

REPORT TO THE COUNCIL		Report No. 9
Date of Meeting	24 June 2008	
Title of Report	Overview & Scrutiny Annual Report	
Link to Corporate Priorities	None specifically, but the work of Overview & Scrutiny links to all	
Public Report	Yes	

Summary of Report

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee is required to produce an annual report to full Council on its workings, recommendations for future work programmes and amended working methods.

The purpose of this report is to set out the annual report.

Recommendations

That the Council note the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Report for 2007/08.

Other than those implications agreed with the relevant Officers and referred to below, there are no other implications associated with this report.

Financial Implications	Legal Implications	Community & Environmental Implications	Human Resources Implications	Equality & Diversity Implications
None	None	None	None	None
Report Author	Councillor C.J. Caswill, Overview & Scrutiny Committee Chair			
Contact Officer	Marie Todd, Senior Policy & Democratic Services Officer, Tel: 01249 706612, e-mail: mtodd@northwilts.gov.uk			

1. Meetings

The Committee met 11 times during the last municipal year. There are 11 members of the Committee. Appendix 1 sets out committee members' attendance at the meetings and the substitutes who attended.

The Committee has set up three Task Groups:

- Housing Advice (Chair: Cllr Rachel Cinnamond)
- Household Waste and Recycling (Chair: Cllr Alan Hill)
- Rural Unitary (Chair: Cllr Chris Caswill)

The Committee also set up two "light touch" Task and Finish Groups

- Car Parking (Chair: Cllr Christine Reid)
- CCTV (Chair: To be confirmed)

The first three Groups met 5, 7 and 5 times respectively. The Car Parking Group has met once and the CCTV Task Group has not yet met. Appendix 2 sets out the Membership of the Task Groups.

2. Work Programme

Overview and Scrutiny is generally recognised to have four rather distinct responsibilities (The development of Overview & Scrutiny in Local Government – INLOGOV Research Summary – ODPM 2002).

The Committee's work over the last year can usefully be described under these headings:

a) ***Holding the Executive to Account*** :

- There were two Call-Ins during the year.
- A decision to dispose of **land at Bristol Road in Chippenham** was called in and discussed with Cllr Tonge, as the Portfolio Holder for Assets, and senior officers. Some changes to the detail of the decision were recommended, and accepted by the Executive.
- A decision regarding the implementation of **Community Area Boards** in North Wiltshire was called in and discussed with Cllr Bucknell, as the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Democracy. No recommendations were made.
- The Portfolio Holder for Waste and Sustainability, Cllr Sturgis, attended a meeting to explain the Executive's policies on **Environmental Issues**, climate change and waste. Recommendations were made.
- The Portfolio Holder for Built Environment attended a meeting to explain the Executive's policies relating to **car parking issues**. The Committee asked that District Council Members be informed as early as possible about the upcoming proposals for changes.
- The Chief Executive attended a meeting to explain his approach to maintaining services and democratic support during the remaining period of the District Council's existence. It was agreed that a seminar should be arranged for all members of the Council to update them on the current situation.

b) Performance and Policy Review :

- The Committee took an early decision to concentrate on a small number of indicators and reports, for example the Corporate Plan Progress Update and Poorly Performing Performance Indicators. From the reports received over the past year, it reviewed those areas of the Council's work where prima facie evidence of concern emerged from these reports:
 - **Cleaner, Safer, Better Streets**
 - **Recycling Rates**
 - **Residents' Parking**
 - **Staff Sickness**
 - **Development of the Bath Road site**
- The **Housing Advice** Task Group met and made a number of recommendations regarding customer feedback, links with partner organisations and publicity for the service. The Task Group concluded that the service would be best administered in-house. The Executive subsequently accepted the recommendations of the Task Group.
- A report was received on the Council's new **Cleansing and Amenities Improvement Plan** and on the additional resources being invested there. It agreed to review progress in six months time.
- The Committee received a report regarding **bulky waste and fly tipping** and advised the Portfolio Holder for Waste and Sustainability that no change should be made to the current arrangements.
- The Committee received two reports on **Section 106 agreements** and noted that financial systems were now in place to track funds. The Committee also recommended to the Frontline Services workstream that information relating to Section 106 agreements should be made more readily available in the new unitary authority.
- With reference to **Leisure Services** in North Wiltshire, the Committee was interested to know how the management of the current arrangements was proceeding and accordingly asked to see the Audit Commission's report to the Council, which had been presented to the Council's Final Accounts and Audit Committee.

