



**Chester-le-Street**  
District Council

# **Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2007/2008**



**The Scrutiny Year**

**MAY 2008**

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## **ANNUAL REPORT OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY 2007-2008**

### **Foreword**



The Council's Constitution provides that an Annual Report on the work of the Scrutiny Panels be produced and as Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board it gives me great pleasure to introduce the 2007/08 Annual Report of Overview and Scrutiny.

Scrutiny has continued to work closely with council officers and, where appropriate, Executive Members to maintain the contribution which the scrutiny process makes to services. The CPA judgement was a fantastic result for the council reflecting the hard work achieved by everyone and saw scrutiny improve from underdeveloped to effective. The biggest challenges have come in generating public interest in scrutiny and this is an area that we will continue to address.

Local Government Review sees us all working, in a variety of ways, towards a new unitary authority for County Durham and this is a potentially exciting time for everyone. Scrutiny is already working in partnership across the county with members and officers from county and district level working together on reviews into local transport and young people who are NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training).

As for the future of scrutiny within Chester-le-Street District Council it seems prudent in the light of LGR to take stock of the process and structure of scrutiny and look at how best we can continue to serve the people and communities of Chester-le-Street in the remaining life of the council.

Finally I speak for all scrutiny members in thanking officers of the council for their invaluable help and contribution, throughout the year, to the work of the scrutiny panels.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "G. Armstrong".

### **Cllr Geoff Armstrong**

Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

## **Scrutiny in Chester-le-Street**

### **CHAIRS OF SCRUTINY**

**Councillor Geoffrey Armstrong**  
Chair of Overview & Scrutiny  
Management Board and  
Chair of Leisure & Neighbourhood  
Overview and Scrutiny Panel

**Councillor David Holding**  
Chair of Partnership & Efficiency  
Overview and Scrutiny Panel

**Councillor Keith Potts**  
Chair of Regeneration & Housing  
Overview and Scrutiny Panel

### **VICE-CHAIRS OF SCRUTINY**

**Councillor Bill Barrett**  
Vice-Chair of Overview & Scrutiny  
Management Board and  
Vice-Chair of Leisure &  
Neighbourhood Overview and  
Scrutiny Panel

**Councillor Martin Gollan**  
Vice-Chair of Partnership &  
Efficiency Overview and Scrutiny  
Panel

**Councillor Paul Ellis**  
Vice-Chair of Regeneration &  
Housing Overview and Scrutiny  
Panel

### **OFFICERS**

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Democratic Services Assistant for  
Overview & Scrutiny Management  
Board and Leisure and  
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**Ian Forster**  
Director of Corporate Services  
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**Chris Potter**  
Head of Legal and Democratic  
Services  
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**Colin Turnbull**  
Democratic Services Officer  
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## **ANNUAL REPORT 2007/2008 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**

### **1 What is Overview and Scrutiny?**

- 1.1 The Local Government Act 2000 brought in a requirement for all local authorities to revise their political management function. Chester-le-Street District Council adopted a Leader and Executive model with an independent scrutiny function. This change to arrangements effectively resulted in decisions being taken on behalf of the council regarding most major issues by a reduced number of councillors. The Executive, acting collectively as the Executive Board, makes decisions in line with council approved policy.
- 1.2 Members not on the Executive are charged with keeping an overview of council business and scrutinising areas of particular interest or concern. Their role is to hold the Executive to account in the business they undertake, when required, and to assist in the development and review of council policies. The latter task may involve looking in detail at areas of service delivery or issues of general concern in the local area and making recommendations to the Executive or to the whole council.
- 1.3 Overview and Scrutiny councillors are not limited to looking at services provided by the council itself and may choose to review any kind of provision that affects the people and communities within its area.
- 1.4 Overview and Scrutiny meetings are open to members of the public to attend.

#### **Good Public Scrutiny**

- 1.5 In the Good Scrutiny Guide the Centre for Public Scrutiny highlights 4 main principles to good scrutiny. These are:
  - i. Providing a 'Critical Friend' challenge to executive policy-makers and decisions makers
  - ii. Enabling the voice and concerns of the public
  - iii. Is carried out by 'independent minded governors' who lead and own the scrutiny role
  - iv. Drives improvement in public services

(Source: Centre for Public Scrutiny [www.cfps.org.uk](http://www.cfps.org.uk))

