

Meeting: Council
Portfolio Area: Council Wide
Date: 5 April 2006

ANNUAL REPORT – SCRUTINY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE & SCRUTINY PANELS
(Constitutional Services Division)

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1 PURPOSE

To report on the work undertaken by the Scrutiny Overview Committee and the four Scrutiny Panels during the 2005/2006 Municipal Year.

2 RECOMMENDATION

That the work undertaken by the Scrutiny Overview Committee and the four Scrutiny Panels during 2005/06 be noted.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Council's current scrutiny structure comprises the Scrutiny Overview Committee, and four Scrutiny Panels – Environment & Economy, Housing & Wellbeing, Partnership & Community and Resources & Corporate Management. The Scrutiny Overview Committee's work includes being consulted on items prior to their consideration by the Executive; the consideration of Executive decisions; undertaking cross-cutting and/or Council wide scrutiny such as Equalities and Diversity; and maintaining an overview of the work of the four Scrutiny Panels. In accordance with Article 6.04 of the Council's Constitution, this report is submitted to give Council an annual update of the scrutiny work undertaken during 2005/06.
- 3.2 At the beginning of the 2004/05 Municipal Year, following a series of Member Workshops, the Committee reconsidered its approach to scrutiny. Members will recall that, given the limited officer resources available to assist with scrutiny work, it was agreed topics for scrutiny should be prioritised and should be measured against a customised template for scrutiny.
- 3.3 The Committee decided to scope any topics suggested for scrutiny using the template exercise in order to establish the relative priority of each topic and the availability of resources to undertake the work. These scoping sessions are attended by the Chair of the Scrutiny Overview Committee and the Chair and Vice Chair of the relevant Scrutiny Panel, together with appropriate officers. Topics, which do not fulfil the scoping criteria, are referred on to Departments for any necessary action, but they are not proceeded with as areas for scrutiny.

- 3.4 The work of the four Scrutiny Panels is very much Member led and the Scrutiny Overview Committee considers and confirms the Work Plans of each of the Panels.
- 3.5 In 2006 the 21st Century Councillor Strategy for Member Development in Stevenage is to focus on Scrutiny work. We are looking to further develop our approach to scrutiny, building on the work so far undertaken and with INLOGOV a couple of years ago, and using the practical experience Councillors have had with individual studies. We have been working with the LGIU to agree a customised programme whereby all Members working on Scrutiny will have the opportunity to identify modes of working that have proved to be most productive; the best structures to put in place to ensure effective and efficient studies; build on individual Councillors strengths and interests; and then work through one or two specific studies with the LGIU working as a critical friend.

4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

- 4.1 Whilst Members serving on the individual Scrutiny Panels will be fully aware of the work undertaken, it should be noted that the following is only a summary of work carried out in 2005/06 and does not quote all the activities of each Panel.

4.2 Scrutiny Overview Committee

The Scrutiny Overview Committee is currently responsible for looking at the Council's Equalities and Diversity Strategy, and has recently scrutinised the Council's recruitment/retention policy.

In 2005/06 it was planned that the Committee would direct the Scrutiny Panels to look at areas of the Council's budget on a thematic basis. Whilst this was carried out to a limited degree, it has subsequently been agreed by the Committee that, bearing in mind the volume of work involved in scrutinising the budget as a whole, the Panels should scrutinise various parts of the budget throughout the year. For 2006/07 meetings of the relevant Panels will be timetabled throughout the year to follow the Executive's consideration of different elements and decisions necessary for compiling the forthcoming year's budget.

4.3 Environment & Economy Scrutiny Panel

The Panel has focussed its work this year on the development of the Energy Strategy and the Green Space Strategy.

In developing the Energy Strategy, Members have attended topic groups and been on visits to Beacon Council Leicester City and Beaufort Park. A draft Policy Statement and Framework have been agreed to guide the Review and an action plan addressing the four themes of Promotion and Education, Consumption, Performance and Improvement had been produced. Consultation is now underway with the three key stakeholder groups: Direct Operational Services, Supported and Sponsored Organisations and the Wider Community. The final draft of the policy has now been recommended to the Scrutiny Overview Committee for adoption by the Executive.

In terms of the Green Space Strategy, an open space assessment has been undertaken and work on developing the Strategy is underway. Workshops have been held with Members to identify some of the issues that a Green Space Strategy should address. A detailed project plan has now been developed including timescales for this work from May 2006 to March 2007.

The Panel has also received reports on the Health and Safety Audit and the Food Safety Audit.

