



Meeting: COUNCIL
Portfolio Area: All
Date: 14 July 2010

**ANNUAL REPORT - COMPLETED SCRUTINY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE TOPIC
GROUPS REVIEWS & SCRUTINY ACTIVITY DURING 2009/10 MUNICIPAL YEAR**
(Constitutional Services)

NON-KEY DECISION

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1. PURPOSE

To report on the work undertaken by the Scrutiny Overview Committee (SOC) and the Scrutiny Topic Groups during the 2009/10 Municipal Year.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the work undertaken by the Scrutiny Overview Committee through its Scrutiny Topic Groups during 2009/10 be noted.
- 2.2 That Council notes the additional responsibilities given to Scrutiny Overview Committee regarding the Petitions Scheme.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Under the provisions of the Local Government Act 2000 Overview and Scrutiny's role is to operate as an independent function of the Councils decision making process, by holding the Executive to account, having the power to "call in " decisions for reconsideration, conducting policy development, undertaking internal and external scrutiny reviews and carry out pre-decision scrutiny into decisions.
- 3.2 Since the Municipal Year 2007/08 the Scrutiny function has been conducted under the arrangement of one Scrutiny Overview Committee fulfilling the Scrutiny function with specific review work being conducted by ad hoc Topic Groups and supported by one full time dedicated Scrutiny Officer.

4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

4.1 Throughout the municipal year the Scrutiny Topic Groups have carried out a number of studies which have drawn conclusions and made recommendations to the Scrutiny Overview Committee. This process has been fully reported to the Scrutiny Overview Committee and recorded in its agenda papers, therefore the following details are a brief summary of the work carried out during 2009/10:

4.2 Pre-scrutiny of the Corporate Performance Plan 'Annual Report'

4.2.1 A Strategic Topic Group of SOC met on 12 May 2009 to pre-scrutinise an early draft of the Corporate Performance Plan 'Annual Report'. Members made a number of comments on the following chapters - Shape our community; Bring communities together; Improve the image of Stevenage; Revitalise neighbourhood centres; Provide quality affordable housing; Keep the town safe; Maintain a clean and green environment; Help provide leisure and health service; Promote equality; Maintain a customer focus and Use resources effectively. These comments were incorporated into the version that was subsequently presented to the Executive and the Scrutiny Overview Committee in June 2009.

4.3 Strategic Topic Group of SOC to consider the Draft Consultation Toolkit and Policy Consultation Guide

4.3.1 A Strategic Topic Group of SOC met on 29 July 2009 to consider the draft Consultation Toolkit and Policy Consultation Guide. The Topic Group had been brought together to consider these documents as their consideration had been deferred from the Scrutiny Overview Committee 13 July 2009 meeting. These documents were directly in response to the decisions and recommendations of the Consultation on Policy Changes Topic Group which had met on 27 November 2008 and reported to SOC on 18 December 2008. The Strategic Topic Group made a number of further recommendations to the Toolkit and Guide and were pleased that all of the recommendations that the original Topic Group had made had been actioned.

4.4 Cycleways

4.4.1 A two day Scrutiny Topic Group review into cycling in Stevenage was held on Wednesday 4 and Monday 9 November. The Topic Group reported its recommendations to the Scrutiny Overview Committee on 24 November 2009. The Scrutiny Topic Group were of the view that the Council should be doing all it could to capitalise on the great asset that the 26km of dedicated cycle tracks provides the town and all of the benefits that cycling can offer including improved health, leisure and a sustainable transport mode. The Topic Group met with a number of Members, Officers and Partners including the following:

Cllr Simon Speller, then Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise and Transport
Lee Myers, SBC Environmental Services Manager
John Pye, SBC External Funding Officer
Dave Wells, SBC Strategic Developments Officer, Regeneration
Robert Woodisse, SBC Principal Engineer
Jim Brown, Stevenage Cycling Touring Club
Nigel Brigham, Regional Manager, East of England Sustrans
Dave Burt, Programme and Strategy Manager Hertfordshire Highways
Roxanne Glaud, Hertfordshire Highways
Tom May, West & East & North Herts PCT
Guy McCallan, Herts Constabulary, Roads Safety Manager
Clare Riches, Co-optee, Chells and Manor Action Team
Tina Walker, Stevenage Cycling Touring Club