## 2 The Structure of Scrutiny

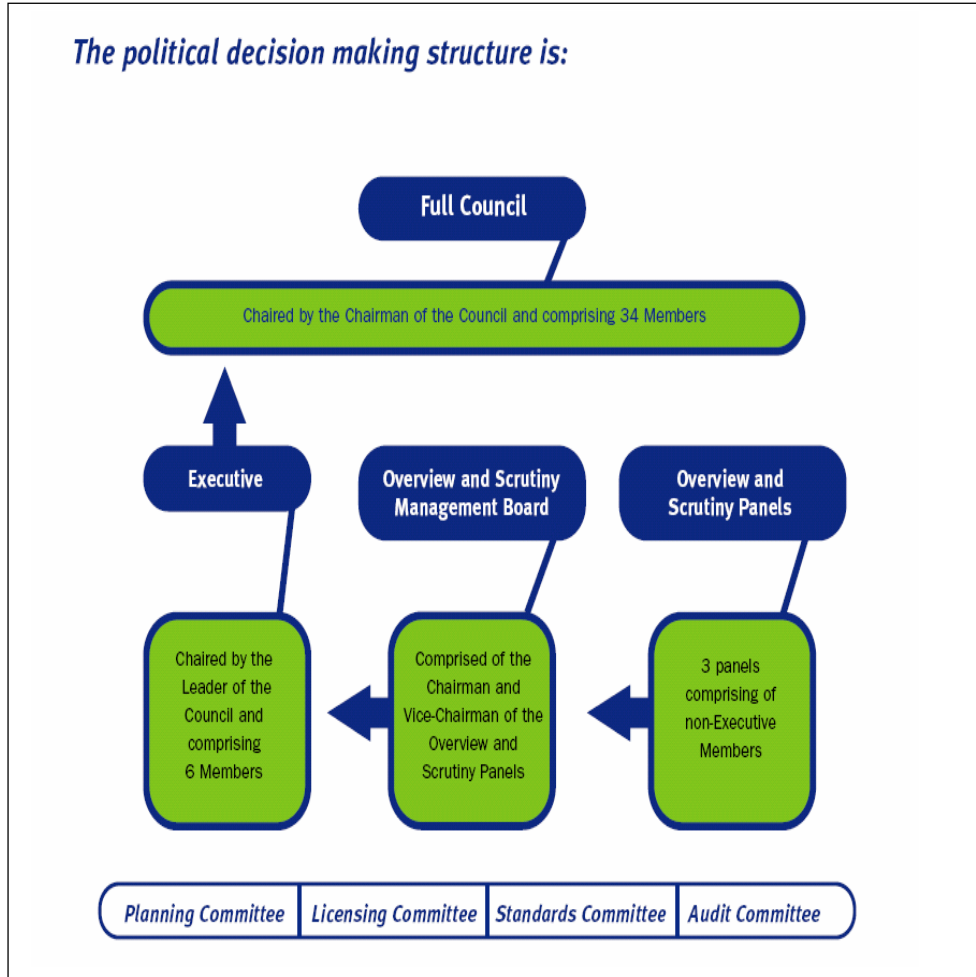


Figure 1: Scrutiny Function Chester-le-Street District Council

## 3 Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

- 3.1 The board's scope of responsibility covers areas relating to cross-cutting issues, the scrutiny panel work programmes and management of the scrutiny process. The membership is as follows:

Councillor Geoff Armstrong (Chair), Councillor Bill Barrett (Vice-Chair), Councillors David Holding, Martin Gollan, Keith Potts, Paul Ellis, Lance Brown, Keith Davidson and Alan Holden.

### Meetings & Attendance

- 3.2 During the Municipal Year 2007/08 the panel met 6 times.

- 3.3 The average Members attendance during the Municipal Year was 6 Members from a membership of 9.

### **Presentations and Witnesses at Scrutiny**

- 3.4 The Overview and Scrutiny Management Board received presentations on Local Government Review (Director of Corporate Services), Land Matters (Acting Head of Regeneration) and Councillor Call for Action (Scrutiny Officer).
- 3.5 At each of the Board meetings the Chairs of the respective scrutiny panels provided verbal updates on their work programmes and progress on any reviews being undertaken. The Executive Forward Plan and work programmes are also routinely scrutinised at management board meetings.
- 3.6 All scrutiny panel review documents, prior to presentation at Executive, were presented to the OSMB for comment and final approval. The OSMB received the following review reports during 2006/07:

- Leisure Activities for Young People
- Public Toilet Provision in Chester-le-Street Town Centre
- Community Partnerships
- Review into Industrial/Business Sites
- Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005.

### **Call-ins**

- 3.7 There were no call-ins during 2007/08.

### **Scrutiny Report to Executive**

- 3.8 The Ad-Hoc Scrutiny Panel which was established through the OSMB to look into the financial viability of Industrial Estates presented their findings to Executive on 2 April 2007.