4.4 **Housing & Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel**

During the course of the year, the Panel scrutinised the HRA Budget for 2006/07, and has concerned itself with increasing tenant satisfaction by setting up two working groups to scrutinise Estates Management and Repairs/Maintenance. The work of these two groups is ongoing and, when complete, their findings will be reported to the Panel who will then make its recommendations to the Scrutiny Overview Committee.

This Panel is also awaiting the findings of the Housing Allocations Working Group which was set up to review the allocations policy.

4.5 **Partnership & Community Scrutiny Panel**

The main topic for this Panel's scrutiny during 2005/06 has been an overview of Community Associations in the town. Member visits to all the Community Centres were undertaken and similar sized/type of authorities were consulted on their approach to Community Centre grants.

The review of Community Centres has highlighted a number of issues for both the Council and Community Associations. A total of 35 recommendations have been made around the following 10 broad themes and a report was submitted to the Executive on 22nd March 2006.

- • Developing partnership working
- • Stevenage borough council involvement
- • Finance
- • Management
- • Community buildings and grounds
- • Health and Safety
- • Equalities
- • Outreach
- • Promotion
- • Training and Capacity Building

This report was extremely well received and it was agreed that the recommendations should be implemented, with the relevant Executive Member working with the Chair of the Panel and the Community Centres to progress the proposals.

Following on from scrutiny work undertaken in 2003/04 by this Panel in respect of the former Joint Local Committees, a summary report was submitted to the Scrutiny Overview Committee on the 27th March 2006. This report recommended that the continued scrutiny of the Area Committees be scoped and be concluded by a series of linked meetings/workshops in early 2006/07, with recommendations for change being incorporated in the current Community Engagement and User Involvement Review.

4.6 **Resources & Corporate Management Scrutiny Panel**

The focus of the Resources & Corporate Management Scrutiny Panel during 2005/06 has been Garage Management and it is likely that this work will continue in 2006/07.

A major element of the Panel's work is budget scrutiny and, along with the other Scrutiny Panels, this Panel will be directed by the Scrutiny Overview Committee during 2006/07 to scrutinise various parts of the Council's budget prior to the final consideration of the 2007/08 Budget.

4.7 **Joint Primary Care Trust Scrutiny Committee**

The Scrutiny Overview Committee receive the Minutes of the Joint PCT Scrutiny Committee which has considered the following throughout 2005/06:-

- Health Provision at Great Ashby
- PCT Financial Recovery Plans
- Lister Hospital Surgicentre
- Super Surgeries
- Consultation Paper 'Ensuring a Patient Led NHS' - reconfiguration of PCTs

The 3 Sub Groups have continued their scrutiny work in connection with the GP Appointments System, Teenage Pregnancy and reprovision at Hitchin Hospital for the Elderly.

A one-day event was organised by SBC officers at North Herts College in November 2005, during which various relevant agencies were represented, and many aspects of teenage pregnancy throughout Stevenage and North Hertfordshire were discussed. A transcript of the event was published and the Sub Group is to build on the work already undertaken and to consider what progress can be made to improve this ongoing problem.

5. IMPLICATIONS

5.1 **Legal Implications**

Overview and Scrutiny is undertaken by Councillors in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Act 2000.

5.2 **Policy Implications**

Many of the specific overview and scrutiny projects undertaken during 2005/06 were linked to the Council's Corporate Business Strategy – 'Changing Gear'.

5.3 **Staffing and Accommodation Implications**

Currently there are no dedicated staff resources to support overview and scrutiny at this time. General support is provided by the Constitutional Services Division with specific work being undertaken by various senior officers from around the Council, dependant upon the study being undertaken and the demands of their primary role as a Head of Service/Principal Officer. As part of the Corporate Improvement Plan agreed arising from the Peer Review, the Performance, Priorities and Improvement Group (18th November 2003) agreed that consideration of dedicated officer support for scrutiny be considered and this is ongoing, although to date no budget provision has been identified.

5.4 **Equal Opportunities Implications**

'A fair and inclusive community' is one of the Council's ambitions as stated in the Changing Gear Programme. The Scrutiny Overview Committee has taken the lead in scrutinising the Council's Equalities and Diversity Strategy and Action Plan.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- Minutes of Panel and Scrutiny Overview Committee meetings 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005 & 2006.
- 'Changing Gear' – The Council's Corporate Business Strategy 2002/03 – 2006/07.
- Report to Scrutiny Overview Committee – 25th July 2005 – Scrutiny Work Plans.