c) Policy Development :

- A report was presented to the Committee on Council Involvement in Health Issues, which had been held over from the previous administration period. The Committee made a number of recommendations to the Executive, aimed at strengthening the Council's Involvement with **Health** service issues. Given the high public interest in health services in the North Wilts area, the Committee recommended that some staff resources be earmarked for tracking and reporting on health issues.
- The Committee asked for early sight of the officers' draft **Youth Strategy**, and made a number of observations which it wanted to be passed on to officers and the Portfolio Holder.

- At its first meeting the Committee identified **Planning Enforcement** as an issue of great importance to local residents and officers made a presentation to the June meeting. After that discussion, officers developed a new draft Enforcement Policy, which was supported by the Committee at its October meeting. A small number of suggestions were also agreed, to be included in the recommendations to the DC Committee.
- The Committee considered and commented on the Council's **Corporate Plan**.
- The Committee considered and asked a number of detailed questions about the **Draft Budget** for 2008-9, as part of its preparation for approval by the Executive.
- The Task Group on **Household Waste and Recycling** completed its work and prepared a report which was considered by the Executive at its meeting on 24 April. The Executive accepted the Task Group's recommendations and congratulated the Group on its work. The report has also been considered by the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Transition Board Task Group which is investigating the proposals for dealing with household waste and recycling in the new unitary authority.
- The **Rural Unitary** Task Group has visited three rural unitary authorities (Herefordshire, Monmouthshire and East Riding) and will produce its final report in June. This will then feed into the joint scrutiny arrangements for the transition.
- At its May 2008 meeting, the Committee received a report on **Councillor Calls for Action**, which are about to be introduced in the context of the 2007 Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act.

d) External Scrutiny :

The Committee has not so far undertaken any scrutiny of external bodies or activities. Engagement of work of this kind has been restricted by the realities of member and staff resources and by the initial uncertainty about the transition to a unitary authority, and its timing.

3. Representations from the public

The Committee heard representations from the members of the public on three occasions during the year. **The first issue** raised was the background to the Development Control (DC) Committee's award of retrospective planning permission for the Linden Homes flats in Cocklebury Road. This was discussed by the Committee at two meetings, leading to a recommendation to the DC Committee that a new procedure be adopted for handling submission of drawings by applicants after a plan had been approved by the Committee, or by officers on their behalf. Responses were also provided by officers to the questions asked by the residents. **Secondly**, a member of the public raised concerns regarding the closure of hospital beds in the Chippenham area and the need for alternative provision to be put in place. The Committee requested that this matter be considered by the County Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee who have agreed to take this forward. **Thirdly** a member of the public wrote to the Committee to ask for re-consideration of the policy of levying fees on new developments in the North Wiltshire area, and in particular the inclusion of single property developments in that policy. The Committee agreed to review the impact of this policy in six months time.

4. Transition to the Unitary Authority

As part of the transition process, a Joint Overview and Scrutiny Transition Board (JOSTB) has been created and this Committee's Chair, Cllr Caswill, has represented the Committee, and the District Council, on that Board. Cllr Reid serves as the deputy. Reports back from the JOSTB are regular items on the Committee's agenda.

The JOSTB has so far had two informal and two formal meetings, and has set up Task groups in five areas: Community Area Boards, Customer Access, Development Control, Housing and Waste. Following a process of internal consultation, a District Council Member has now been appointed to each of these Groups, with four of the five nominees coming from outside the Committee. Additionally, Cllr Doyle has been appointed as a member of the County Council's Business Management Programme group.

The JOSTB has agreed that District Council scrutiny business should continue as the Districts wish, and that there should be no expectation that District O&S Committee reports be routed through the JOSTB. However Districts have the opportunity to bring forward relevant material to the JOSTB and its Task groups and this was the case in with the North Wiltshire Housing Waste report and the upcoming Rural Unitary report is expected to come into that category.