## **4 Partnership and Efficiency OSP**

- 4.1 The panel's scope of responsibility covers areas of customer excellence, partnership working and maximising efficiencies. The membership is as follows:

Councillor David Holding (Chair), Councillor Martin Gollan (Vice-Chair), Councillors Lawson Armstrong, Richard Court, Syd Greatwich, Philip Nathan, Mike Sekowski, John Shiell and Tracie Smith.

### **Work Programme 2007/08**

- 4.2 Key areas identified for the work programme and topics discussed during the municipal year included the following:
- Budget Review

- Review on Effectiveness of Community Partnerships
- Corporate Performance – Annual Report
- Corporate Performance – Quarterly Report
- Community Call for Action
- Financial Monitoring – Mid-term
- Revised Whistle Blowing Policy.

### **Meetings & Attendance**

- 4.3 During the Municipal Year 2007/08 the panel met 8 scheduled times with an additional 5 meetings to tackle issues related to scrutiny reviews being undertaken.
- 4.4 The average Members attendance during the Municipal Year to scrutiny panel meetings was 6 Members from a membership of 9.

### **Presentations and Witnesses at Scrutiny**

- 4.5 The Partnership and Efficiency Overview & Scrutiny Panel received presentations, information and reports on Corporate Performance Information (Director of Corporate Services), Councillor Call for Action (Scrutiny Officer), Revised Whistling Blowing Policy (Head of Internal Audit), Financial Monitoring (Accountancy Manager).
- 4.6 During the panels review into Community Partnerships evidence was received from the following witnesses as part of the review process; Community Strategy Manager, Community Development Manager, Community Engagement Officer, Leader Chester-le-Street District Council, Portfolio Holder – Community Engagement & Partnership Working, Chester-le-Street & District CVS, Staff from Gateshead Council, Pelton Area Community Partnership Representative, Chester-le-Street Area Community Partnership Representatives, Durham County PCT, Durham Police Authority and Durham County Council.
- 4.7 The panel also visited the headquarters of the Nexus (Tyne & Wear Passenger Transport Executive) Transport Company while investigating the potential of the LinkUp service for Chester-le-Street.

### **Scrutiny Reports to Executive**

- 4.8 The Partnership and Efficiency Overview and Scrutiny Panel's Review into the Nexus LinkUp Bus Service was presented to the Executive on 2 April 2007 and the Review into Community Partnerships was presented to the Executive on 7 April 2008.

## **5 Regeneration and Housing OSP**

- 5.1 The panel's scope of responsibility covers areas of housing and the regeneration of the district. The membership is as follows:



Councillor Keith Potts (Chair), Councillor Paul Ellis (Vice-Chair), Councillors Lawson Armstrong, Thomas Harland, Ralph Harrison, Peter May, Derek Robson, Allen Turner and Audrey Willis.

### **Work Programme 2007/08**

5.2 Key areas identified for the work programme and topics discussed during the municipal year included the following:

- Homelessness Performance Information
- Housing Options Bulletin
- Locations of New Youth Development Programme
- Community Services Performance Information
- Corporate Performance – Annual Report
- Corporate Performance – Quarterly Report
- Review of Estate Walkabouts
- Affordable Housing Policy
- Bond Scheme
- Prevention Fund – Strategy Document.

### **Meetings & Attendance**

5.3 During the Municipal Year 2007/08 the panel met 7 times.

5.4 The average Members attendance during the Municipal Year to scrutiny panel meetings was 6 Members from a membership of 9.

### **Presentations and Witnesses at Scrutiny**

5.5 The Regeneration and Housing Overview & Scrutiny Panel received information, presentations and reports on Homelessness Performance Information (Housing Options Manager), DLO Health Check (Director of Community Services), Youth Development Programme (Community Development Manager), Community Services Performance Information (Acting Director Community Services), Review of Estate Walkabouts (Estates Services Team Leader), Corporate Performance Information (Director of Corporate Services), Bond Scheme (Housing Options Manager), Prevention Fund (Housing Options Manager), Affordable Housing Policy (Housing Strategy Manager) and Councillor Call for Action (Scrutiny Officer).

5.6 At the beginning of February 2008 the Council's housing stock was transferred to Cestria Community Housing which has affected the remit and role of the Regeneration and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel.



Figure2: Scrutiny Consultation Exercise

### **Scrutiny Reports to Executive**

- 5.7 The Regeneration and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel presented the findings of the Review into Leisure Activities for Young People to Executive on 4 June 2007. The Review into Public Toilet Provision in the Town Centre was presented to Executive on 6 August 2007.