4.4.2 The following themes emerged and are summarised below:

- Improved signing on the cycleways
- Improved cycle parking around the town
- Establishing a Cycling Action Group
- SMART targets for the 2002 Stevenage Cycling Strategy
- Improved Marketing of Cycling in Stevenage
- Funding – Joint Member Panel and fund cycling schemes from the Herts Highways Integrated Work Programme.
- Maintaining high standards for any new cycle schemes
- Working with partners in Herts Highways and CSF to promote more cycling to school schemes
- Herts Highways clarifying the Traffic Regulation Orders for Mopeds on Cycleways

4.4.3 The Topic Group made 12 short term recommendations (within 1 year to implement) and 13 medium term recommendations (within 5 years to implement). The Topic Group and Scrutiny Overview Committee were of the view that the most likely vehicle for improvement would be the establishment of the Cycling Action Group, 'First Bike Boro' which was Chaired by the then Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise and Transport (Cllr. Simon Speller) with officers from both SBC and HCC Herts Highways as well as cycling activists.

4.4.4 Action/Response

4.4.5 The Scrutiny Overview Committee received a response from the Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise and Transport, SBC Officers and Herts Highways Officers. All who took part were very enthusiastic about the scrutiny process and were of the view that the review had been invaluable in moving forward the issues that affect cycling. The Scrutiny Overview Committee

welcomed the response and would be monitoring progress with the review recommendations, via the First Bike Boro group.

4.5 **Cleanliness of the Neighbourhood Centre Shops**

4.5.1 A one-off Scrutiny Topic Group met with or received verbal or written evidence from the following people to review the Cleanliness of the Neighbourhood Centres:

Cllr John Gardner, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regeneration
Marcel Coiffait, Head of Environmental Services
Nik Brown, Temporary Environmental Enforcement Manager
Sue Padfield, Lodge Farm School
PC Hal Palmer, Herts Constabulary, Stevenage Enforcement Team
Val Hargrave, St Vincent de Paul
Carol Jennings, Manager of Revival (The Living Room Charity Shop)
Barry Burningham, Deputy Head, Nobel School

The review focused on the following issues:

- Frequency and timing of cleaning
- Quality of the cleaning
- Enforcement
- Relationship with the shopkeepers especially the fast food outlets
- Education – Working with schools and young people
- Constraints

The following measures to improve the service were identified:

- Change the order of the cleaning rota to move to a rolling programme
- Discourage littering through education in the long term and enforcement in the short term
- Encourage socially responsible behaviour through targeted campaigns and education
- Encourage shop keepers to take responsibility for areas around their shop-fronts
- Recruitment of an Environmental Campaigns officer (a post which had been vacant for some months) and with environmental enforcement, campaigns and operations now in the same SDU, Environmental Services were looking forward to a more positive and effective approach to dealing with littering
- The provision of more bins in strategic areas where identified can help but were only part of the solution
- Better bins - capital funding had been secured for new DEFRA recycling bins at the Neighbourhood Centres, which would improve the service when installed

4.5.2 Action/Response

4.5.3 The Topic Group have not as yet received a formal response from the Portfolio but Cllr Gardner was very enthusiastic about the issues that the scrutiny process had focused on and on the changes that the Environmental Services SDU were delivering.

4.6 **SoStevenage – Narrowing the gap in educational and employment inequalities between Stevenage and the Hertfordshire average**

4.6.1 A Topic Group met on six occasions between November 2009 and February 2010 and conducted a review into narrowing the gap in educational and employment inequalities between Stevenage and the Hertfordshire average, focusing on:

- how well SoStevenage and individual partners were working towards narrowing the gap in social inequalities in education and employment
- why there was an apparent disparity in the performance of Stevenage Secondary Schools with regard to key stage 4 results (GCSE 5 A* - C) compared to that for primary schools at key stage 2, which appeared to be more closely aligned to the Hertfordshire average?
- what strategies were currently being employed to narrow the gap and if not currently being deployed what would be required in the future

4.6.2 In addition to the Scrutiny Officer, this Topic Group was also supported by Nicola Kilvington, Communications and Partnership Manager and Emma Tucker, Partnership Officer, SoStevenage and Stephen Weaver, Scrutiny Officer

4.6.3 The following people took part in the review or provided a written submission to the Topic Group:

Cllr Sharon Taylor, Chair of SoStevenage

Cllr Michael Downing, then Portfolio Holder for Community, Health and Older People

Cllr Speller, then Portfolio for Economy, Enterprise and Transport

County Cllr Richard Thake, Education Portfolio

County Cllr Terry Douris, Vice-Chair Education Policy Panel

Graeme Buck, Chair of Stevenage Children's District Trust

Peter Bandy, Strategic Director (Environment)