5. Process

Coming together for the first time in May, the Committee has taken a fresh look at its procedures and processes. It has introduced a number of innovations, for example:

- Agreeing on a set of criteria for identifying topics for review (attached at Appendix 3).
- Including an Action Report on the agenda of each meeting, to allow tracking of work and outcomes, and to provide building blocks for six monthly and annual reports.
- Ensuring that Portfolio Holders and officers are offered advance notice of the issues which the Committee wished to discuss with them.
- Moving the meeting start time till 7pm to allow fuller participation of members with full time jobs.
- Asking the Leader and Chief Executive for a budget and specific allocation of staff time and support resources. The latter was agreed.
- Agreeing a new 'light touch' process by which small task and finish teams can be established in areas where Committee members have an interest but where a formal Task Group is not appropriate – and getting new supporting procedures for this approved by Council.

The Committee also discussed and recommended amendments to a Motion to Council proposed by Cllr Doyle, which introduced improvements to the handling of Call Ins, and specifically to the information provided to Portfolio Holders and Members of this Committee. The amended resolution was agreed by the full Council.

Looking to the immediate future, work is underway to improve the materials for publicising the Committee's work, in accordance with national good practice, and with the purpose of improving the communication of the O&S role to members, staff, stakeholders and the public. Improvements have been made to the Overview and Scrutiny pages on the Council website. The Committee will also discuss an overall communications plan.

6. Outcomes

The positive outcomes from this twelve month period can be summarised as:

- ✓ Improving the Executive's decision on disposal of the Bristol Road land to Chippenham Football Club.
- ✓ Facilitating the development of a new Council policy on Planning Enforcement.
- ✓ Getting Health established as a specific portfolio holder responsibility.
- ✓ The Task Group on Household Waste has completed its work, in collaboration with the Portfolio Holder, who has supported it with additional resources. The recommendations of this Task Group contribute not only to this Council but to the new unitary authority.
- ✓ Similarly the setting up of a Rural Unitary Task Group has been welcomed outside North Wiltshire, and the evidence it collects about other large rural unitary authorities should feed directly into policy debates within the transitional authority and beyond.
- ✓ The positive review of bringing Housing Advice work in house.
- ✓ Keeping a number of less well performing areas of the Council's work under the spotlight, most of which are now on course for major improvement.
- ✓ Making a proposal for an improvement in the way developers' plans are handled in the planning process.
- ✓ The Committee was able to connect to three issues of concern to members of the public and provide them with an opportunity to make their case.
- ✓ Introducing several improvements in the Committee's own ways of working.
- ✓ Securing some earmarking of staff resources and support, and the agreement that up to four O&S Task Groups can be operational at any one time.
- ✓ Introduction of a six-monthly process of review and reflection followed by an annual report to Council as required by the Constitution.

7. Issues for the year ahead

The Committee has set up two new Task Groups to look at car parking charges and CCTV. These will undertake reviews and report within the next six months, as will the existing Rural unitary Group.

Perhaps the main challenge for the coming year is to balance the Committee's continuing responsibilities to the citizens of North Wiltshire with responsibilities to contribute positively and efficiently to the process of transition to the new unitary authority, and in particular to the JOSTB.

- The process of Councillor Calls for Action
- The possibility of undertaking external review, connecting to the increased emphasis on partnership working.
- Balancing in-depth enquiries with performance overview.
- Discharging its responsibilities within the constraints of limits on members' time and supporting resources, and the move to a unitary authority.
- Engaging with other non-Executive Councillors.
- Publication and communication outside the Council.

8. Appreciation

The Committee would like to convey its appreciation for the contributions which Council officers from several parts of the organisation have made to its work by producing reports and attending meetings. In particular it would like to express, again, its thanks to its former Clerk, James Whittleton, and to the former Deputy Chief Executive, Sue Pangbourne, for their direct support of the Committee's work.

Appendices:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Appendix 1 – Attendance at Overview & Scrutiny Meetings• Appendix 2 – Task Group Membership• Appendix 3 – Criteria for Agreeing Overview & Scrutiny Topics
Background Documents Used in the Preparation of this Report:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The development of Overview & Scrutiny in Local Government, INLOGOV Research Summary, ODPM 2002.• Minutes of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee from the meetings held over the last 12 months.

Previous Decisions Connected with this Report

Report	Committee & Date	Minute Reference
None	N/a	N/a