## **6 Leisure and Neighbourhood OSP**

- 6.1 The panel's scope of responsibility covers areas of neighbourhood management and leisure services. The membership is as follows:

Councillor Geoff Armstrong (Chair), Councillor Bill Barrett (Vice-Chair), Councillors Keith Davidson, Alan Holden, William Laverick, Maureen May, Mike Sekowski, David Thompson and Frank Wilkinson.

### **Work Programme 2007/08**

- 6.2 Key areas identified for the work programme and topics discussed during the municipal year included the following:

- Energy Efficiency and Affordable Warmth
- Environmental Services – Overview
- Neighbourhood Management
- Review of Local Watercourses
- Corporate Performance – Annual Report
- Corporate Performance – Quarterly Report
- Draft County Waste Strategy
- Leisure Services – Overview
- Bonfire Policy – Annual update.

### **Meetings & Attendance**

- 6.3 During the Municipal Year 2007/08 the panel met 8 scheduled times with an additional 6 meetings to tackle issues related to scrutiny reviews being undertaken.
- 6.4 The average Members attendance during the Municipal Year to scrutiny panel meetings was 7 Members from a membership of 9.

### **Presentations and Witnesses at Scrutiny**

- 6.5 The Leisure and Neighbourhood Overview & Scrutiny Panel received presentations, information and reports on Corporate Performance Information (Director of Corporate Services), Derelict Land (Operations Manager), Section 106 Agreements (Development and Building Control Manager), Energy Efficiency and Affordable Warmth (Senior Sustainability Officer), Environmental Services Overview (Environmental Services Manager), Neighbourhood Management (Director Development Services), Leisure Services Overview (Leisure Services Manager), County Waste Strategy (Environmental Services Manager) and Councillor Call for Action (Scrutiny Officer).
- 6.6 During the panels review into The Quality of Local Watercourses evidence and presentations were received from the following witnesses as part of the review process; Environment Agency, Hydrogeochemical Engineering Research and Outreach – Newcastle University, Durham County Council, The Coal Authority, Bournmoor Parish Council and Bournmoor Conservationist Group.



Figure3: Scrutiny Members on a site visit

### **Scrutiny Reports to Executive**

- 6.7 The Leisure and Neighbourhood Overview and Scrutiny Panel presented their Review of Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 to Executive on 4 June 2007.
- 6.8 A Review into the Quality of Local Watercourses is nearing completion and will be presented to the Executive in due course. This piece of work has been completed in partnership with Bournmoor Parish Council and the local conservationist group.

## **7 Scrutiny Performance**

- 7.1 The Council has made significant improvement and this has been acknowledged in the CPA judgement moving the council from the poor to good category, the first in the country to do so. The CPA also reported that scrutiny had improved from underdeveloped to effective.
- 7.2 The scrutiny function has also contributed to managing council performance through quarterly performance monitoring reports received by the respective

scrutiny panels. This contribution has helped in the Council's annual audit and inspection letter received during the year.

- 7.3 Improvements in the Council's scrutiny function were also recognised by the Centre for Public Scrutiny in two publications;
- Scrutiny, Performance & Improvement: The Road to Excellence
  - Scrutiny Frontiers: Experiences from the Scrutiny Frontline.
- 7.4 The then Assistant Chief Executive (now Head of Corporate Services) and Scrutiny Officer were invited to a launch event in London to share their experiences within scrutiny with fellow officers and councillors.

## **8 The Future of Scrutiny**

- 8.1 Local Government Review and the formation of a new unitary authority for County Durham have direct implications for the structure and purpose of scrutiny within Chester-le-Street District Council. To this end corporate priorities have been refocused and concentrated into a single 'People and Place' priority for the final year of the council. This leaves the current scrutiny panels, aligned to previous corporate priorities, in an indeterminate state.
- 8.2 A single scrutiny panel is a potential way forward for the final year with all non-executive members' part of this panel. A series of concise time-focused task and finish groups would look at matters of particular concern or with implications beyond the life of the current council.
- 8.3 A workshop is to be arranged to provide members with a range of options and the impetus to drive these changes forward. The workshop will facilitate the model and processes to be employed and allow for members to shape and develop the work programme.

## **9 Background Papers**

- Executive Papers 2007-2008
- Overview and Scrutiny Management Board Papers 2007-2008
- Regeneration and Housing Overview & Scrutiny Panel Papers 2007-2008
- Leisure and Neighbourhood Overview & Scrutiny Panel Papers 2007-2008
- Partnership and Efficiency Overview & Scrutiny Panel Papers 2007-2008
- Scrutiny Handbook 2007-2008
- Good Scrutiny Guide Book – Centre for Public Scrutiny
- Corporate Plan 2007/2010