Barry Burningham, Deputy Head, Nobel School and SoStevenage Board Member

and District Schools Effectiveness Adviser

Ian Knowles, Assistant Director, Performance and Business Support,

Children, School and Families, HCC and CSF representative on SoStevenage

Kate Smith, Head of Secondary Standards and Effectiveness

Adrienne Arthurs, North Stevenage, Extended Schools Co-ordinator

Liz Neville, District Schools Effectiveness Adviser (Primary)

Martin Cooke and Simon Gentry, Youth Connexions

Marian Hurlle, CAB

Caroline Collins, Ridgemoor Training
Tim Hutchins and Owen Davies, Hertfordshire Chamber of Commerce

4.6.4 The Topic Group made a number of recommendations to SoStevenage and its partners around the following themed outcomes:

Raise the aspirations of young people and families

- Develop strategies to engage wider parental involvement in schools & in their child's education
- Promote reading & writing in home by holding a writing competition, strategies to promote books in the home
- Promote extended schools to parents
- Promote more parent governors
- Strategies to encourage parents to be ambitious for their children

Raise the standards in Schools to break the cycle of under achievement with interventions

- Think Family
- More 1-2-1 tuition for English and Maths
- Develop strategies to combat poor attendance
- Curriculum changes - New Diploma
- Focus on improving KS4 results
- Building Schools for the Future

Celebrate success - encourage and recognise achievements

- Celebrate the successes of young people in schools, highlighting achievement at various levels to spur on current students

Help young people make the right choices that lead to further education and employment

- Promote strategies that link schools and employers
- Promote qualifications that employers are looking for
- Businesses to mentor young people to write CVs/Application forms

Work in Partnership

- SoStevenage and other Partners work with Herts Chamber of Commerce to develop a shared vision for skills set required by employers for the next 20/30 years
- Encourage the use of Common Assessment Frameworks
- Encourage better sharing of data by partners

4.6.5 Action/Response

4.6.6 At the time of writing this report the Scrutiny Overview Committee had not received a formal response from SoStevenage but it had not long been published. It is expected that SoStevenage having considered the report and recommendations would provide a response in due course.

4.7 **General Fund Budget**

4.7.1 A one-off Strategic Topic Group of the Scrutiny Overview Committee considered the General Fund Budget and Housing Revenue Account on 26 January 2010. Members considered in some detail the Medium Term Financial Strategy, General Fund Budget Risk Analysis, and Housing Revenue Account Budget Risk Analysis.

4.7.2 Key issues raised

- Increased Benefit Applications
- Energy Management
- What work had been undertaken to react to the drop in income in the indoor market
- Performance of the Business Technology Centre
- Successful Council Tax collection rates in a difficult environment
Encourage better sharing of data by partners
- Threats to the Council's finances if the Government decided to reallocate concessionary fares to County Council's in two-tier areas
- Risks to the HRA if the Decent Homes Programme is not delivered on time
- Inviting the SHL CE to meet the Scrutiny Overview Committee and share her vision for housing in Stevenage as well as addressing members concerns regarding SHL's project management and financial management skills

4.7.3 Action/Response

4.7.4 Ongoing budget monitoring would be considered at the Scrutiny Overview Committee and a further Strategic Topic Group of SOC would be scheduled to meet in June 2010 to monitor progress on the issues raised and take an early view on issues of concern for Members regarding formation of the draft 2011/12 budget.

4.8 **Pre-scrutiny of the Annual Plan**

4.8.1 The Chair and Vice-Chair of the Scrutiny Overview Committee along with Cllr Monika Cherney-Craw pre-scrutinised an early draft of the Annual Report on 13 April 2010. Members' comments were incorporated into the version that was presented to the Executive and the Scrutiny Overview Committee in June. This pre-scrutiny will take place each year.

4.9 **Work programme for 2010/11**

4.9.1 The following issues have been identified for review in 2010/11:

4.10 **SoSafe – CCTV**

4.10.1 Discussions with SoSafe support officers and SBC officers directly involved in the running of CCTV have been ongoing during the 2009/10 Municipal Year and a scoping document was agreed by the Scrutiny Overview Committee at

the 12 April SOC meeting. The first meeting of the Topic Group is scheduled to meet on 16 June 2010. The review will focus on what information is shared with SoSafe from the CCTV Partnership and whether the information can currently demonstrate that CCTV is making a quantifiable affect on reducing crime, antisocial behaviour and the fear of crime.

