a review of the partnership for Rosliston Forestry Centre, at which the meeting was held. It also considered future actions to improve the Business Plan performance of the Centre. A presentation was made by the partners involved in the Centre, being the National Forest Company, the Forestry Commission and the District Council. The presentation covered the establishment of the Centre; developments over the last 10 years; the Centre's 5-year Vision and Strategy; its 10-year business performance and business planning results, together with a financial comparison to other supported leisure facilities in the District and other similar facilities in the region.

A report on this review was considered by the Housing and Community Services Committee. Key recommendations approved concerned full support for the excellent partnership work being undertaken, that the partners seek to maximise income and reduce costs and be asked to consider increased contributions to the marketing budget. There was support for the Partnership's work to secure capital funds, for projects contributing income or reducing expenditure to the Business Plan. Finally, a further update of the Vision / Strategic Plan and Business Plan would be brought to Overview and Scrutiny Committee at the start of the 2009/10 Municipal Year.

2.4 Health Scrutiny

The Committee completed two reviews on the provision of NHS Dentistry and the out of hours services provided at the new Swadlincote Health Centre, at which a Scrutiny meeting was held. Officers from the Primary Care Trust (PCT) gave presentations on the general role of the PCT and these two service areas. A list of questions had been circulated prior to the meeting and these were responded to. A number of other issues were raised during the meeting. The Committee made suggestions, which were accepted, to assist the PCT to improve communication with residents.

The main conclusions drawn from these reviews were the lack of publicity and access to information for residents on NHS services and the lack of current NHS dentists in the District, who are accepting new patients. The reviews were reported to the Housing and Community Services Committee in March.

2.5 Budget Proposals 2009/10 and Financial Plan to 2014

The Committee has a specific role to assist the Finance and Management Committee to develop the budget proposals. The Committee received budget scrutiny training and considered the budget at two of its meetings.

The Committee proposed a number of areas for further investigation. A review could be undertaken of the Swadlincote Woodlands Scheme to examine the potential costs associated with future maintenance. With regard to Community Partnership funding, a review of the arrangements in place could look to find additional funding, based on the likelihood of further parish plans and schemes in the future. With regard to the Etwall Leisure Centre, the potential withdrawal of County Council funding would have an impact for remaining partners.

The Committee questioned the affordability of the proposed housing rent increases. A proposal was submitted that Finance and Management Committee be asked to consider the potential to reduce the level of rent increase for the current year, for specific sections of the community and to consider the implications of this proposal. The Finance and Management Committee accepted the budget scrutiny feedback and reduced the level of housing rent increase.

2.6 Partnerships - Staffing Arrangements/Budgets

Arising from the previous year's budget scrutiny work, a review was undertaken of posts that were reliant on external funding and the future impact, when this funding was withdrawn. This review was concluded as part of the budget scrutiny work for the current year and was referred back to Finance and Management.

2.7 Public Transport and Community Transport

The public transport review from the previous year was concluded in June 2008. This review area had a very broad scope and evolved over time. It had focused on the provision of bus services and train services, with a particular emphasis on Willington Station and the review of franchise arrangements. The findings were reported to the Environmental and Development Services Committee in August.

Consideration was given to future work on public transport and it was felt it should focus more specifically on community transport. It formed the basis of a review in 2008/09, which has been considered at two meetings and included a dialogue with Derbyshire County Council on its review of community transport. This review is ongoing.

2.8 Flooding – Household Drainage

This review arose from the previous year's work on flooding, particularly concerning household drainage. At the December meeting, information was provided on drainage controls associated with planning and building regulations. There was discussion about the problems experienced where drainage schemes were not constructed to the required, adoptable standard.

It was proposed to lobby the Government, to adopt all private sewers, in view of the problems caused to residents. Defra replied explaining plans from 2011, for all existing private sewers and lateral drains to transfer to the nine English water and sewerage companies. Design and construction standards are also proposed. The Committee will consider this review area again when the draft regulations are issued for consultation later in 2009.

2.9 Joint Scrutiny Work

The Council has joined the Derbyshire Scrutiny Liaison Group. This is a county wide forum, established to meet the new legislative requirements for joint scrutiny, particularly focused on the Local Area Agreement. The Council is also represented at the Local Government East Midlands Scrutiny Network.

3. Work Programme 2009/10

Following the Annual Council Meeting, a half-day focus session is planned. This will enable Members to discuss the work programme for 2009/10, to review of the Committee's operation and particularly any findings from the peer review. Further aspects that will impact on the work programme are scrutiny of the Local Area Agreement, the Councillor Call for Action and the potential joint work associated with the county wide scrutiny liaison group.

4. Concluding Comments and Acknowledgements

This report has 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 recognises and appreciates 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 constitutional remit.

Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Members
Overview and Scrutiny Committee

May 2009