4.10.2 The following people will be invited to attend as witnesses to the review to provide oral and written evidence.

- Robert Holgate, CCTV Manager
- Keith Moore, Parking and CCTV Manager
- Local people drawn from SHL Tenants and Leaseholders Groups
- Responsible Authority Group (RAG) Members – CE, Police Authority – Keith Emsal (HCC)
- Herts Constabulary
- Fire & Rescue
- Stevenage Homes Ltd
- Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinator
- SBC Portfolio Holder Safer and Stronger Communities, Cllr Richard Henry
- Head of Leisure, Community and Children's Services and a Community Development Officer

4.11 **Community Grants**

4.11.1 A scoping document was agreed at Scrutiny Overview Committee in September 2009 and following a discussion with the Chair of SOC a revised version was agreed at SOC at 12 April SOC meeting. Provisional dates for this Topic Group have been set for July and August 2010 and a final report to SOC in October 2010. The outline of the review is as follows:

4.11.2 How well have the new arrangements for the Community Grants gone? What was the rationale for putting an element of the decision making on the community grants out to the Social Inclusion forum? Why was an element of this funding ring fenced? How much does the current decision making process stand up to scrutiny? Is the current level of support to the Council's Community Grants sustainable?

4.12 **SoStevenage – Community Strategy Refresh**

4.12.1 A Strategic Topic Group of SOC will meet to pre-scrutinise an early draft of the Community Strategy Refresh ahead of its consideration at the Executive on 19 January 2011. The date for this Topic Group has not yet been agreed.

4.13 **SHL – Scrutiny of SHL's financial and project management skills and aligning of the HRA budget process with SBC**

4.13.1 A Scrutiny Topic Group will meet on 8, 14 & 29 September and make its final report to SOC in November 2010. A scoping document needs to be drafted

and agreed by SOC before the review commences but the issues already identified include:

4.13.2 Concerns that the decent homes programme is successfully delivered, as there are serious financial penalties if the capital funding for each financial year is not delivered. The review will examine the organisations project management and financial management skills and also look at the ongoing issue of poor alignment of SHL and SBC budget process for the HRA.

4.14 Budget Scrutiny - Strategic Topic Group of SOC

4.14.1 A one-off Strategic Topic Group of SOC will meet in June 2010 and report to SOC in July 2010 following up the issues raised in January Topic Group. This group will monitor progress on the issues raised in the January Topic Group and take an early view on issues of concern for Members regarding formation of the draft 2011/12 budget.

4.15 Renewal of the Community Centres

4.15.1 A Scrutiny Topic Group is scheduled to meet on 20 September and 5 & 14 October 2010 following the decision of the Community Buildings Working Group and report to the Executive. The review will pick up the 36 recommendations that were made in a previous review in 2006 to see how many of these have been delivered in the asset review of the current community buildings. Is what is being proposed for regeneration and disposal the right choices for the local neighbourhoods?

4.16 Future Developments

4.16.1 Training Programme

4.16.2 A training programme is being drawn up with the Training and Development Manager for new and existing SOC and Scrutiny Members. An outline was reported to SOC on 7 June as well as an overview of what Scrutiny is and how it operates locally to all new SOC Members.

4.16.3 Legislation Changes

The Democracy Bill was dropped by the government before parliament was dissolved for the 2010 general election. Any developments to the Bill in a new government or any other legislation changes will be reported to SOC with any impact on the scrutiny function reported to the Committee.

4.16.4 Petitions Scheme

Under the Council's new Petitions Scheme, agreed on 26 May 2010, the Scrutiny Overview Committee has a role in both questioning Senior Officers in the event of this being required by petitioners and considering reviews of actions taken as a result of a petition should petitioners so request.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial Implications

There is a budget of £2,500 to support study activities, site visits and specialist advice where necessary.

5.2 Legal Implications

As described at 4.16.3 above progress on any legislative changes will be reported to SOC regarding any legal changes to the function and impact it could have on the authority.

5.2 Service Delivery Implications

The Scrutiny Officer supports all aspects of the scrutiny function at SBC, including desk top research, report writing, note taking at meetings, setting up Topic Group meetings, initiating and completing scoping documents, liaising with Executive Portfolio holders, Strategic Management Board and SDU service users (including members of the public) as appropriate. Input from other areas of the Council varies dependent upon the topic under scrutiny, but in the main amounts to the provision of evidence and responding to approved recommendations.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- Local Government Act 2000
- Public Involvement in Health Act 2007

APPENDICES

None